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FOR STUDENTS**
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salvation for its end; and truth, without any
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FROM THE EDITOR



Andy McLean

Editor

*The Gospel Project
for Students*

The classical notion of a letter is lost on many of us today, because we have grown up in a digital culture where email and texting are more common than pen and paper. While these modern means of communication are quick and efficient—which is certainly a good thing—there is still something special and unique about receiving a personalized, handwritten letter from someone. Not a neatly typed letter on official letterhead, but a handwritten one. These are the ones you store in a keepsake box and reread from time to time.

Writing letters was a common means of communication in the first century, and with the church spreading throughout the near east and beyond, biblical instruction about how to live the Christian life was needed. The churches that were springing up from the missionary efforts from the apostles were in a constant need to learn Jesus' teachings, to be trained in sound doctrine, and to be aware of the false teachings around them. This is why we have Paul's letters to the house churches of Rome, the church at Corinth, the church of Ephesus, and so on. This is why we have letters from Peter, John, and James, giving specific instructions to a group of first century Christians who needed to be encouraged, warned, or rebuked in some way.

Of course, these letters aren't just for first century followers of Jesus. Yes, we should read them and study them, asking the questions about what the authors were communicating to their first century readers. However, the letters weren't just for their benefit, but for all centuries of Christians afterward as these letters became an important section of the New Testament. Much like they did for first century readers, today these letters instruct us in the gospel, encourage us to missional living, and ground us in biblical doctrine so as to guard us from false teachings that still linger.

AUTHORS

UNIT 1



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HOW TO USE

▶ INTRO

The two introductory pages begin with a summary that provides a brief overview of the session, including a list of Scriptures. The main point is also listed here, as well as two introductory options to choose from to begin the session.

▶ HIS STORY

The five His Story pages contain the main teaching material for each session. This section follows the storyline of the Bible, focusing on what God has done in redemptive history throughout the pages of Scripture. The first page restates the main point that is to be emphasized throughout the session and is followed by an overview of the main characters. There is also an introductory plot that serves as a transitional entryway to the main part of the session that begins on the following page.

In addition to these, there are other things to notice throughout the His Story section:

- **Personal Study Guide:** Any time you see a vertical bar in the His Story section, it indicates that the material can also be found in the student's personal study guide.
- **Timeline:** Each session features a timeline of events that corresponds to the timeline located in the student's personal study guide.
- **Going Further With The Story:** Most sessions will include at least one of these. They contain additional material that allows leaders to go deeper into the biblical story. It is up to the leader's discretion whether he or she would like to utilize this material in any way. One can simply bypass this option, however, and not miss anything vital to the session.

01 SESSION ONE

Standing Firm on the Gospel

THE POINT
God calls us to stand our ground, refusing to compromise when the truth of the gospel is at stake.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1
None like to be called two-faced, but here's the problem: We live in a world of selfish and social media-driven opinion where we present the best version of ourselves to others to win over (the stage isn't quite accurate). We can't show what others think of us, so we only give what we think others will like. *Apply: Ask: "Does your opinion change to please others? Do you ever change your opinion to please others? Do you ever change your opinion to please others?"*

Option 2
Paul's mission in groups of three to share and ask them to come up with two weekly goals. Tell students they should also come up with a defense for the necessity of each rule. Allow 15 minutes for students to create their rules and defenses and then share one for each group to present their ideas. Then ask:
• What was the weakest rule you heard and why?
• What are some ways you struggle with presenting an image of yourself that's not accurate?
• What are some ways you seek the praise and approval of those around you?

Option 3
Paul's mission in groups of three to share and ask them to come up with two weekly goals. Tell students they should also come up with a defense for the necessity of each rule. Allow 15 minutes for students to create their rules and defenses and then share one for each group to present their ideas. Then ask:
• What was the weakest rule you heard and why?

HIS STORY 15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT
God calls us to stand our ground, refusing to compromise when the truth of the gospel is at stake.

CHARACTERS
• Paul: Former persecutor who became a Christ follower and apostle to the Gentiles
• Peter: One of the original twelve disciples, became an apostle and one of the leaders of the first-century church

PLOT
This session begins with a quick look at an intense conversation between the apostle Paul and the apostle Peter. These two giants of the faith—two leaders in the first century church—were having difficult conversations that was necessary because of the seriousness of the issue.

THE POINT
God calls us to stand our ground, refusing to compromise when the truth of the gospel is at stake.

CHARACTERS
• Paul: Former persecutor who became a Christ follower and apostle to the Gentiles
• Peter: One of the original twelve disciples, became an apostle and one of the leaders of the first-century church

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY
The church in Antioch consisted of one of the most remarkable church planting operations in the New Testament (Acts 13:26). After Stephen was martyred, the early church's center of gravity shifted to Antioch. This led to the conversion of many Gentiles who had been baptized only to have been required to become Jews and observe the Law (Acts 15:1-2). Paul and Barnabas were sent to Antioch to minister to these Gentile believers and to help them understand what was going on in Antioch—a clash between two ways of understanding Christianity: faith, which was the new way, and the Law, which was the old way.

Timeline
STANDING STRONG: God's sovereignty when the truth of the gospel is at stake.
UNIFY IN THE CROSS: Showing we are not the same as the world.
SHOWING MERCY TO THOSE WHO DO NOT BELIEVE: Showing mercy to those who do not believe.

PAUL REMINDED THEM OF JU FAITH, NOT BY WORKS

The ground is level at the cross. Regardless of our ethnicity, whether we are male or female or your through the same door, Jesus.

THE POINT
God calls us to stand our ground, refusing to compromise when the truth of the gospel is at stake.

CHARACTERS
• Paul: Former persecutor who became a Christ follower and apostle to the Gentiles
• Peter: One of the original twelve disciples, became an apostle and one of the leaders of the first-century church

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY
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Timeline
A NEW IDENTITY: Peter reminds God's people of their identity in Christ.
LOVE IN ACTION: Love by God's grace when the truth of the gospel is at stake.

THIS STUDY

- **Essential Doctrines:** Each session will also contain an essential doctrine that directly relates to the Bible study material. The essential doctrine is also located in the student's personal study guide, though in an abbreviated format.
- **Christ Connection:** Each session will end with a direct look at how the content studied connects with Christ, emphasizing to students how all of Scripture is pointing to Him. The material in the Christ Connection will also be provided in the student's personal study guide.

▶ YOUR STORY

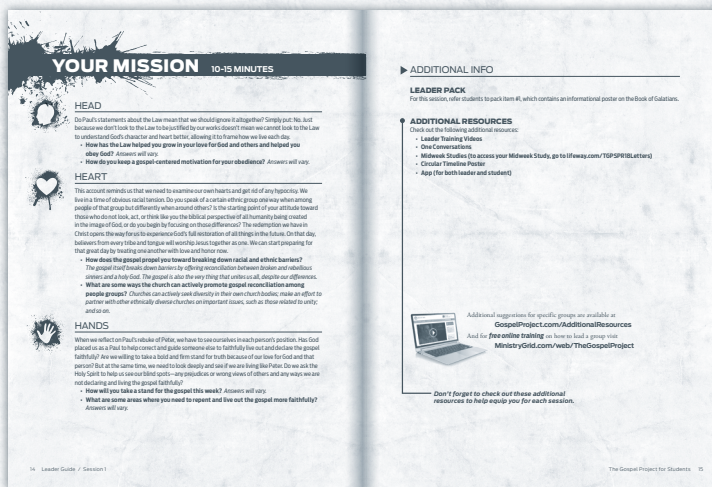
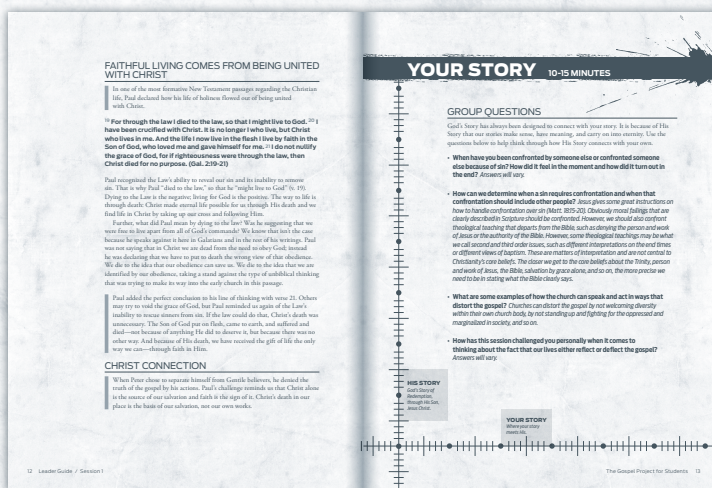
The Your Story section is designed to connect what God has done in the past to students' lives today by introducing group discussion questions that highlight how God's Story connects with their story. There are lead-ins with each question in the Leader Guide to help the leader walk students through each question.

▶ YOUR MISSION

The Your Mission section is designed to show how God's Story is capable of creating lasting transformation into how we think, feel, and live from day to day. By doing so, we emphasize to students that every session goes beyond mere Bible study to a calling to be on mission with God.

▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

The final page of each session points leaders to additional resources that can be used in conjunction with each study. The resources listed, such as teaching tips videos and One Conversations, are designed to help leaders prepare for each session. There is also information about the leader pack posters that can be used with each session.



01

SESSION ONE

Standing Firm on the Gospel

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we will see how the apostle Paul confronted the apostle Peter for being *two-faced*, or *hypocritical*. Peter acted one way with one group of Christians, and another with a different group. Peter's hypocrisy wasn't a small problem. When he chose to separate himself from Gentile believers, his actions denied the truth of the gospel. This is why Paul had to challenge Peter to act in a way that reflected the truth of the gospel to all people. Paul's challenge reminds us that our salvation rests in our faith in Christ alone. Christ's death in our place and resurrection is the basis of our salvation, not our own works.

SCRIPTURE

Galatians 2:11-21

THE POINT

God calls us to stand our ground, refusing to compromise when the truth of the gospel is at stake.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

No one likes to be called two-faced, but here's the problem: We live in a world of selfies and social media status updates where we present the best version of ourselves for others to see, even if that image isn't quite accurate. We care about what others think of us, so we only post what we think others will like. *Happy. Social. Smart. Caring. Spiritual.* It's easy to stretch facts and exaggerate to make ourselves look good to others. However, when we do that, we can easily become two-faced, acting a certain way with one group and differently with another.

Apart from social media, this reveals another problem: Our hearts are bent towards pleasing people. We like certain people and want those people to like us. It does not matter if we are talkative and extroverted or shy and introverted, we all struggle with how we are perceived by others. This struggle causes us to aim our actions, either directly or indirectly, at being noticed and gaining approval from others.

Worries about our image and people pleasing can create conflict when we have to choose between pleasing ourselves or someone else instead of pleasing God. Relationships matter. Scripture teaches that. However, when the truth of the gospel is at stake, we must take a strong stand.

- **What are some ways you struggle with presenting an image of yourself that isn't quite accurate?**
- **What are some ways you seek the praise and approval of those around you?**

Option 2

Place students in groups of three to four and ask them to come up with two wacky rules. Tell students they should also come up with a defense for the necessity of each rule. Allow about 5 minutes for students to create their rules and defenses and then allow time for each group to present their ideas.

Then ask:

- **What was the wackiest rule you heard and why?**

The church's early days were filled with figuring things out—especially when it came to the Law. Jesus came to fulfill the Law, not to destroy it; however, the religious leaders had placed extra rules and burdens on the people, which Jesus constantly confronted them about. Even for the disciples, like Peter, it was difficult to move away from practices that were no longer necessary because of what Jesus did on the cross. When we place extra rules on people, we ignore the truth of the gospel: Only Jesus is sufficient for salvation.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

God calls us to stand our ground, refusing to compromise when the truth of the gospel is at stake.

CHARACTERS

- **Paul:** former persecutor who became a Christ-follower and apostle to the Gentiles
- **Peter:** one of the original twelve disciples; became an apostle and one of the key leaders of the first-century church

PLOT

This session begins with a quick look into an intense conversation between the apostle Paul and the apostle Peter. These two giants of the faith—key leaders in the first century church—were having a difficult conversation that was necessary because of the seriousness of the issue.

Remember, these sections are optional and can be skipped if preferred.

PAUL CHALLENGED PETER'S BEHAVIOR

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

The church at Antioch demonstrated one of the more remarkable church planting episodes in the New Testament (Acts 11:19-26). After Stephen was martyred, the early church scattered and some of the believers went to Antioch. These Jewish believers who had been speaking only to Jews began speaking to Gentiles as well and many came to Christ (11:19-21). Barnabas was dispatched from Jerusalem to lead this fledgling congregation, and he took along a new convert named Paul (11:25-26). Not long after, the young church would send out Paul and Barnabas as the church's first missionaries (13:1-3). Paul and Barnabas later returned to Antioch to report what God had done on their journey, after which they remained at the church for an extended time (Acts 14:26-28).

