

EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

For His name's sake

On June 9, 1968 my parents gave me a name. Six months later I was baptized Carmen Suzette Fowler. It is the name by which I have been known my entire life. But it is no longer my name.

My name changed on May 7, 2011. I am now Mrs. James LaBerge. I had the honor of being a bride and now have the honor of being a wife. It is a whole new reality that comes with a new name. Legally I'm going to give up my middle name and officially become Carmen Fowler LaBerge. Suzette will be gone and with it, a point of reference to a person who was my namesake.

The practice of having a namesake keeps us connected as families. My nephew, Larry, bears the name of my deceased father. My niece bears my mother's name, Ruth, as one of hers. We bear the name of our namesake for a purpose: to give that person a living legacy in the world today.

So, considering the name into which we are baptized as believers, who's our namesake?

As Christians, from God's perspective, we bear the name of Christ and we do so for His name's sake.

The first people to be called Christians were the followers of Jesus Christ in the house church at Corinth. And "Christian" was a pejorative term.

As Jesus had forewarned, His followers were maligned, persecuted and martyred both by the religious Jews and by the secular Romans.

The Cornerstone upon which they were centering their lives was a real stumbling block to others. They hadn't just taken His name – these Christians were thoroughly taken with Jesus!

Around Him they were not only reorienting their faith but their

families, finances, friends, passions, ideas, and past-times. Jesus had become the point of integration for them.

So much so that it was more appropriate to call them by the name of Jesus, "Christians," than to call them by their family given names.

Points to ponder:

- When you acknowledge that you are a Christian, is that what you mean?
- Are you really living for His name's sake or is "Christian" just one of many adjectives that are used to describe you?
- If so, where does Christian fall in the list of relational, vocational, political, recreational and other monikers you bear?
- What does it say about your genuine allegiance to the One who died that you might live?

In II Chronicles 7:14 God says that if His people who are *called by His name* would humble themselves and prayerfully repent, He would turn and send revival to their land.

If we are not experiencing revival, the question we should ask is not about the faithfulness of God, but that of the people who are called by His name.

Indeed, we should pray, "Although our sins testify against us, O Lord, *do something for the sake of your name*. For our backsliding is great; we have sinned against you." (Jeremiah 14:7)

Christian, this study (pages 8-9) is sure to till the soil of your soul as you consider anew the power of the One whose Name you bear.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Carmen Fowler LaBerge is the author of the equipping section that appears in the center of each issue of *The Layman*.

Your feedback is greatly appreciated as future studies are planned.

Share your comments with Carmen via e-mail at cfowler@layman.org, call 1-800-368-0110 or write her at P.O. 2210, Lenoir, NC 28645.

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Week I: There is something about God's name

"A good name is more desirable than great riches." – Proverbs 22:1

Read Exodus 3:1-15.

Moses recognized that something extraordinary was taking place in an otherwise ordinary day. When he took the time to turn aside from his own agenda, he had a transforming encounter with the living God. When the Lord saw that Moses had responded to His presence, He called him by name. Their encounter changes not only the life of Moses but all of human history. In fact, there is a great gift for all those who bow at the burning bush: the knowledge of the good name of God. God is Yahweh, "I am."

God's name is to be revered, honored, glorified, hallowed and used to accomplish His will. It is also a name that comes with a warning label. Deuteronomy 28:58 says "If you do not carefully follow all the words of the law, which are written in this book, and do not revere this glorious and awesome name – the Lord our God" – the consequences will be grave.

To know God by name is to be invited into an intimacy with Him and to possess the power to use and act in His name. The Jews regarded the name of God as so powerful that they never spoke it aloud. God's name was considered so holy as to be ineffable.

So when Jesus not only uses the name of God but claims it as His own (recall the "I am" declarations of Jesus), power was evident and the response of people was personal. In John 18:1-6, Jesus identifies Himself as "I am" to those who come to arrest Him in the garden of Gethsemane. John tells us that at the evocation of the name "they drew back and fell to the ground." Indeed, there is something about that name.

There is also something about the name of Jesus. We learn in Matthew 1:21 that the name of Jesus, Jeshua, Savior, was given by God the Father to His only begotten son. The Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and delivered not only the news of Mary's miraculous pregnancy but also the name: Jesus.

Why Jesus? Because, says the Lord, "He will save His people from their sins."

From God's perspective, it is

- the name above every other name (Phil. 2:9)
- the name at which every knee shall bow and every tongue confess (Phil. 2:10-11)
- a name superior to angels (Hebrews 1:4), and
- the only name under heaven by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

The name of the Lord is the only name that will endure forever. God declares in Zechariah 14:9, "The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and His name the only name." Indeed, there is something about that name.

For reflection and conversation:

1. Do you consider the knowledge of God's personal name to be an intimate divine gift?
2. What response does the name of Jesus provoke within you?
3. What responses does the name of Jesus provoke from others in the world?
4. The Gaither trio sings a chorus that says, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus; let all heaven and earth proclaim. Kings and kingdoms shall all pass away but there's something about that name." With these words in mind, read and reflect together on the coming reality declared by God in Philippians 2:9-11.