In the Book of Galatians, Paul referred back to the Antioch church. Antioch was a key city in the Roman Empire with more than a half-million people of diverse nationalities, making it the Empire's third largest city. Like its city, the church at Antioch was diverse, filled with both Jewish and Gentile believers. It was here that Peter's (called Cephas in Aramaic) hypocrisy led to a sharp rebuke from Paul.

¹¹ But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹² For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. ¹³ And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. ¹⁴ But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?" (Gal. 2:11-14)

The early church was still grappling with the different ways Jewish and Gentile Christians lived out their faith and how a unified church could work through these differences (Acts 15). These differences—the more Jewish-focused Christianity coming out of Jerusalem and the newer, more Gentile-focused Christianity coming from the large number of Gentile believers in Antioch—created the environment for Peter's hypocrisy.

TIMELINE

STANDING STRONG

Refuse compromise when the truth of the gospel is at stake.

UNITY IN THE CROSS

Believers are united together in Christ.

SHOWING MERCY

Those who know mercy show mercy to others.

Remember, every time you see this bar in the leader guide, it indicates the same material is also found in the personal study guide as well.

Whenever you see PSG page numbers listed, it indicates that there is a section in the personal study guide for students to interact with.

Imagine a small, rural First Baptist Church congregation consisting mainly of families related to one another and having an organ, a piano, and a robed choir. Now, picture an urban, young, multiethnic congregation in a major city named Grace Community Church that has contemporary dress and music. Both churches preach the Word, share the gospel, love Jesus, and support missions. These two churches are very different, with very different cultures. Now, imagine what it would be like to merge these two churches together. That might help you understand what was going on in Antioch—a clash between two ways of understanding Christianity. Still, that was no excuse for hypocrisy. Indeed, there is never an excuse for it.

- **What are some ways churches today understand and practice Christianity differently? Are any of these differences reasons to divide? Why or why not? (p. 10, PSG)**

Paul saw Peter acting differently with two different groups of people. First, Peter would “regularly” eat with Gentile believers. Peter had witnessed the conversion of Cornelius and his family (Acts 10) and knew without a doubt that Gentiles could follow Jesus. But something changed when “certain men came from James” (v. 12). These men were likely shocked to see the way Peter made no distinction between Jewish and Gentile Christians. The verb tense of “withdrew” and “separated” gives the idea that Peter gradually gave into the pressure of the group after they arrived.

Eventually, even the other Jewish believers followed Peter’s example. Church leaders have an incredibly powerful influence! Paul’s frustration with Peter’s example was made evident in his statement in verse 13: “even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.” Even Barnabas, the earliest leader of the church at Antioch and a man known for his encouragement (Acts 4:36), gave into the peer pressure from Peter and the Jewish Christians.

There was no cover-up here: Peter was wrong and had led others astray. Paul made it unmistakably clear that they were straying from the ultimate truth of the gospel. When our lives openly deny the gospel, rebuke is the necessary response. There is a time to pull someone aside and quietly speak to him or her about error. In this case, due to the public nature of Peter’s sin and the public influence he had, Paul rightly confronted his hypocrisy in front of everyone.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Justification by Faith (p. 12, PSG)

Justification refers to the moment a person is objectively declared righteous before God based on the righteousness of Christ’s atoning death (Rom. 8:33-34). This act of declaration takes place through faith in Christ, not as a result of human works or effort (Eph. 2:8-9). Through justification, a person is made to be in right standing before God, changing what was once an estranged and hostile relationship to one of adoption into the family of God.

PAUL REMINDED THEM OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH, NOT BY WORKS

The ground is level at the cross. Regardless of socioeconomic status or ethnicity, whether we are male or female or young or old, we all come to God through the same door: Jesus.

15 We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; 16 yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. 17 But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! 18 For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. (Gal. 2:15-18)

Earlier, Paul said Peter's actions were a deviation from the truth of the gospel. Then, he unpacked what he meant. When Christians act with prejudice toward others, we deny the very gospel we proclaim. We are justified by faith and nothing else (v. 16)—not our works, our ethnic origin, or any other standard. This is why Paul saw Peter's hypocrisy as being so serious—the gospel was being denied.

The Jewish believers had been given a great advantage in the Law, a key way they were set apart from the Gentiles. It was also through their obedience to the law that they saw the Gentiles as “sinners”—men and women who failed to even attempt keeping a single aspect of the law. It was through this same obedience—or their failure and imperfection in obedience—that led these Jewish Christians to understand the Law could not save them. This realization was proven in their faith in Christ, by their turning away from trusting in their own works and turning to Christ to save them. Then, how could a Jewish Christian, such as Peter, believe himself above his Gentile brothers and sisters? Where does the gospel make room to treat Jewish believers and Gentile believers differently?

Paul asked a question that may have been raised by the Jewish brothers when they led Peter astray (v. 17). If Jewish believers could eat with “Gentile sinners” who didn't follow the law, wouldn't that make the Jewish believers “sinners” too? And if that was the case, wouldn't that make Jesus a promoter of sin since He said that what you eat doesn't make you unclean and He commanded Peter to eat what was unclean (Mark 7:19; Acts 10)? Paul's answer was certain: “Absolutely not!” It would be sin to restore the restrictions Jesus removed.

TIMELINE

A NEW IDENTITY
Peter reminds God's people of their identity in Christ.

**Bonus Session*
THE RESURRECTION IS ESSENTIAL
Christianity stands or falls with the resurrection.

LOVE IN ACTION
Love for God and others is the fruit of Christian living.

FAITHFUL LIVING COMES FROM BEING UNITED WITH CHRIST

In one of the most formative New Testament passages regarding the Christian life, Paul declared how his life of holiness flowed out of being united with Christ.

19 For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. 20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21 I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose. (Gal. 2:19-21)

Paul recognized the Law's ability to reveal our sin and its inability to remove sin. That is why Paul "died to the law," so that he "might live to God" (v. 19). Dying to the Law is the negative; living for God is the positive. The way to life is through death: Christ made eternal life possible for us through His death and we find life in Christ by taking up our cross and following Him.

Further, what did Paul mean by dying to the law? Was he suggesting that we were free to live apart from all of God's commands? We know that isn't the case because he speaks against it here in Galatians and in the rest of his writings. Paul was not saying that in Christ we are dead from the need to obey God; instead he was declaring that we have to put to death the wrong view of that obedience. We die to the idea that our obedience can save us. We die to the idea that we are identified by our obedience, taking a stand against the type of unbiblical thinking that was trying to make its way into the early church in this passage.

Paul added the perfect conclusion to his line of thinking with verse 21. Others may try to void the grace of God, but Paul reminded us again of the Law's inability to rescue sinners from sin. If the law could do that, Christ's death was unnecessary. The Son of God put on flesh, came to earth, and suffered and died—not because of anything He did to deserve it, but because there was no other way. And because of His death, we have received the gift of life the only way we can—through faith in Him.

CHRIST CONNECTION

When Peter chose to separate himself from Gentile believers, he denied the truth of the gospel by his actions. Paul's challenge reminds us that Christ alone is the source of our salvation and faith is the sign of it. Christ's death in our place is the basis of our salvation, not our own works.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **When have you been confronted by someone else or confronted someone else because of sin? How did it feel in the moment and how did it turn out in the end?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How can we determine when a sin requires confrontation and when that confrontation should include other people?** *Jesus gives some great instructions on how to handle confrontation over sin (Matt. 18:15-20). Obviously moral failings that are clearly described in Scripture should be confronted. However, we should also confront theological teaching that departs from the Bible, such as denying the person and work of Jesus or the authority of the Bible. However, some theological teachings may be what we call second and third order issues, such as different interpretations on the end times or different views of baptism. These are matters of interpretation and are not central to Christianity's core beliefs. The closer we get to the core beliefs about the Trinity, person and work of Jesus, the Bible, salvation by grace alone, and so on, the more precise we need to be in stating what the Bible clearly says.*
- **What are some examples of how the church can speak and act in ways that distort the gospel?** *Churches can distort the gospel by not welcoming diversity within their own church body, by not standing up and fighting for the oppressed and marginalized in society, and so on.*
- **How has this session challenged you personally when it comes to thinking about the fact that our lives either reflect or deflect the gospel?** *Answers will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION

10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

Do Paul's statements about the Law mean that we should ignore it altogether? Simply put: No. Just because we don't look to the Law to be justified by our works doesn't mean we cannot look to the Law to understand God's character and heart better, allowing it to frame how we live each day.

- **How has the Law helped you grow in your love for God and others and helped you obey God?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How do you keep a gospel-centered motivation for your obedience?** *Answers will vary.*



HEART

This account reminds us that we need to examine our own hearts and get rid of any hypocrisy. We live in a time of obvious racial tension. Do you speak of a certain ethnic group one way when among people of that group but differently when around others? Is the starting point of your attitude toward those who do not look, act, or think like you the biblical perspective of all humanity being created in the image of God, or do you begin by focusing on those differences? The redemption we have in Christ opens the way for us to experience God's full restoration of all things in the future. On that day, believers from every tribe and tongue will worship Jesus together as one. We can start preparing for that great day by treating one another with love and honor now.

- **How does the gospel propel you toward breaking down racial and ethnic barriers?**
The gospel itself breaks down barriers by offering reconciliation between broken and rebellious sinners and a holy God. The gospel is also the very thing that unites us all, despite our differences.
- **What are some ways the church can actively promote gospel reconciliation among people groups?** *Churches can actively seek diversity in their own church bodies; make an effort to partner with other ethnically diverse churches on important issues, such as those related to unity; and so on.*



HANDS

When we reflect on Paul's rebuke of Peter, we have to see ourselves in each person's position. Has God placed us as a Paul to help correct and guide someone else to faithfully live out and declare the gospel faithfully? Are we willing to take a bold and firm stand for truth because of our love for God and that person? But at the same time, we need to look deeply and see if we are living like Peter. Do we ask the Holy Spirit to help us see our blind spots—any prejudices or wrong views of others and any ways we are not declaring and living the gospel faithfully?

- **How will you take a stand for the gospel this week?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some areas where you need to repent and live out the gospel more faithfully?**
Answers will vary.

▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #3, which contains an informational poster on the Book of Galatians.

● ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPSPR18Letters)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at
GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit
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02

SESSION TWO

The Gospel Calls for Unity

SESSION SUMMARY

This session gives direction and truth to guide our hearts and conduct toward unity. Our unity must be grounded in biblical convictions, not popular personalities. We will also contrast the wisdom and power this world has to offer with the wisdom and power displayed at the cross. This contrast will show us that our unity is increased as we recognize that we cannot brag about anything we've done for ourselves, only what He has done in us.

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 1:10-31

THE POINT

God calls us to strive for unity in the church in order to showcase the beauty of the cross.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

Fables are fictional stories used to teach a specific moral or lesson. One of the most famous collections of these fables is called *Aesop's Fables*. Though the stories were made up and usually used animals as main characters, we still have a lot to learn from them. For example:

A LION used to prowl about a field in which Four Oxen used to dwell. Many a time he tried to attack them; but whenever he came near they turned their tails to one another, so that whichever way he approached them he was met by the horns of one of them. At last, however, they fell a-quarrelling among themselves, and each went off to pasture alone in a separate corner of the field. Then the Lion attacked them one by one and soon made an end of all four.¹

The lion in the fable knew that as long as the four oxen stayed together he didn't stand a chance against them. However, the minute the four oxen decided to split up, their power through numbers disappeared. The lion resumed his attack and triumphed. Similarly, the Bible tells us that we have an adversary in Satan who prowls about like a lion seeking someone to devour (1 Pet. 5:8). Satan loves to attack the body of Christ—the church—because he knows that if he can get us isolated, he can take us down by making us unproductive in the kingdom of God.

God has commissioned the church to take the message of the gospel to the nations. His plan is to use us as part of the local church to build the kingdom. When we are united through the cross, we stand as an undeniable force for the gospel. God's heart for us is to be a unified, powerful front against the schemes of the evil one. Not only is unity a critical line of defense, it is also crucial to our task of carrying the gospel to the nations.

- **What are some common causes of division within churches today? How might we begin to address those divisions?**

Option 2

The word *unity* pops up in discussions about all kinds of groups of people—families, friends, churches, the government, races and ethnicities, and the list goes on. Where there are people in this sin-filled world, there will always be a little disunity. But believers should be different. As Joni Eareckson Tada explained it, “Believers are never told to *become* one—we’re *already* one and are expected to act like it.”² We are already one in Christ—and we are not “in Christ” because of anything we have done (so there should be no competition between believers), but because of what He has done for us all.

- **What are some things we should remember as we work toward unity in the church?**

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

God calls us to strive for unity in the church in order to showcase the beauty of the cross.