Pray for the coming of the day when the name of God will be revered by all and the name of Jesus esteemed above all others. And until that day, may the people of God give God the glory due His name.

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Week II: Use and misuse of God's good name

From the beginning, the name of God is given to the people of God that they might use His name. The reason that knowing God's name is so valuable is that the knowledge of the name gives you access to the power of the One whose name you know.

According to the Scriptures, there are "right" or righteous uses of the name of God, both Yahweh and Jesus; evocations of the name that are aligned with the will of God in giving His name. But there are also misuses of the name of God.

God clearly commands in Exodus 20:7 and repeats verbatim in Deuteronomy 5:11 that "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses His name." In order to keep this command it is imperative that we know what constitutes the righteous use of God's name and what constitutes misuse.

The commandment has been articulated as "do not take the Lord's name in vain." Vanity has two meanings. It is to fail to use something with its full impact and it is also the exaltation of the self over others. Whenever the Lord's name is used casually, without thought or consideration for the One whose name is used, the Lord's name is taken in vain. Likewise, when the name of the Lord is used without consideration of the power being accessed, it is used in vain. Sadly, examples are plentiful in our cultural context.

If you listen, you will hear children, teens and adults alike using the name of God as slang and obscenity. When "O my God" is demoted from the prayerful declaration of a believing heart to the three letter text message: omg, the Lord's name is taken in vain. When someone casually spews "God damn" without recognizing that they are calling down the very power of heaven to condemn a person to eternal hell, the Lord's name is taken in vain.

Do not be deceived, God will not be mocked. Make careful use of His name.

For reflection and conversation:

Read and discuss the following verses that lay out patterns of behavior for the right and righteous use of the name of Lord.

1. Deuteronomy 28:58, Psalm 34:3, 103:1 exalt the name of God
2. Joel 2:32 = Romans 10:13 call on the name of the Lord
3. Matthew 6:9 = Luke 11:2 hallow God's name
4. Matthew 18:5 welcome children in the name of Jesus
5. Matthew 18:20 come together in the name of Jesus
6. Matthew 28:19 baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit
7. Mark 9:38-40; 16:17-18 = Luke 10:17 drive out demons in Jesus' name
8. Mark 11:9 blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord
9. John 14:13-14; 16:26 ask in the name of Jesus
10. John 15:20-21 because of Jesus' name you will be persecuted
11. Colossians 3:17 do it all in the name of Jesus

Pray that God's name would be rightly hallowed in our hearts and minds, rightly spoken from our lips and rightly used for the advancement of His Kingdom purposes upon the earth.

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Week III: The purpose and power of the name

The power that was poured out at Pentecost is the power of God in the person of the Holy Spirit. And it is a power that is accessed by a name. That name is Jesus.

Like a key which unlocks the resources of heaven, the knowledge and confession of Jesus as the Christ is imperative to authentic Christian witness. A study of the early Church is informative here.

After the Spirit descended at Pentecost and the people turned aside to acknowledge that what was once an ordinary day had been infiltrated by the extraordinary power of God, their hearts were turned to God and Peter preached. His sermon is recorded in Acts 2:14-36.

The next two verses reveal the response of the crowds to the proclamation of the gospel truth. Acts 2:37-38 says, “When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you *in the name of Jesus Christ* for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”

Believe the truth of the gospel of what God has done in Jesus Christ; be baptized into His name; be filled with His Spirit; and then live as His agents of grace and truth in the world, declaring to others the Name of the One who called you out of darkness into His glorious light.

The book of Acts is a chronicle of the active work of the Holy Spirit through the lives of the first people who were baptized in the name of Jesus. They used His name in powerful ways to extend His redemptive love.

Reading Acts 3 we witness the power of the name of Jesus to lift crippled people to newness of life. To the one begging at the gate of the Temple, Peter says, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” (Acts 3:6) Imagine that! You and I possess a name that has the power to transform lives! Like Peter, we must be willing to speak it with authority into the lives of those who are lost in despair, broken against sin, bereft of hope and wallowing in ways of the world that lead to destruction.

We know the name of the One with the power to change all that! We know Jesus. The plaguing question is are we too ashamed of Him to speak His name in the world today?

The early Christians were not ashamed to bear the name of Christ into a world that was in desperate need of redemption. And they were not ashamed to declare that there is no other name given by God through which people can be confident of salvation.

When Peter is called to account for the healing of the man in Acts 3, the Holy Spirit inspires him to speak the name of Jesus again. Peter’s second sermon is recorded in Acts 4:8-12.

He clearly articulates the power and the exclusive nature of Jesus’ name. Are we that clear in our proclamation today?

For reflection and conversation:

1. Read and discuss Acts 3:1-10 and Acts 4:5-12.
2. Do you believe what the Bible says in Acts 4:12?
3. If so, how do you identify and confront error when you hear it or read it today from those who teach a pluralistic approach (i.e. that all religions and philosophies are equally salvific)?
4. If you don’t believe what the Bible says in Acts 4:12, what do you believe and on what basis do you challenge the veracity of this verse of Scripture?
5. By what authority do you deny the Word of God at this point?
6. Read Acts 4:16-20.
7. When the worldly powers conspire to squelch the spread of the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ, what is the response of the disciples?
8. Where do you see evidence of bold proclamation of Jesus’ name in the world today?
9. What were the disciples willing to risk losing for the advancement of the gospel?
10. How does this passage inform and convict you?