CHARACTERS

- **Paul:** former persecutor who became a Christ-follower and apostle to the Gentiles
- **Apollos:** an articulate preacher who was helped by Priscilla and Aquila

PLOT

Our world desperately needs unity—politically, socially, ethnically, economically, culturally—in a time when disunity is just as common as unity. The causes of disunity in these areas may vary, but the one place where unity should stand out is in the church. In fact, this is exactly what we see Paul advocating among the Corinthian church.

TIMELINE

UNITY IN THE CROSS

Believers are united together in Christ.

SHOWING MERCY

Those who know mercy show mercy to others.

A NEW IDENTITY

Peter reminds God's people of their identity in Christ.

CHRISTIANS ARE UNIFIED IN CHRIST

Do you have any heroes in the faith—others you look up to as examples of following Jesus? There is nothing wrong with this, Paul himself encouraged the Corinthians (as well as other churches) to watch him closely and imitate his own actions (1 Cor 4:16; Phil. 3:17; 4:9). Of course, Paul didn't mean we should take this too far. In other words, we must be careful not to allow our spiritual leaders around us to become more than they were designed to be.

Though we don't always realize we do this, we love to put spiritual leaders on a pedestal, much like the church in Corinth. Instead of simply learning from their leaders and imitating their obedience, the Corinthians turned their affiliation with their heroes into status symbols, and a cause for arrogant boasting.

- **When have you or others given leaders or celebrities a higher place in your life than they deserved? What's the danger in doing this?**

¹⁰ I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. ¹¹ For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. ¹² What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." ¹³ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴ I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶ (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) ¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. (1 Cor. 1:10-17)

Divided. Immature. Quarreling. These words describe the type of church Paul wrote to. Keep in mind that Paul was one of the original founders of this young church (Acts 18:1-11). However, after having spent eighteen months training them in the gospel, Paul continued on his missionary journey. It wasn't too long before he received reports of the immorality and disunity in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:11).

Like a puzzle, you and I are part of a whole. Not one piece is alike, and no piece can stand alone. We don't make sense without each other. In the church at Corinth, people attempted to start a puzzle of their own. Men and women rallied around a different leader, then they tried to prove why their group was better than the others. They also fought a similar battle over spiritual gifts, continually debating over which gift was most important (1 Cor. 12–14). In response, Paul cautioned them that the church of God—the bride of Christ—is one body. God gifts every person with specific and necessary talents and resources meant to be used for the greater good (1 Cor. 12). Instead, the people of the Corinthian church attempted to use their gifts and talents, as well as their connections with a popular personality, to serve their own egos.

Unity grounded in gospel convictions lasts; unity attached to personalities doesn't. When the church at Corinth had several leaders to follow—the church fragmented. The same can be true of churches today when we have multiple staff members or strong leaders in the church body. Even a church where everyone is unified behind the same leader has placed its unity in danger, which we often see when that leader leaves the church. But the gospel is unchanging. The gospel will not leave. The gospel will not accidentally or intentionally make us take sides. That is why unity is grounded in the gospel alone.

- **How does the gospel help us maintain unity despite being diverse in so many other ways?** (*p. 16, PSG*)

THE CROSS OF CHRIST IS THE WISDOM OF GOD

After showing that true unity can be found in Christ alone, Paul went on to show us the brilliance of the cross. From the world's perspective, the cross makes no sense. The Jews were looking for the signs of the Messiah. They thought he would be a glorious king who would rescue them in a powerful, obvious way. An uneducated, unimportant Man from Galilee—who willingly walked to His death—did not fit the part. The wisdom-seeking Greeks didn't buy it either. Nothing about this crucified Jesus looked wise.

¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." ²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (1 Cor. 1:18-25)

But God's thoughts are not ours, nor are His ways ours (Isa. 55:8). God's use of the cross to bring about the deliverance of His people certainly falls into this category. Crucifixion was Rome's chosen manner of execution for slaves and non-citizens; because it was so cruel and shameful, only Roman citizens guilty of treason were crucified. To the Jewish mind and heart, the cross was a symbol of tyranny by an occupying foreign power. The thought that the long-awaited Messiah would end up being crucified was foolish because they believed the Messiah to be the One who would finally free them from this oppression. To them, Jesus' crucifixion closed the door on the possibility that He was the Messiah. While the Gentiles had no understanding of the Messiah, they saw the cross as foolishness because the idea of an executed criminal being a hero was absurd.

The world's wisdom sees the cross as foolishness, but God made the world's wisdom foolish through the cross (1 Cor. 3:19). The cross was God's plan to provide forgiveness for sinners who would never find forgiveness on their own. This young Corinthian church needed to remember that the gospel makes no sense from a human perspective. Not one of them (and not one of us) deserves the grace of God. Yet it is this very "foolishness" which binds us as believers. The undeserved forgiveness and abundant spiritual blessings we receive from our heavenly Creator unifies us even with all our earthly differences. Regardless of our backgrounds, spiritual gifts, or tightly held opinions, it is only through the cross we obtain eternal life with God. The gospel is our common denominator.

THERE IS NO ROOM FOR PERSONAL BRAGGING

Paul also made a point about how humility can drive unity. Let's take a look:

26 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. 30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." (1 Cor. 1:26-31)

Notice whom God has chosen. People who are not wise, not powerful, and not of nobility. People who are weak, insignificant, and despised. That doesn't make for a good résumé, does it? Why did God choose people the world looks past? Paul answered that question twice—so that no one can brag about his own doing, but instead about what the Lord has done (1:29,31). God's choosing reminds us of His grace—our salvation is not based on who we are or what we have done—and drives us toward humility. We cannot brag on ourselves because we have nothing worth bragging about in ourselves.

TIMELINE

**Bonus Session*

THE RESURRECTION IS ESSENTIAL

Christianity stands or falls with the resurrection.

LOVE IN ACTION

Love for God and others is the fruit of Christian living.

LETTERS TO YOUNG PASTORS

Paul instructs Timothy and Titus.

It is a great honor to know the Lord, our faithful, loving, righteousness Judge. There is much to boast in as believers. Again, this is our common denominator. Though we may have different preferences on how our church building should look, or opposing views on the details of our Sunday service, we are united in the fact that we can all point others to God as the faithful, loving Savior. As we fix our eyes on Jesus, instead of our supposed strengths and our tightly-held opinions, our hearts are naturally stirred for His name to be famed and we will joyfully and passionately proclaim His goodness to the nations.

- **When have you been tempted to brag about something in your life that God clearly did? How can you turn that around and share about what He has done in your life?** (p. 18, PSG)

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Body of Christ (p. 17, PSG)

The New Testament describes the church as the body of Christ. The church lives and operates as Christ's representative here on earth, with Christ as its head (Col. 1:18). This means the church is an extension of Christ's ministry, carrying out His work by fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). The picture of the church as the body of Christ also shows us the connection between individual Christians as members depend on each other for growth and sanctification (1 Cor. 12).

CHRIST CONNECTION

Paul addressed divisions in the Corinthian church by reminding believers that the gospel overturns human expectations and robs us of any ability to brag in our salvation. Jesus is our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; therefore, selfish bragging and divisions have no place among God's people.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **How does the gospel help us maintain unity despite being diverse in so many other ways?** *The session is pretty clear on this point—our common denominator as Christians, no matter what differences we may have, is Christ as our salvation. Because of Christ and what He accomplished on the cross, we have common ground in Him and should resist the temptation to brag about anything else.*
- **What are some ways we draw attention to ourselves instead of Christ?**
Answers will vary.
- **Name a spiritual leader God has used to bring you closer to Him. What has this person taught you?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How does the gospel allow you to see your gifts and talents and those of others in proper perspective?** *The gospel allows us to see that these gifts and talents aren't given to draw attention to us or impress others, but rather to serve others in the same way we have been served by Jesus.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION

10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

Believers should have godly examples to look to and imitate. According to Hebrews 13:7, these leaders should speak God's Word and live in accordance with the Word of God. These criteria help us to evaluate which leaders around us deserve our attention. Are they leaders who love God's Word and handle/interpret it properly? Are they leaders who not only speak God's Word, but also live it out in their everyday lives? If so, then we should look to these leaders and learn from them.

- **Who are some heroes of the faith you look to personally?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Why is it important that the author of Hebrews instructed us to examine the outcome of a leader's faith before imitating him or her?** *At the very least, the author implied that the people we look up to spiritually should have a long history of faithful obedience. We obviously would not want to follow those without much of a history of obedient living or a small window of apparent faithful living followed by lifestyles of disobedience.*



HEART

The bragging heart is a prideful heart, and we know how God feels about pride. Throughout the Bible, Scripture speaks of God opposing or resisting the proud, but giving grace and favor to the humble (Ps. 138:6; Prov. 3:34; Luke 1:52; Jas. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5). Why is that the case? Because pride and bragging are essentially a self-declaration of: "I'm good enough and don't need God." This is why we must constantly be on the lookout for pride and bragging in our lives so we can uproot them in our desire to pursue hearts of humility before God.

- **How might a personal focus on imitating the humility, service, and obedience of Christ bring greater unity to your church?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What areas do you brag about in your own life that prevent you from a closer relationship with God?** *Answers will vary.*



HANDS

We too often approach the body of Christ to be served by it. The church does serve as the hands and feet of Jesus, and we should receive from the church; however, many of us have the backward mindset that church is mostly about what we can get from the people of God, instead of holding on to a humble heart of service. Jesus Himself came not to be served but to serve, and this example of humility is what begins to unify us.

- **Why is it incorrect to only think of church as a place we go to receive something?** *Because church isn't about association only but participation.*
- **What are some areas where you can begin to give back through serving those around you this week?** *Answers will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #4, which contains an informational poster on the Book of 1 Corinthians.

SOURCES

1. Charles William Eliot, ed., *The Harvard Classics* (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1909), 32.
2. Joni Eareckson Tada, *Glorious Intruder: God's Presence in Life's Chaos* (New York: Waterbrook Multnomah, 1989), 82.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPSPR18Letters)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



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03

SESSION THREE

The Gospel Calls for Mercy

SESSION SUMMARY

God has called us to a life of holiness—to be a people set apart for the glory of God. However, we were not saved to separate and settle around those we are most comfortable with. We are to be set apart through our Christ-like character, our mission-minded actions, and our Biblical beliefs—all of which should drive us toward those who need Christ, regardless of their skin color, economic status, or political beliefs. Our individual lives are meant to be satellites of God’s glory to all people, reflecting the hope of the gospel and the message of mercy we ourselves have experienced.

SCRIPTURE

James 2:1-13

THE POINT

God calls us to avoid showing favoritism and to extend mercy to all.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

As we begin our study today, take a few minutes to read through Psalm 96. During your first read, underline all the commands given. Now, read the passage again and this time circle every mention of the global nature of these commands (i.e., “the whole earth,” “all peoples,” and “the nations”).

This globe in its current state—whether we live in Kentucky or Kuwait—is not really our home. Christians have been rescued and given a new identity, which includes a new, heavenly citizenship. We must shake off the tendency to sit within the safety of what we know and who we think we can trust. Our political stances and our cultural identities don’t mean much in light of eternity. We exist to give glory to Christ through bringing the gospel to all nations. We must be willing to cross social, political, cultural, and national lines to bring the freedom of Christ to every soul in bondage to sin and death.

- **How does your heart for the nations line up with God's love for all people?**

Option 2

Ask students to list some of their favorite foods, TV shows, bands and musicians, actors, movies, books, and so on. Ask:

- **What makes these your favorites? Why?**

Give each student a blank piece of paper. Tell students to list their three best friends. Next, instruct students to list the names of three people they don’t know well. Allow a few minutes for students to think through and record their answers. Then ask:

- **Which of these groups would you be more likely to reach out to if they showed up to church? Why?**

After discussing students’ answers, brainstorm some ways they can avoid showing favoritism. Believers must love, reach out to, help, pray for, and share Jesus with all kinds of people—no matter how well we know them or how little we think their status may benefit us.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

God calls us to avoid showing favoritism and to extend mercy to all.

CHARACTERS

- **James:** half brother of Jesus; leader of the church in Jerusalem

PLOT

The half-brother of Jesus, the apostle James, opens our eyes to the fact that favoritism has no place among the people of God. In a culture very much like our own, the people of James' day faced the temptation to favor one group of people over another. However, James knew that such behavior was the very opposite of living out the gospel and of doing what the Word of God tells us.

SHOWING MERCY
*Those who know mercy
 show mercy to others.*

A NEW IDENTITY
*Peter reminds God's
 people of their identity
 in Christ.*

**Bonus Session*
**THE RESURRECTION
 IS ESSENTIAL**
*Christianity stands or falls
 with the resurrection.*

JAMES WARNED AGAINST FAVORITISM

The first chapter of James ends with a call for Christians to keep ourselves unstained from the world. We are to be holy—which essentially means we are to be different. James carries that theme into chapter 2 by addressing one of the ways we often struggle with this—favoritism.

- **When have you struggled with showing favoritism among your friends, classmates, or siblings? Explain.** (*p. 22, PSG*)

¹ My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. ² For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, ³ and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” ⁴ have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? (Jas. 2:1-4)

So, we must “hold on to” our faith (our confession as Christ as our glorious Lord) in such a way that this confession is evident to those around us. Our beliefs must be consistent with our actions. Since James received reports of the church acting inconsistent with the faith they claimed to hold, he offered a parable of sorts to drive his point home.

James asked the readers to imagine a wealthy man entered their gathering and was followed by a poor man. How would they react to each? Would they offer the wealthy man a seat of honor while telling the poor man to stand or to sit on the floor? If so, they discriminated by believing the wealthy man was deserving of more honor than the poor man. Through those actions, they revealed their evil thoughts of favoring the wealthy man. The readers in James’ day probably had to take a big gulp when they read this knowing they were guilty. And so do we—we are just as vulnerable to the sin of favoritism.

The proof of our salvation to the world around us is in the way we live. A Christian showing favoritism (which includes any sort of partiality shown regarding race, economic status, political view, or other defining characteristic of a person) ought to be an oxymoron. A Christ-follower should not treat people differently depending on their appearances, because it is inconsistent with the character of the God we serve and testify about. The Bible tells us plainly that God shows no partiality (Rom. 2:11). As image bearers of God—salt and light to the world around us—our treatment of others should never be dependent on how people look, what they do or don’t believe, or what they can or can’t do for us.

GOD'S KINGDOM IS NOT LIKE THE WORLD'S KINGDOM

As James continued addressing the sin of favoritism, he wanted to be sure that the church fully understood what they were doing when they sided with the rich over the poor—or demonstrated favoritism for any other reason. He wrote:

⁵ Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called? (Jas. 2:5-7)

Favoritism is not just evil because it is self-serving; it is far more sinister than that. Favoritism undermines the gospel itself. James reminded the church that God chose the poor of the world to be rich in faith (Psa. 68:10; Matt. 5:3). Through our neediness—financial, spiritual, and otherwise—we turn to seek help from others. And in that helpless state, the gospel takes root in the heart and begins to grow, and we begin to experience God's extravagant grace in our lives.

Still, it goes even deeper than that. James pointed out that when his readers favored the wealthy and neglected the poor, they took sides and aligned themselves with the ones who oppress others—including themselves! The rich were rich, in part, through their oppression of the poor. The poor were poor, in part, because of the oppression of the wealthy. When the people of God choose to align with oppressors through mistreating others in an attempt to gain favor, it shows that the church's thinking has not been transformed by the gospel as it should be. In these cases, the church still acts like the world, but the gospel is intended to change our perspective completely. God turns everything upside down.

Yet God's calling is upside down from what this world values, esteems, and applauds. As we follow God with an eternal perspective, our goals, desires, and choices will (and should) look radically different from those who don't know Christ. The world will always demand our allegiance to the whims and trends of the time. Sometimes our Christian values and convictions will line up with the world order; Oftentimes, it will not. We must continually remember that this present world is not our home. We do not exist to be served, but to serve. Our lives are not our own, but are a sacrifice, an offering to our God.

- **How do your goals, desires, and choices reflect God's will for your life rather than the world's?** (*p. 23, PSG*)

MERCY TRIUMPHS OVER JUDGMENT

It is easy to be judgmental of others when we don't have the perspective of new identity in Christ. But just as God is merciful, we should also be. James continues:

⁸ If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. ⁹ But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. ¹¹ For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. ¹² So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. ¹³ For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. (Jas. 2:8-13)

James didn't sugar-coat it: Favoritism is sin. Not only is being judgmental and showing partiality against the heart of God, these actions are hypocritical at their core. We each were rescued at our worst. We had nothing to offer Christ, yet He bore the wrath of God so we could be included in the family of God (1 Pet. 2:9-10). We were homeless, fatherless orphans without hope. But God rescued us from our poverty and granted us the riches of His eternal kingdom and the position of His beloved children. All we have is from God alone.

We are called to show mercy not only for what we have already experienced in Christ and who we have become, but also because of what we will experience. We are to show mercy because we will receive mercy. Here is a sobering thought: All of our words and actions will be judged one day (Matt. 12:36-37; Rom. 2:6-11; 2 Cor. 5:10). On that day we will stand before the judgment seat of Christ to account for all of it—every word and deed, no matter how big or how small. James carefully pointed out that we are all lawbreakers and have been convicted as sinners, proven by our favoritism (2:9-11).

But we know what will happen on that day: Because of Christ, all of our sin will be tossed aside and we will stand before God pure and righteous. We will experience mercy from God. It is this great hope that should compel us to extend mercy to others freely and abundantly. Mercy triumphs over our judgment, so we are to turn away from being judgmental toward others and give them mercy.

- **When you find it difficult to extend mercy to others, what can you do to respond in grace rather than judgment?** (p. 24, PSG)

TIMELINE

LOVE IN ACTION

Love for God and others is the fruit of Christian living.

LETTERS TO YOUNG PASTORS

Paul instructs Timothy and Titus.

CO-HEIRS WITH CHRIST

Benefits of being adopted through Christ

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

God Is Just (p. 24, PSG)

God establishes standards for His moral creatures that are in accordance with His righteousness, and they will be judged according to those righteous standards (Lev. 11:44-45; Rom. 2:5-11; 2 Cor. 5:10). It would be an injustice if God did not uphold His righteousness, because such a failure would require God to violate His own righteous character. Since humanity has sinned by failing to live up to God's righteous standards, God has taken it upon Himself to make provision by being both just and the justifier of those who place their faith in Christ (Rom. 3:25-26).

CHRIST CONNECTION

When the early church was showing favoritism, James reminded believers of their identity in light of God's mercy and judgment. The way we show our faith in Jesus Christ is by keeping the royal law and proclaiming His mercy over judgment—a mercy seen most clearly in Jesus' death in our place. Because God has shown mercy to us through Jesus Christ, we are to show mercy to others.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **In what ways do you think people around you can see Christ in their interactions with you?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How do we sometimes side with the world and act and think according to its values instead of the gospel?** *Answers might include: We judge people based on their outward appearance; We measure others' worth and value by what they are capable of doing; We dismiss those who don't agree with us; and so on.*
- **Share about a time when you or someone you know made a decision marked with an eternal perspective which seemed like foolishness to the world.** *Answers will vary.*
- **How has this session challenged you when it comes to not being judgmental or showing favoritism to others?** *Answers will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION

10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

God's kingdom will be filled with every tribe, tongue, and nation. Heaven will not be brimming with a bunch of people who look, speak, and act just like you. The sounds of our eternal home will be permeated with beautiful, joyous voices of diversity. What better place to get ready for that glorious day than in our churches now?

- **What are some ways your church values and advocates for diversity?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Why is it important for Christians not to remain silent when it comes to fighting for diversity?** *Our actions and words are a direct result of our beliefs and convictions. If we really believe God desires and loves diversity, as the Bible clearly describes, then we should be vocal about seeing diversity displayed in all of our churches.*



HEART

If we consistently live without mercy for those in desperate need of it, we need to take a big step back and evaluate our hearts. Have our hearts undergone the radical change we say they have? Never ending mercy, unfailing love, and deep compassion are characteristics of our God. As sons and daughters of God, our experience of grace-filled belonging and merciful rescue should shape our lives and reflect the glory of God to everyone around us.

- **Why can it be so difficult to treat others with mercy sometimes?** *Often, we feel like we have been wronged and therefore find it difficult to show mercy, or we feel as if the other person isn't deserving of mercy, and so on.*
- **Read the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18:21-35. What does this teach us about our need to show mercy to others?** *In short, it teaches us that we are all debtors to God, and if He can find room to show us mercy, then we should find room to show it to others.*



HANDS

Partiality and being judgmental should be eradicated from the life of a Christian. Yet favoritism, racism, sexism, socio-economic and cultural elitism and a host of other "isms" continue to plague the church. Our merciful treatment of people—especially those who are different from us—ought to be one of the greatest and truest markers of believers. We are to be known for our mercy, compassion, and care for the wounded, afflicted, outcast, and marginalized. When it comes down to it, we might find that we have more in common with these people than we realized. We are all in need of a Savior. We are all in need of rescue. We all are in need of mercy and grace.

- **What "isms" do you see in your life and how does God's mercy to you address each one?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How are you actively seeking to love and show mercy to the wounded, afflicted, outcast, and marginalized in your community and beyond?** *Answers will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #5, which contains an informational poster on the Book of James.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPSPR18Letters)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject

04

SESSION FOUR

The Gospel Calls for a New Identity

SESSION SUMMARY

We are each part of the body of Christ. As those who are chosen by God and receivers of great mercy, believers have been given a new identity and all we do flows out of this new identity. We've also been given a new purpose and calling to be set apart for the working and glory of God, with Christ as our foundation and example.

SCRIPTURE

1 Peter 2:1-17

THE POINT

The church's identity as God's people causes them to live differently than the world.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

No matter what highway or interstate you travel throughout the US, you will eventually come across some sort of sign indicating a marker of a major historical event in that state's history. These historical markers and monuments can range anywhere from colonial America to historic state capitals to the national parks that have been preserved for personal enjoyment. It's one thing to hear about historic sites, but it's quite another to see and experience them. Each monument declares the honor and significance of the people, event, and/or treasure each location holds. The areas of preservation help us to see the beauty of the land untouched by human development.

- **What state or national parks have you been to and what impressed you most at each one?**

As Christians, our lives are similar to these monuments and areas of preservation. Unlike the lifeless physical stones which fill our national parks, we are living, breathing statues for the glory of our Savior. We exist to declare to those around us the honor and significance of our God.

Just as people pour out much effort and care to maintain our national parks, we must also intentionally live out the purpose for which we've been called. God has a great purpose for our each of our lives. We've not only been saved *from* our sin, we've been saved *to* live out a mission. Standing firm in the foundation of righteousness Christ provided for us and remembering our new identity and true home, we get to live out this mission. We get to be set apart for the work of the gospel and the glory of God.

Option 2

While exercise and eating right are key to staying healthy, professional football players take their workouts to another level. They must train in speed, agility, strength, and power.¹ It's not even unusual for NFL (National Football League) players to be at their team's facility from 6 am until 7 pm. Not only do they have these intense workouts, but they also spend hours watching film, participating in team meetings, and attending community or charity events.² These athletes live their lives differently—with strict diets, workouts, and team requirements—because of their identity as football players.

- **Did any of this information surprise you? Why or why not?**

Because of our identity as Christ-followers, believers should also look different from the world, especially in the way we train for our future. We should constantly be training in righteousness through the reading of God's Word, in order to do His work (2 Tim. 3:16). We look different from the world because we live out of our identity as God's people.

- **What are some habits you need to break or create to look different to the rest of the world?**

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

The church's identity as God's people causes them to live differently than the world.

CHARACTERS

- **Peter:** one of the original twelve disciples; became an apostle and one of the key leaders of the first-century church

PLOT

What is the church? Is it merely a place where Christians gather together a couple of times of week? Or is it something more than a location? According to the apostle Peter, the church is indeed far more than a physical building. By use of metaphors and analogies, the apostle Peter helps us see the beauty and complexity of what God has designed in the creation of the church.

TIMELINE

A NEW IDENTITY
Peter reminds God's people of their identity in Christ.

**Bonus Session*
THE RESURRECTION IS ESSENTIAL
Christianity stands or falls with the resurrection.

LOVE IN ACTION
Love for God and others is the fruit of Christian living.

THE CHURCH AS LIVING STONES

God has provided a solid foundation for us to experience His goodness for eternity. Through Christ's obedient life, sinless sacrifice, and powerful resurrection, by faith we can stand firm on the foundation so abundantly provided us. The Book of 1 Peter is filled with several foundational truths. One of the truths Peter presented is this: we are on this earth to be stones of grateful testimony who declare the salvation of our glorious Lord to all who will hear.

¹ So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. ² Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. ⁴ As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵ you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." ⁷ So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," ⁸ and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. (1 Pet. 2:1-8)

The first thing Peter said was for us to aggressively and urgently fight our sinful flesh. Yet all too often we find ourselves complacent, even comfortable, with our sinful patterns. Instead of waking up to the shock and terror of sin's presence, we cozy up to it and allow it to take over. Anger, selfishness, pride, and the list goes on.

Though we have been given right-standing with God through Jesus' sacrifice, we still have much work to do as we wait on the completion of God's work in us. We all have sin that clings closely to us, and Scripture continually commands us to take it down (Heb. 12:1). We have a race to run. A battle to fight. A lifetime of learning to live out the internal realities Christ provided us.

- **How can we better see the battle over sin as a moment-by-moment, urgent war rather than an occasional activity?** (*p. 28, PSG*)

Next, notice the main command Peter issued in the first two verses and the metaphor Peter used to make his point. Peter encouraged the church to desire the Word in order to grow into Christian maturity. The expectation of a true Christ follower is steady maturity, which comes primarily through a healthy diet of the Bible. And a desire for the Bible stems from a deep need to be closer to God,

because God's Word is the primary way we can learn more about Him. If we've truly tasted and experienced God's goodness, we will naturally want more and more of Him.