Pray that the name of Jesus might be used with power for the purposes God intends.

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Week IV: Living for His name's sake

As a Christian, Jesus is your namesake. You are His living witness in the world today. You bear His name to a watching world. Jesus was filled with grace and truth. And as His namesake you are to demonstrate those realities to others. Jesus proclaimed the nearness of the Kingdom of Heaven. And as His namesake you are to be a provisional demonstration of that Kingdom in the context of a broken and fallen world. As a “little Christ,” the Christian is to show forth the Savior until He comes again.

It is true that Jesus calls us individually by name but then he sends us in His name into the world that God so loves. We are covered by His grace, indwelt with His Spirit, sent on His mission as agents of His agenda, co-heirs of His inheritance, branches of His vine, bearers of His name. The Christian life is lived for the sake of Christ's name.

The beloved 23rd Psalm declares that the Lord shepherds His people along right paths for His name's sake. Throughout the Psalms, forgiveness of sins, liberation from enemies and general help is sought not so much for the benefit of the psalmist as for the sake of God's name. Read Psalm 25:11, 31:3, 79:9, 106:8, 109:21, 143:11.

It is for the sake of God's name He brought the Hebrews out of Egypt (Ezekiel 20:9, 14), did not reject the Israelites (I Samuel 12:22), delayed His wrath (Isaiah 48:9), withheld His hand (Ezekiel 20:22), and showed mercy to a rebellious people (Jeremiah 14:7, 21; Ezekiel 20:44).

The point is clearly stated in Ezekiel 36:22 which reads, “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: It is not for your sake, people of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of My holy name.” God is doing what He is doing for His own name's sake. The question provoked by that truth is: am I living in accordance with my namesake, Jesus?

If I have been redeemed for His name's sake, then what is it that God wants to do with me to impact the world for the sake of His holy name?

For reflection and conversation:

1. What does it mean to you to bear the name of Christ in all your spheres of influence: family, work, church, community, world?
2. What does it mean to you that God has made you and redeemed you for His name's sake? How does that change or affect your perception of your present circumstances, your sense of purpose and/or the nature of God's character and plan?
3. Read and discuss John 15:20-21. Does this passage make you think that Christianity should come with a warning label? In what ways are you experiencing persecution for the sake of Christ's name? How are other Christians in the world being persecuted for their namesake?

Pray that God would continue to pour out His Spirit in all sufficient measure upon those who bear the name of Christ in a world that is hostile to Him and thus to them.

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Bible study review

Pregnant with Promise

Reviewed by Jessica Lalley
The Layman

Pregnancy ... it's a promise of hope. And with each pregnancy story, lies a celebration of the miracle of a God who knows us and loves us before we are even born.

This book is a study of the character of God who cherishes human life. I found this truth revealed in these (12) self-standing Biblical stories, leading us through pregnancies of women from both the Old and New Testaments and to the ultimate Holy Birth of Jesus Christ.

It is written by Marie Bowen, executive director of Presbyterians of Pro-Life, (www.ppl.org) a voice for renewal in the PC(USA). She is married and the mother of three grown sons.

This is a great read for men and women of all ages that could be studied in a small group format or a Sunday School class. Personally, I can't wait to read this again with a Christian mentor and study together one on one.

Each chapter is scripturally based and easy to read for those new to the Bible, with opportunities to take the study and questions deeper for the more apt Bible student.

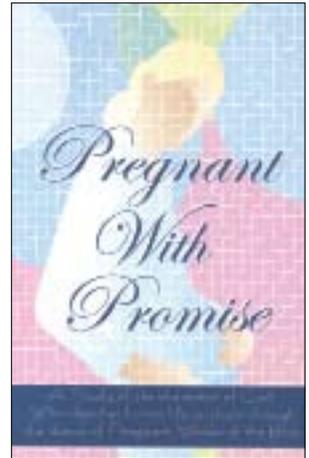
The format for each lesson provides a commentary background and reference to Scripture so that you are directed straight to the pure text of the Bible. Thought-provoking questions have us think about applying the lessons from these stories to our lives right now – a reminder of how God's word is alive and eternal. You'll learn about foreshadowing and prophecy into the New Testament as well as our current modern time.

It's interesting how many of the actions and choices studied in *Pregnant with Promise* are still mistakenly made today!

Because these 12 lessons hit on so many parts of the Bible, leaving you wanting to know more and to dig deeper, it could even be an inspiration or springboard to "Read the Bible in a Year." (<http://tinyurl.com/5rmpaev>)

We are reminded that God gives us life, sees us and understands us. We are blessed beyond measure.

Jessica Lalley, of Dunwoody, Ga., is married to Marc and they have two children, Brooks (11) and Kate (9). She is a member of the Church of the Apostles (www.apostles.org) and works for www.michaelyoussef.com.



For more information or to purchase *Pregnant with Promise* visit the website of Presbyterians Pro-Life:

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