Finally, did you notice what Peter proclaimed is true of every believer? We are living stones; chosen and honored by God. We are a spiritual house for the presence of God who is building each of us into a holy priesthood. All of this is through the bedrock of Christ—the Living Stone—through whom our sinful, spiritually dead hearts of stone were removed and replaced with the gift of living hearts. And those of us who have placed our trust in Christ alone will not be put to shame—He will do what He promises. We have a sure hope.

THE CHURCH AS A CHOSEN PEOPLE

Peter continued his use of metaphors in the following verses:

⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Pet. 2:9-10)

Peter described us in four ways. First, we are a chosen race, or nation, a description linked to God forming a new nation through Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). The children of Israel were a people of common descent from Abraham, who had been chosen by God and set apart for His purposes. In the same way, the church is a people of common descent from Jesus Christ who has given us new life and made us new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17), and we have also been set apart for a purpose. Being a chosen race also affirms that our primary identity rests in who we are in Christ, not our ethnicity, nationality, or culture. Jesus' intention is that we be a people completely unified in Him (John 17:20-23). There is beauty when God's people who are full of diversity are truly one in Christ.

Peter drew from Exodus 19:6 for the next two descriptions of the church—we are a royal priesthood and a holy nation. Being a royal priesthood reminds us of our function to be intercessors to the unbelieving world around us. God formed a nation through Abraham not so they would be the sole recipients of His blessings, but so that they would be the manner through which His blessings might be shared with the world. This is at the core of being a priest—one who intercedes on the behalf of others and brings them to God.

As a holy nation, we are a people set apart from the world, but not disengaged from it. We are not to be holy through our lack of presence in the world, but through our different way of living in the world. As new creatures who are guided by the Holy Spirit, our speech and conduct should be remarkably different from others around us.

Peter's final description—a people for his possession—reminds us of whom we belong to, the price that was paid to purchase us, and the future hope we have in Christ. Our possession came at a great cost—Jesus' suffering and death—but that purchase price also has future implications. Just as Christ rose from the dead, we too have been promised future resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20; Rev. 1:5). We belong to God. When we look back on how we became His, we are filled with gratitude. When we look forward to what awaits us, we are filled with hope.

THE CHURCH AS A HEAVENLY PEOPLE

We've talked a lot about the foundational truths about who we are because of the work of Christ, and this passage adds one more key element to the conversation. Along with our new identity, we are given a new citizenship. This world is no longer our home. Peter went on to address how we should live in light of our new identity:

¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. ¹³ Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. ¹⁵ For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. ¹⁶ Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. ¹⁷ Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. (1 Pet. 2:11-17)

One key to living out our new identity and purpose is to fully understand our new citizenship. We cannot live out the call to be holy with one foot in the conduct of the world and another in the lifestyle of Christianity. It is a false reality, because they are different from one another.

Each of the four preceding descriptions of the church—a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people for God's possession—remind us that we are fundamentally different from the world. We are, as Peter puts it, strangers and exiles. This is our new identity in Christ and our changed behavior should flow from this identity. Who we are should always be the root of our behavior.

The first way we live as strangers in the world is by avoiding sinful desires. The idea here is that we should live in an unexpected way. In other words, we do not give in to the sinful patterns of the culture around us. The visible nature of this counter-cultural lifestyle is critical. We are to live honorably so that when the world attempts to lie about us and say we are evildoers, our faithful lifestyles refute every accusation. The world will have no choice but to admit that the slanderous charges cannot be supported; instead our good works will draw them toward God.

TIMELINE

LETTERS TO YOUNG PASTORS

Paul instructs Timothy and Titus.

CO-HEIRS WITH CHRIST

Benefits of being adopted through Christ

FELLOWSHIP WITH BELIEVERS

Believers love one another as God has loved us.

The second way we live differently is through our submission to authority. We are to willfully and respectfully place ourselves under the authority God has placed over us and in doing so, once again we will silence any foolish accusation made against through our good citizenship.

The third way we live as strangers and exiles is through our honor for everyone, our love for our fellow believers, and our fear of God. Peter seems to present these in a crescendo of importance. It is important that we honor everyone but even more important that we love the church, and ultimately most important that we fear God. In order to avoid confusion about our submission to governmental authority and our submission to God, Peter stepped back down and instructed us to honor leaders in government. When God's Word and our nation's laws collide, the gospel wins out (Acts 4:13-22).

- **Which of the three ways Peter taught us to live is most challenging for you?** (p. 30, PSG)

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

People of God (p. 29, PSG)

Scripture describes the church as the people of God (2 Cor. 6:16). The church is created by God through the atoning death of Christ and is made up of both Jews and Gentiles. The term church is used in two senses. Church refers to individual local churches composed of people who have united together under the lordship of Christ and the universal church composed of all believers in Christ in all times. As the people of God, the church seeks to live under God's ruling care while He protects and cares for us.

CHRIST CONNECTION

The early Christians faced persecution and experienced suffering for their faith in Christ. Peter reminded them of their identity as God's people—formed by Christ and sent out on His mission. United to Christ—the One who suffered for us on the cross—Christians can expect God to use suffering to make us into the image of His Son.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **How would you describe your desire for God and His Word? How might focusing on God's goodness increase your affections for His Word?** *If we are truly convinced God is not only good, but He also loves us, cares for us, and desires our very best, then we will be more likely to seek after Him in His Word.*
- **How do you best draw near to God when you are alone? With others?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Which of Peter's descriptions of a Christian is most challenging for you to grasp? Why? Which connects with you most deeply? Why?** *Answers will vary.*
- **In what ways can we live differently in the world without giving an appearance of superiority?** *One way is by not withdrawing from the world completely. In other words, we can be different from our surrounding culture and the world in general without retreating from it. If our response was only to retreat, then others could interpret that as an act of superiority. However, if we live differently while also engaging culture with the love and message of Christ, then it is unlikely we will be charged with superiority.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION

10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

It is important to notice that each of Peter's descriptions of our identity is plural. We can often focus on our personal relationship with Christ—and there is nothing wrong with that—but there is a corporate aspect to our salvation as well that we can't miss. Both matter. We are saved as individuals, but we are not saved to live as individuals.

- **Why do you think God designed it that we should be stronger together rather than apart?** *Like a body that has many parts and different functions, God has designed His church to rely on one another so that no one person can brag and for us to grow in humility as we encourage one another to good works.*
- **What are some examples of when you have been strengthened in your faith as a result of being surrounded by God's people?** *Answers will vary.*



HEART

In the "hall of faith" given to us in Hebrews 11, the author commended many people as those who lived "by faith." By faith, Enoch. By faith, Sarah. By faith, Abraham. These faith-filled souls recognized that their true home was in heaven. Their real citizenship was in heaven. Their only allegiance was to King Jesus—and it is from this identity they obeyed. They understood that the way we live matters, but not for the status we'll receive on this earth. Our holiness sets us apart from this watching world, not so we can puff ourselves up, but so we can point to our holy God.

- **How might greater effort focusing on eternity change our attitudes and actions each day?** *Focusing on eternity will mean we aren't merely living for the moment. Instead, it reminds us that our lives are a part of something much bigger than ourselves.*
- **What difference will it make in our attitudes and actions if we love our place in the world more than we love our citizenship in God's kingdom?** *If our ultimate allegiance is to the world and what the world has to offer, then our actions will surely follow.*



HANDS

The truths that we are chosen, adopted into royalty, and set apart by God are crucial for us to internalize, believe, and live out. But these truths were not meant to merely give us a healthy self-esteem. The end-goal of our rescue is for His name to be honored. God's rescue plan, Christ's provision on the cross, and the continual work of the Spirit within us ought to point to His glory. We are His possession for this: to proclaim His praises. Just as the Bible echoes the melody of our Savior's glory, so should the actions and attitudes of our days sing His praises.

- **How does reflecting on your identity in Christ motivate and fuel you to proclaim Him to those around you?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some ways you can glorify God in your actions and words to those around you this week?** *Answers will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #6, which contains an informational poster on the Book of 1 Peter.

SOURCES

1. Joe DeFranco, "The Football Body Workout," *Men's Fitness*, September 8 2016, <http://www.mensfitness.com/sports/football/football-body-workout>.
2. Jack Bechta, "5 surprising things about NFL players," *National Football Post*, October 29, 2014, <http://www.nationalfootballpost.com/5-surprising-things-about-nfl-players-9129/>.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPSPR18Letters)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
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05

SESSION FIVE

The Gospel Calls for Acts of Love

SESSION SUMMARY

In today's passage, we will study the biblical call to love. We cannot ignore the command to love—one of the most loudly and clearly stated threads of Scripture. Because God loved us, we respond by rightly love those around us.

SCRIPTURE

1 John 3:10-18

THE POINT

Love for God and love for others is the fruit of true Christianity.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

In a world filled with ideas about what love is, it can be hard to discern what it looks like to follow the Bible's commands to love. Our culture is obsessed with feelings. Most people view love as an emotion, which can come and go as it pleases. The world's definition of love does not always involve actions. However, while the Bible does talk about love as a feeling and emotion, it talks more frequently about love as being evidenced mostly in our actions. Passages about love fill the Bible. Statements such as:

- "A friend loves at all times" (Prov. 17:17a).
- "But love your enemies" (Luke 6:35a).
- "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18b).
- "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12b).
- "And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Col. 3:14).

▪ **What is your favorite verse on love in the Bible, and why?**

While the Bible talks a lot about love in different contexts, it also makes clear that true love originates in God. God is the author and source of love, which was ultimately demonstrated when God sent His Son to die for us while we were still sinners (Rom. 5:8). When God rescued us from sin, He gave us a new identity and the fruit of love will be evident in our lives.

Option 2

As you begin today's session, play a game called *Fruit, Vine, Shrub*. After you call out the name of a fruit, allow students 30 seconds to decide whether the fruit grows on a tree, vine, or shrub. Here are some suggested fruits (the answer is in parenthesis)—be sure to mix it up:

- | | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| • Orange (tree) | • Banana (tree) | • Lemon/Lime (tree) |
| • Grape (vine) | • Tomato (vine) | • Pear (tree) |
| • Apple (tree) | • Strawberry (shrub) | • Kiwi (vine) |
| • Blueberries (shrub) | • Watermelon (vine) | |

Once you've been through the entire list, ask if an orange tree is able to produce watermelon. Then, ask:

- **Why can an apple tree only produce apples and a grape vine only produce grapes? What do you think would happen if they tried to switch roles?**
- **Why is it important for Christians to only produce fruits (traits/works) consistent with our faith?**

Just like an orange tree only yields oranges and a watermelon vine only produces watermelons, Christians should only produce fruit that is consistent with the love of Jesus and the new life He has given to us.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

Love for God and love for others is the fruit of true Christianity.

CHARACTERS

- **John:** one of the original twelve disciples; author of the Gospel of John

PLOT

What does it mean to love? Our culture offers endless ideas about what it means to love, ranging from chemical reactions in the brain that produce a feeling we call “love” to simply accepting and affirming everyone in every life decision, no matter how immoral it may be. But what does the Bible say about love? Since God is the author and originator of love itself, maybe we should take our cue from Him in explaining what true and genuine love looks like.

TIMELINE

LOVE IN ACTION

Love for God and others is the fruit of Christian living.

LETTERS TO YOUNG PASTORS

Paul instructs Timothy and Titus.

CO-HEIRS WITH CHRIST

Benefits of being adopted through Christ

GOD'S MESSAGE IS ONE OF LOVE

If you have ever done any gardening, you know tomato seeds produce tomato plants, pecan trees drop pecans, and orange trees produce oranges. Thinking these crops would produce anything other than what was planted would be insanity. The reason is simple: The genetic makeup of each tree or plant determines the fruit it might bear. A banana tree will never produce a bell pepper, an apple tree won't produce asparagus, and a grapevine will never produce garlic. Some factors might affect a tree or plant's ability to actually produce fruit—the amounts of sunlight, nutrients, and water available—but it is always limited to producing what it was designed to produce.

The same is true of people. People will always produce fruit according to how they are designed.

¹⁰ By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. ¹¹ For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. ¹² We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. ¹³ Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. (1 John 3:10-13)

Similar to the way the physical fruit of a plant is connected to its genetic identity, people's spiritual fruit is also connected to their genetic identity. All of mankind has inherited Adam's sin nature, so our corrupted spiritual DNA only leads to death, moral decay, and distance from God.

Only through Jesus does our spiritual DNA change. When we trust in Him, we are born to a new life, new identity, and new purpose. Our old state of death and decay is done away with, and in its place we are given eternal life and our spiritual transformation begins.

- **What are some new qualities or characteristics we would expect to see in someone who has new life in Christ?** (p. 40, PSG)

At the moment of our salvation, God initiates a great work in us. This work makes us more into the likeness of His son—a work in which we partner with Him throughout our lives, until we meet Him face to face and the work becomes perfect and complete. We are all works in progress, but the proof that we have this new identity is the beginning of this work within us.

Those who do not know Jesus do not yet have this sanctifying work within them. Their course is opposite to believers', yet it the same course ours used to be. Some openly mock God and hate Christians. They say they do not believe or love God and never plan to, and their lives are marked by hate. We must certainly be

grieved by these people; we should intercede on their behalf for a change of heart, that they would see the truth of where they're headed, and have a willingness to submit their ways to God.

Others on this same course are not so easy to identify, and their spiritual DNA is just as corrupted as the former. These people may even be among the body of Christ, walking the walk and talking the talk. We cannot always discern the difference between real spiritual growth and a false church-going performance. But the Bible is clear, just as a corn stalk will not produce a tomato, a spiritually dead soul cannot produce the life-bearing fruit of Christ.

GOD'S PEOPLE ARE MARKED BY THEIR LOVE FOR OTHERS

During the Nazi Holocaust in World War II, Corrie ten Boom and her family helped many Jews escape. Corrie and her family were Christians and decided to show Jesus' love to others rather than playing it safe. They were in danger every day, and were eventually arrested and sent to work in prison camps. Even in the camps, they continued to show love to the people around them—even those who ran the prisons.¹

Corrie's story of those prison days especially sheds light on the power of Christ's love to enable us to show love to others (2 Cor. 5:14-15). Corrie and her family were only able to love their enemies because of the faithful, powerful working of God through them.

John continued by talking about this supernatural love that is within us and identifies us.

¹⁴ We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. ¹⁵ Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. (1 John 3:14-15)

While the positive fruit of love is evidence of our new spiritual DNA, continuing in sinful practices is evidence of a lack of change. During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught on this problem (Matt. 5:20-22). The Scribes and the Pharisees were very religious people. They faithfully tithed of everything they owned and followed all the rules. They clung tightly to religion; if anyone could be called righteous, it was them. Yet Jesus said their righteousness was not enough. Only the righteousness of Jesus, which exceeds what they had shown, would be sufficient. In other words, Jesus said no one does good on his or her own (Ps. 14:3)—not even those who look like “good” religious people.

Jesus, fully God and fully man, lived the perfectly obedient life we could never live. Then He died the death we all deserve, paying the penalty of wrath our sin earned us. When He rose from the grave, He defeated death so we could have new life and spend eternity with God. And when we come to Christ in faith that His work—His perfect life, sufficient sacrifice, and powerful resurrection—as our only hope, a great and glorious exchange occurs.

THE EXAMPLE OF CHRISTIAN LOVE IS FOUND BY LOOKING TO JESUS

A group of angry pirates surrounded their captain and a captured naval commander. The ship's captain began yelling out battle cries for his men to rally around: "Let's feed him to the sharks!" and "Take all of his gold!" The parrot on the captain's shoulder repeated each phrase, but he didn't stop there. Unfortunately, the parrot began to rattle off other statements he often heard from his master: derogatory comments about the crew and his plans to hide the gold from them.

This is a scene from a clever commercial from GEICO®. It ends with the phrase: "If you're a parrot, you repeat things. It's what you do." Following this statement is a pitch of the slogan, "If you want to save money on car insurance, you switch to GEICO®. It's what you do," There are several other similar commercials, all inferring the actions of an animal or type of person to the inevitable outcome. These commercials tap into the reality of what we all know.

16 By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. 17 But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. (1 John 3:16-18)

Later John explained that we love others because God first loved us (1 John 4:11,19). God sent His Son to show us His love for us. Christ walked to the cross to show His love for us. God raised Jesus from the dead to provide a way for us to experience this love. God began the journey of love we experience through Christ, but it ought not stop with us.

We are conduits of God's love—in other words, we are the way people see His love in the world. This love is not a power we can provide on our own. Only because of God's love to us can we bring true acts of sacrificial, life-giving love to a lost and weary world. We must pass on His love to those around us and complete the journey of God's provision through our hands and feet. Our love, and expression of God's love to others, cannot simply be through telling them how much God loves them or how much we love them; instead, we have to show this love by the way we live—a combination of the words we speak, the way we treat others, and our general attitude about life.

None of us will love others perfectly, but the fact that we don't love perfectly should still rattle us. Christ-followers' main desire is to honor God with every moment, and the natural fruit of His disciples will be a deep and abiding love for others. As recipients of the merciful and powerful love of Christ, let's walk forward—marked by love—in grateful worship, allowing the love of God to spill over to those we encounter.

- **What are some practical ways you can show love to the people around you?** (p. 42, PSG)

TIMELINE

FELLOWSHIP WITH BELIEVERS

Believers love one another as God has loved us.

LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

Works of the flesh versus the fruit of the Spirit

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Standing firm with the armor of God

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

God Is Love (p. 41, PSG)

Saying God is love means God is the essence of love or that perfect love resides and resonates within God Himself—one God in three Persons. The imperfect love that human beings share between one another is a dim reflection, a sign that points to the perfect love that resides within God. God's greatest act of love toward humans isn't the giving of earthly goods but the giving of Himself in Christ so that we might become reconciled to Him.

CHRIST CONNECTION

In teaching the church about the nature of true love, the apostle John reminded Christians that love is not merely a matter of feelings or words but of action. Love was demonstrated and defined most clearly by Jesus' action of laying down His life for His people.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What are some changes God has made in you since you became a Christian?** *Answers will vary.*
- **When was a time when you were able to love someone and the only explanation for that love was the work of Christ within you?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How does the reality of Christ's right standing with God, which has been given to you, change how you think about loving others?** *God's love for us in Christ is the model and standard by which we understand how to best love others. Jesus serves us; we should serve others. Jesus had compassion on the broken; we should have compassion on the broken. Jesus stepped down from His heavenly throne to meet our deepest needs; we should step out of our comfort zones and seek to meet the needs of those around us.*
- **What are some practical ways you can love others according to the love you have been given?** *Answers will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION

10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

It only takes one difficult relationship to see how the love we are called to exhibit is not something we can build up on our own. Loving others like Christ loved us can only be done with supernatural power. This is why nonbelievers are unable to truly display the fruit of love. Why? First, the power of the Holy Spirit is not within them. And second, true and genuine love seeks for others to be happy in God, the source of all love. Thus, the call to love is a calling they can never carry out.

- **How does the world's love differ and fall short of God's love?** *The world's love is often self-serving; it doesn't seek to lead others to God and a right relationship with Him; it is often only explained as an emotion or feeling; and so on.*
- **Why should love always seek to lead people to the source of love—God?** *Truly loving your neighbor as yourself requires pointing that person to finding joy in God and loving Him with all that we are.*



HEART

Remember the story of Cain and Abel? Both made a sacrifice yet God only accepted Abel's as righteous. Abel is listed in the hall of faith, which says Abel's sacrifice was a more acceptable sacrifice because of his faith (Heb. 11:4). Since we know our salvation is never by the works we do but by faith (Eph. 2:8-9), we must assume that though Cain and Abel both obediently sacrificed, only one did so with the undercurrent of faith: Abel. Cain's offering was given without heart, without faith, and without love.

- **What most often prevents you from showing love to others?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How does the Bible's teaching on love challenge the way you previously viewed it?** *Answers will vary.*



HANDS

How do we love others with God's love? Here are five actions to consider as we strive to show the world around us the love of Christ.

1. Pray: Regardless of age or ministry training, we can all pray.
 2. Pay attention: We don't need to look too far to know people with needs.
 3. Share the gospel: As we seek to minister to those around us, we should be a continual source of gospel truth.
 4. Provide for those who are where you cannot be: Get involved by supporting missionaries and organizations who are sharing Jesus' love with the nations.
 5. Share the needs with others: As you see needs, pray for them and provide for them, but don't forget to tell others too. Invite others to get involved in the act of love.
- **Which of these actions comes most natural to you?** *Answers will vary.*
 - **Which of these is the best next step for you to work toward?** *Answers will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #7, which contains an informational poster on the Book of 1 John.

SOURCES

1. Corrie ten Boom, *The Hiding Place: The Triumphant True Story of Corrie ten Boom* (New York: Bantam Books, 1974).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGSPR18Letters)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject

06

SESSION SIX

The Gospel Calls for Obedience

SESSION SUMMARY

This session covers significant themes regarding pastors found in key excerpts from Paul's Pastoral Epistles. God uses pastors to lead His people in obedience to His Word. Reading through the Pastoral Epistles helps God's people learn to obey His call to pray for and support the pastors He has given to lead us in our mission of making disciples.

SCRIPTURE

1 Timothy 4:11-16; 2 Timothy 4:1-8; Titus 2:11-14

THE POINT

God uses pastors to lead His church in obedience to His Word.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

Good leaders are essential in all organizations. Schools need principals. Governments need presidents or prime ministers. Teams need coaches. Businesses need CEOs. Marching bands need directors. Armies need generals. Churches need pastors.

- **What are some qualities and characteristics of good leaders?**
- **If someone asked you to describe the pastor's work, what would you say?**

The Bible takes the role and responsibilities of those in church leadership quite seriously. The apostle Paul went to great lengths in laying out what those qualifications and responsibilities look like in his letters to Timothy and Titus. However, while these character traits may be specific to leadership within the church, they should be true of all Christians, no matter their role within the church.

Option 2

Ask students to think of all the pastors at the church or any other pastors or ministry leaders they may know. Write out each name on a separate index card, along with the leader's role in the church. Place students into groups of three to four and give each group the same amount of index cards. Then instruct students to pray for the following for each of the leaders their group received:

- Pray for the pastors/leaders to follow God above all.
- Ask God to strengthen the pastors/leaders' relationships with their family and friends.
- Pray for mentors in similar roles to come alongside the pastors/leaders to encourage them.
- Ask God to increase the pastors/leaders' wisdom and knowledge of Him.
- Pray that God would help these pastors to walk in obedience to Him and to become better leaders.

Pastors and church leaders do not have easy jobs. They need people to encourage them, to speak truth into their lives, and to pray for them.

- **Today, we prayed for some pastors/church leaders. What are some other ways you can support and encourage these people this week?**

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

God uses pastors to lead His church in obedience to His Word.

CHARACTERS

- **Paul:** former persecutor who became a Christ-follower and apostle to the Gentiles
- **Timothy and Titus:** two young pastors who were apprentices of the apostle Paul

PLOT

Most of us reading this won't go into full-time, vocational ministry. In other words, being a pastor or minister on staff at a church likely won't be the way we make a living. So why bother ourselves with these three letters that are called the pastoral epistles (1 Tim.; 2 Tim.; and Titus)? The reason is quite simple: The things Paul taught to this young man named Timothy aren't just for those in church leadership, but for all Christians everywhere.

TIMELINE

LETTERS TO YOUNG PASTORS

Paul instructs Timothy and Titus.

CO-HEIRS WITH CHRIST

Benefits of being adopted through Christ

FELLOWSHIP WITH BELIEVERS

Believers love one another as God has loved us.

PASTORS SHOULD SET AN EXAMPLE

Timothy was a younger pastor in the early stages of continuing a vibrant ministry. Timothy would soon take over the leadership from the apostle Paul who sought to encourage his son in the faith for the pastoral calling God placed on Timothy's life. Paul's instructions to Timothy—and to all pastors who came after him—remind us of both the awesome responsibility and great privilege pastors have shepherding a flock in the local church.

¹¹ Command and teach these things. ¹² Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. ¹³ Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. ¹⁴ Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. ¹⁵ Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. ¹⁶ Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. (1 Tim. 4:11-16)

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

In our passage, Paul instructed Timothy to command others (v. 11). This doesn't mean Timothy—or pastors who follow—were to be yelling orders like a general to his troops. Instead, "command" refers to the confidence Timothy needed in his role as pastor, and in saying this, Paul likely recognized Timothy's nervousness about the task ahead. Like Timothy, pastors shouldn't beat up on their people with the Word, but they shouldn't be timid in declaring God's truth either. The God who called Timothy gives commands, not suggestions, and Paul urged Timothy to challenge those he taught to obey the Lord. "These things" refers specifically to the items Paul cited in the previous verses, but would extend to the faithful teaching of all the Word.

Paul listed what was supposed to mark Timothy's ministry (vv. 12-16). First, Timothy was to set an example. A major way pastors lead churches to grow is through the examples they set. Although Timothy may have been considered a younger leader, his age didn't prevent him from setting an example to the churches.

Throughout Scripture, God often used young people at strategic times: Joseph, Samuel, David, Jeremiah, Daniel, and Esther offer only a few of the many Old Testament examples. Paul exhorted Timothy not to be concerned about his age or how others might treat him due to his youth, but to focus on living an exemplary life. Timothy's life needed to be a pattern of a life given to Christ.

In what ways was Timothy supposed to be an example? He was an example outwardly in speech and in conduct. Speech would of course include clearly communicating the Word of God, but Paul meant much more. Paul wanted Timothy to be known for wise words rather than harsh rants. Today, this could include refusing to post outrage on social media, choosing instead to speak words of grace and compassion, and so on. Paul also encouraged Timothy to set an example inwardly through building traits of love, faith (or faithfulness), and purity (both sexual and general integrity).

- **What are some ways you personally could choose to follow the advice Paul gave to Timothy in these verses?** (p. 46, PSG)

PASTORS SHOULD FAITHFULLY TEACH THE WORD

It's one thing to faithfully proclaim God's Word even when you are young; it's another thing to do so when it is costly. But Paul knew that time was coming, so he continued:

¹ I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: ² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. ³ For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. ⁵ As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. ⁶ For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. (2 Tim. 4:1-8)

Employing athletic and military metaphors, Paul reminded Timothy it's not how you start in ministry but how you finish that matters most. Paul fought the good fight, he finished the race, and he kept the faith. Don't get confused by Paul's use of metaphors here. He was not calling for needless arguing with people in the church or giving permission for fist fights! Pastors should not be theological snobs who believe rightly but are jerks about it when preaching, teaching, and talking with others.

Instead, Paul called on Timothy to have clear conviction of faithful doctrine. Teaching the Word means we don't have a choice to waver in our convictions when they conflict with popular ideas in culture. For example, Jesus is not *a* way to God. Jesus is *the* only way to God. This is God's good and great plan. We don't get to choose which convictions to stand on based on their popularity. Some things are worth standing for, fighting for, and even dying for. That is what Paul wanted Timothy to understand and do.

Olympic athletes train, compete, and sacrifice for years to be able to represent their country. Some only compete in a race that literally lasts seconds. So why the sacrifice? There is a level of honor and satisfaction the years they trained reward them with the title of *Olympian*. However, pastors serve Jesus and the church their entire lives. They serve so sacrificially and joyfully because they know a crown of righteousness far greater than Olympic gold awaits. They know that, rather than standing on a podium to receive their awards, they will have the honor of kneeling and offering it to the King of kings.

PASTORS POINT PEOPLE TO CHRIST

Paul encouraged Titus about a pastor's work the same way he encouraged Timothy. Paul gave Titus practical instructions for how to teach others to live consistently with sound teaching throughout the first ten verses of chapter 2. Beginning in verse 11, Paul took Titus back to the doctrinal basis for the reason we live the way he described.

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. (Titus 2:11-14)

Paul first reminded Titus of a fundamental conviction of Scripture—the belief that all are accepted by God through faith in Jesus. Scripture clearly indicates the requirement of faith in salvation and the danger of unbelief. What this means is that salvation is available to all who believe—no matter their ethnicity, social status, language, or any other factor.

The gospel carries with it both negative and positive aspects. The gospel encourages us to deny godlessness and worldly lusts—negative commands. In other words, we will spend half our time staying out of trouble. The grace of God reminds us God's way is better than any of our worldly, fleshly, sinful desires no matter how appealing they may seem. However, because of Jesus, we can deny godlessness and worldly lusts, but we can go even further and live in a way that is sensible—positive gifts. Christianity is true—and that is enough—but Christianity also works. Christianity is truly the best way to live. Because of Jesus' work to save us, the Spirit within us empowers us to make sensible choices each day. In Christ, not only have we been given His perfect righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21), but we also have the power to live righteously as He changes and empowers us.

TIMELINE

LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

Works of the flesh versus the fruit of the Spirit

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Standing firm with the armor of God

GENEROUS LIVING

A model and motivation for generosity

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Inspiration of Scripture (p. 47, PSG)

The inspiration of Scripture refers to God directing the Bible's human authors as they composed and recorded His message to humankind in their original writings (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19-21). Occasionally this inspiration was achieved through dictation, meaning God spoke directly to the original authors. However, this inspiration came most often through the supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit and personalities of the authors so that their writings can be considered the very words of God.

CHRIST CONNECTION

Near the end of his life Paul wrote letters to Timothy and Titus, two of his most trusted children in the faith. Paul instructed them to follow the model of the Good Shepherd—Jesus—who guides His people into the knowledge of truth. Because Jesus died to serve the church, pastors and leaders are called to live to serve the church.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What are some ways we can faithfully call on others to obey God's commands without sounding harsh or timid?** *The tone we use is very important, as is genuinely showing others that we care for them and are looking out for what's best for them. In addition to how we speak, we should focus on what we say and the language we use. In other words, we don't need to list things they should be doing or avoiding; instead, we invite them into a conversation where we can graciously and lovingly speak God's truth into their lives.*
- **How have you been corrected or encouraged by a pastor or leader that proved helpful?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some of the theological convictions that are becoming more difficult for us to hold faithfully in our culture?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How should remembering the gospel change the way we live each day in our homes, schools, neighborhoods, and beyond?** *Part of the gospel includes our future state and resurrection. When we live our daily lives with the constant reminder of what one day will be, we are motivated in the present to live in a way that reflects our future reality.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION

10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

Paul instructed Timothy to continue to grow as a believer (1 Tim. 4:15-16). These instructions apply to both pastors and us. “Practice these things” (v. 15) carries the idea of a consistent routine. Paul exhorted Timothy to develop healthy routines and follow them, which is something we should all be doing as we seek to grow and mature in our walk with Christ.

- **How can we relate Paul’s instructions to Timothy to our lives, even if we are not pastors?**
We should also set an example to those around us in the areas Paul lists and practice spiritual disciplines in order to grow and mature in our faith, and so on.
- **What are some ways we can encourage our pastor(s) and leaders as they lead out in practicing spiritual disciplines?** *One way to encourage them would be to follow their example. Another way would be to tell them how their example encourages you in your own practice of spiritual disciplines.*



HEART

We can live godly lives, even now, knowing this life is not the end. There is a blessed hope in the restoration of all things, a hope that is grounded in Jesus who is God, Savior, and Redeemer. Jesus redeems us from lawlessness, so we can deny godlessness and lusts and live doing good works that bring God glory. To be clear, we don’t do good works to earn anything from God; we can’t earn anything from Him! We do good works because the transforming work of the Spirit changes our nature (2 Cor. 5:16-17), creating a new heart in us that is eager to do good works out of gratitude.

- **What are some personal challenges in your daily life that distract you from pursuing godliness?** *Answers may include relationships, social media, entertainment, and so on.*
- **How should Christ’s return and future redemption of all things frame how we live now?**
We should live in light of Jesus’ future return, and try to mirror that future reality in the present.



HANDS

God uses pastors to model God’s Word for the church, proclaim God’s Word to the church, and call on us to submit to God’s Word under the authority and leadership of Christ. While pastors are a blessing from God to the church, the church should also strive to be a blessing to their pastors as we seek to love, encourage, pray for, and support them. Take time this week to consider how you can encourage your pastor(s) and leaders in the church and pour into them as they pour into you.

- **What are some ways you can serve the pastors and leaders of your church in the coming weeks?** *Pray for them, encourage them, give them your attention, and so forth.*
- **How have the pastors and leaders in your church encouraged you to follow Christ?**
Answers will vary.

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack items #8, #9, #10, which contain informational posters on the following books: 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. You can also refer students to pack item #11, which contains a quote poster related to the session.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPSPR18Letters)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



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SPECIAL SESSION

The Resurrection is Central to the Faith

SESSION SUMMARY

Jesus' resurrection points both backward and forward His followers. It points back to what Jesus has done in history through His life, death, and resurrection and God saving us and raising us spiritually. At the same time, Jesus' resurrection points forward to the day when Christ will return and we will experience ultimate victory over sin and the final completion of our faith in Him.

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 15:1-28

THE POINT

Christianity stands or falls with the resurrection of Jesus.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

Over time, it has become popular in our culture to question even the possibility of miracles; however, of all the miracles that cause problems for those who reject the idea of them, Jesus' resurrection is the most controversial, debated, and denied. Maybe some people find it easier to believe the parting of the Red Sea, manna appearing from heaven, or an endless supply of flour and oil than to believe in Jesus' resurrection. Why is this one miracle so much more divisive than all the rest? Maybe because it is the one miracle that demands a personal decision about who Jesus is. The resurrection is essential to the gospel message because it displays God's defense of the life and work of Jesus Christ. If you believe in the resurrection, then you are forced to believe Jesus is the Son of God. If you deny the resurrection, you continue in your rejection of Jesus. For this reason, the resurrection is one of the most important events in human history. Jesus' resurrection not only changed the course of history, but it also has the power to change peoples' eternal destinies—if they believe.

- **How did you come to believe in Jesus' resurrection? Was it a difficult step of faith for you? What evidences led you to believe the resurrection really happened?**

Option 2

Place students into two teams. Ask them to come up with a club/group based on a particular common favorite thing. Give the example: *Society of Ice Cream Eaters (SICE)*. Instruct students to come up with five core beliefs about their chosen item, such as *Ice cream should be a food group*. Then, ask students to think of one thing that would make this group completely fall apart. For example, with the *SICE*, your group would fall apart if ice cream had never been invented or suddenly became "extinct."

- **What are some other things that would fall apart without a key component, ingredient, or truth? Explain.**

Similarly, if Jesus' resurrection never happened, Christianity would be no more than a pointless system of opinions. The truth of Jesus' resurrection is the foundation of our faith. True, if He had not died, our sins would not be paid for; however, if He had never risen from the dead, we would not have new, eternal life with Him. Thankfully, we can rest in the truth of the resurrection and the truth of Christianity. We can hold onto our hope of a future resurrection and eternity with Him.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

Christianity stands or falls with the resurrection of Jesus.

CHARACTERS

- **Paul:** former persecutor who became a Christ-follower and apostle to the Gentiles

PLOT

As we celebrate resurrection Sunday, it is fitting to talk about Jesus' resurrection from the dead and what it means for us as Christ-followers. According to Paul, the truth of Christianity hinges on Jesus' historical resurrection from the grave. In other words, it's not just some icing-on-the-cake belief, but one that is both central and foundational to our Christian beliefs as a whole.

TIMELINE

**Bonus Session*

THE RESURRECTION IS ESSENTIAL

Christianity stands or falls with the resurrection.

LOVE IN ACTION

Love for God and others is the fruit of Christian living.

LETTERS TO YOUNG PASTORS

Paul instructs Timothy and Titus.

THE GOOD NEWS OF THE RESURRECTION

The resurrection is depicted in the Gospels and sections in Romans; however, 1 Corinthians 15 is another central passage in helping us develop a biblical understanding of the resurrection, its meaning for our faith, and its implications on everyday life.

¹ Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ² and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. ³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. ¹¹ Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed. (1 Cor. 15:1-11)

By this time in his letter to the Corinthians, Paul had addressed several ongoing sins and struggles in the church. Therefore, he ended by reminding them of the great antidote for all of their troubles—the gospel. Paul was writing to a group of believers who had already received the gospel, yet they needed a reminder that the gospel is central for all of life. The gospel is not just what begins new life and a relationship with Christ, it also shapes daily life in Christ. The church in Corinth was clearly not living out the gospel—they were experiencing divisions in the church, sexual immorality, bragging of all kinds (especially about spiritual gifts, knowledge, eloquent speech, and status), greed, and idolatry. In other words, they were building their lives, hope, and status on things other than the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- **What are some things you're sometimes tempted to build your life around, other than Jesus?** (*p. 34, PSG*)

In essence, Paul gave them a gentle rebuke, calling them to live like Christ-followers by reminding them of the gospel. Notice the progression of his language:

“You received” (past conversion): The gospel is the good news that through Jesus—His perfect life, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection—we have right standing before God.

“On which you have taken your stand” (present sanctification): We take our stand on the gospel as it continually reshapes our emotions, motivations, self-understanding, and identity. It has been said that a saint is a sinner who falls down, and then gets back up in the power of the Spirit.

“By which you are being saved” (future glorification): The gospel proclaims the coming of a new kingdom, a new world. This promise of future salvation provides believers with a hope that cannot be taken from them.

Therefore, hold fast! Remember the good news. As all of us grow in the faith, we begin to see that the gospel was not just something to begin our relationship with Christ. Returning to the gospel and applying it to our hearts is how we grow in our faith. We don't grow in Christ by going beyond the gospel, but by going deeper into the gospel.

THE RESURRECTION IS BOTH HISTORIC AND PHYSICAL

Remember, the entirety of the Christian message hinges on the truth that Jesus resurrected from the dead. If Jesus did not rise, we are still left in our sin. If Jesus did not rise, death has the last word. In this sense, our lives don't validate the gospel, but the gospel validates and transforms our lives. All of the aspects of the gospel, such as Jesus' sinless life and sacrificial death, are vital. But this part—the resurrection—is what gives us our greatest confidence and hope in the entirety of the gospel. Paul focused on the resurrection in this passage, because the resurrection is the means of a transformed life.

¹² Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. ¹⁵ We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. (1 Cor. 15:12-19)

Having explained the importance and essence of the gospel, Paul turned his attention to address a false teaching spreading through the Corinthian church—that there is no literal resurrection from the dead. By saying that the dead in Christ won't resurrect from the dead, they were calling Jesus' resurrection a powerless act. The two are fused together.

To dispute this erroneous teaching and show its impact on the gospel, Paul developed a logical chain of cause and effect, marked by a series of several if/then statements:

- If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ cannot have risen from the dead (v. 13,16).
- And if Christ has not been raised from the dead, then the gospel message and our faith are empty because we are still in our sin (v. 14,17).
- And if we have placed our hope in Christ who did not rise from the dead, then we should be pitied more than anyone else (v. 19).

The bodily resurrection of Jesus was central to the church's preaching and teaching from the beginning. In the church's infancy at Pentecost, Peter boldly proclaimed that "God raised [Jesus] up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it" (Acts 2:24). Peter's sermon was only weeks after the crucifixion and resurrection, giving both Jewish and Roman authorities plenty of opportunities to disprove this teaching if it were not true. Of course, they were unable to present a convincing case that it was false.

JESUS' RESURRECTION POINTS TO OUR OWN

The framework of creation, fall, redemption, and renewal is central to the gospel story that runs throughout the pages of Scripture. From cover to cover, this framework plays a significant role in how we understand God's active work in all of creation. This part of the framework—renewal—is what Paul focused on next.

Renewal is Jesus' future act when He will restore all things to God's intended design. Renewal speaks of completion and restoration—completion of the gospel story and restoration when everything God created as good in Genesis 1–2 will once again measure up to that standard. All of God's work is moving toward this end.

20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. 24 Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27 For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. 28 When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all. (1 Cor. 15:20-28)

TIMELINE

CO-HEIRS WITH CHRIST

*Benefits of being
adopted through Christ*

FELLOWSHIP WITH BELIEVERS

*Believers love one
another as God has
loved us.*

LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

*Works of the flesh
versus the fruit of
the Spirit*

Paul here describes Jesus as the firstfruits of the resurrection. Firstfruits is an interesting and helpful word because it carries with it the clear idea that Jesus is not the only one who will be resurrected. To have a first requires at least a second. Jesus was the first, but He is by no means the last. More fruit is coming!

The sequence of the resurrection that Paul describes occurs according to the rank. First, Christ was resurrected first as the one who ranks highest. Next will be the resurrection of those who belong to Christ. In this sequence, we see that Jesus' resurrection inaugurates the eschatological resurrection of all those who are in Him. If Christ, has been already raised, we can be sure that those who belong to Christ will be raised at His second coming (1 Thess. 4:16–17).

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Resurrection (p. 36, PSG)

The Old and New Testaments both teach that believers will one day experience a resurrection of the body from the dead (Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37:12-14; John 11). The promise of the resurrection is found in the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and it will take place at the future return of Christ. Because Christ was the firstfruits of the resurrection, Christians can be assured that their resurrection will be similar in nature, meaning it will be both bodily and glorious (Rom. 8:22-23; Phil. 3:20-21). The hope of the future resurrection gives Christians confidence that death has been defeated in the death and resurrection of Christ.

CHRIST CONNECTION

Adam's sin brought death to all creation, but in Christ—the new and better Adam—all will experience a resurrection. Both redeemed and unredeemed people will be raised to an everlasting existence—the unredeemed to eternal separation from God and the redeemed to eternal enjoyment of God (Matt. 25:31-46). Only the latter will be made alive fully for eternal life.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **How does remembering the past, present, and future implications of the gospel help you live your life daily?** *The gospel tells us where we have come from (sinners in need of a Savior); it tells us of our new identity in Christ; and it tells us how God's Story (one we are all a part of) will end. Simply put: The gospel frames our very existence, and speaks into every situation and issue we face in life.*
- **How should Jesus being the firstfruits frame how we think, feel, and act in daily life?** *First, it should cause us to think about the future ourselves and those around us. Second, this should inspire believers to praise and worship God, having confidence that we will experience a resurrection like Jesus. Third, it should motivate us to be intentional about the way we live out God's mission of sharing the good news with others.*
- **What impact does the future resurrection of the lost have on your life today?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How can we speak into our culture to share the hope of the end of sin and death and completion of all things through Christ?** *Answers will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION

10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

People always wondered how basketball legend Larry Bird made such complex plays look so simple. His answer was also simple—he never got over the fundamentals. Bird’s meticulous practice of the fundamentals, or the “simple stuff,” of basketball showed up in the way he played in games. Similarly, Paul states that the gospel is of first importance—it is central to our faith. The gospel is the fundamentals of our faith—the “simple stuff” we need to dwell on each day.

- **According to 1 Corinthians 15:3-5, what basic content of the gospel do we need to remember daily?** *Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures (v. 3); Jesus was buried (v. 4); Jesus was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (v. 4); and Jesus appeared to many people after His resurrection (v. 5).*
- **How does remembering the power of the gospel give you hope in God’s transforming work in your life?** *Answers will vary.*



HEART

Paul said Christians should be pitied more than anyone else if the resurrection never took place. Of course, Paul was certain the resurrection occurred, and he was able to persevere in the hardships and sufferings he encountered on a daily basis (2 Cor. 11:21-28). However, he also wanted to make it clear that Christians would be pitied if the resurrection never happened because of the radical heart and life change for believers. In other words, believing in the resurrection and following Christ will involve taking up our own crosses to follow Him—it’s not just merely a belief with no impact on our lives.

- **How does your life demonstrate you are a genuine follower of Christ?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How does our future resurrection give us strength to endure difficulties now?** *Because we know, as Paul stated elsewhere, our momentary afflictions pale in comparison to the eternal weight of glory that we will experience at our future resurrection.*



HANDS

While the resurrection gives us confidence in our faith in Christ and gives us hope for what lies ahead, the resurrection is not all about us. The resurrection also encourages us to lift our eyes, look around us, and see the many who are still in desperate need to experience what we have—salvation through Jesus. As we celebrate Jesus’ resurrection, we should rejoice; however, we should also be broken by the world around us and resolve to share this good news with as many as we can.

- **How can we become more mindful of the people around us because of our belief in the resurrection?** *As Paul says, everyone will experience a resurrection—one that will either lead to eternal joy in God’s presence or one that will lead to eternal separation from Him. These truths should keep our attention pointed toward the future and toward others.*
- **Who do you know needs to hear the good news that God will one day create all things new?** *Answers will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #4, which contains an informational poster on the Book of 1 Corinthians.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPSPRI8Letters)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



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GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject

07

SESSION SEVEN

Once Slaves, Now Children

SESSION SUMMARY

This session begins a new unit that examines how God changes us in Christ. By exploring Romans 8, we will touch on some of the highlights of this key theme in Scripture. Romans 8 explains how believers have undergone a radical transformation from being slaves of sin and fear to becoming children of God; children who can live with full assurance and hopeful anticipation that God will one day make all things new.

SCRIPTURE

Romans 8:12-39

THE POINT

God delivers us from slavery to sin and death and gives us life through the Spirit.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

The Disney-Pixar movie *Up* opens with a powerful flashback sequence. In a few short scenes, we see a detailed backstory of the cranky widower, Carl. The scenes are a masterfully crafted, in many ways capturing the heart of the entire story. Many people have called this flashback sequence a masterpiece of cinematic storytelling. Essentially, it is a great movie within a great movie.

People often consider the Book of Romans as one of Paul's most significant letters to the churches, and some scholars even suggest that every major revival in church history was preceded by the faithful preaching of this letter. And right there in the middle of this letter—the Mt. Everest of theological writing—we find Romans 8. This chapter is a key component in the New Testament's description of the glory of the gospel and Christ's finished work.

In other words, Romans 8 is the movie within the movie that takes us into the panoramic view of how God's redemption story so completely changed us—from suffering to celebration, from bondage to freedom, from death to resurrection. This rich explanation of the gospel message is important for us to know and understand.

- **What are some of the ways you have been changed by the gospel? What are some ways you still want to be changed?**

Option 2

If able, before the session, instruct students to bring in an old school portrait or family photo from childhood. Use the following list of questions for students to describe some ways they have changed since elementary school.

- **What did your hair look like in the photo/elementary school?**
- **Where did you live when this photo was taken/in elementary school?**
- **What was your favorite movie when you were a child?**
- **How has your sense of style changed since this photo was taken/elementary school?**
- **Who were your closest friends when you were a kid? Do you still spend time with those people?**

Just like big changes occur in our personalities and style as we grow up, God continues to change us, beginning the moment we trust Jesus as Savior. In Christ, we are new creations—new creations who are constantly being made into the image of our Savior.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

God delivers us from slavery to sin and death and gives us life through the Spirit.

CHARACTERS

- **Paul:** former persecutor but now follower of Christ and apostle to the Gentiles

PLOT

From slaves to sons, groaning to glory, death to life—we worship a glorious God whose grace is deeper than any ocean. Why would He do this for us? Why would He treat unholy rebels in such a gracious way? Paul helps us see the answer in this chapter of his letter to the Romans. It is all because our God is love.

**CO-HEIRS
WITH CHRIST**

*Benefits of being
adopted through Christ*

**FELLOWSHIP
WITH BELIEVERS**

*Believers love one
another as God has
loved us.*

LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

*Works of the flesh
versus the fruit of
the Spirit*

FROM SLAVES TO SONS

You may recall from a previous volume where we covered Jesus' parable that is traditionally known as the prodigal son. Basically, a man's younger son asked his father for his inheritance, which he used up on wild and shallow living. Eventually, he wound up eating pigs' food in the middle of a pig-pen, dreaming of what life might be like if he could only gather the courage to return home. If you recall, the prodigal son's first instinct was not that he could return immediately to his old life as a privileged son of a wealthy man. Instead, he reasoned, "Even my father's servants have it better than this. I can go home and work for my dad." (See Luke 15:11-32).

Imagine the son's gratitude and love for his father when he was taken back as a son, not as a servant (Luke 11:22-24). This is how we should respond when we read Romans 8:12-17, where Paul summarized the transformation we experience by the power of grace.

¹² So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. (Rom. 8:12-17)

- **What does it mean not to live according to the flesh? Does that mean Christians should expect never to sin? Why or why not? (p. 54, PSG)**

If we are in Christ, we are no longer slaves to the flesh. We have been freed by Christ, and the Spirit enables us to put to death any lingering works of the flesh. Christians *can* still sin, but the gospel changes us so that we don't *have* to. The chains of the flesh have been broken.

Because of this, we are also no longer slaves to something else—fear. In Christ, there is no reason to fear being rejected by God. Our ongoing struggle with the flesh will not end in us being separated from God. Why? Because the spirit of adoption has replaced the spirit of slavery. We are now God's sons and daughters.

In Paul's day, Roman adoption brought you into a new family fully, as if you had been born into it. Through adoption, a child was granted full rights, like any other child in the family; all previous relationships, obligations, and debts were ended. In essence, adoption gave people brand new, permanent identities. This is why Paul placed adoption in opposition to being a slave to the flesh; both cannot be true of believers.

Not only does this change the way we see God and our standing before Him, but it also changes the way we live as Christians. Our status doesn't mean we don't have work to do; rather, we do our work freely and joyfully knowing that our sonship is permanent and that we can neither pay back what is already satisfied nor lose what has already been divinely given. We don't live as slaves with an uncertain future, but as sons and daughters with an assured inheritance.

FROM SUFFERING TO GLORY

When Paul classified believers as adopted children and coheirs with Christ, he was quick to qualify that not everything we share with Christ is pleasant. We share in Christ's sufferings now as we wait for the day when we will be glorified with Him and everything will be right again as He creates all things new.

¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. ²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. ²⁷ And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. ²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Rom. 8:18-30)

One interesting thing in this passage is that the frustrations and pains creation experiences are not the ones we'd associate with that of death. Yes, something is giving way, something is changing, but it is not giving way to death. Instead, the world is being renewed and will be remade—particularly at Christ's second coming, when He completes His kingdom and brings in the new heaven and new earth. So, the earth's frustrations and pains are not because of death, but because it is being made new.

Just as the world is frustrated and in pain, so are we. As Paul wrote about God's plan to restore fallen creation (to a state even better than Eden), he connected men and women—the crown of God's creation—to His restoration as well. We are frustrated and in pain too; we suffer, we experience trials and injustice, we sin, and we grow older. But just as a new earth will come, so will new bodies for God's children. If we have been made joint-heirs with Christ, it is because we have died with Him and live with Him. And though we will die someday, we will be resurrected.

- **What are some frustrations and pains you experience?** (*p. 56, PSG*)

FROM DEATH TO LIFE

How would you live if you realized that nothing you fear could ever have the last word in your life? What would your days look like if you believed that the most defining and secure reality of your very existence was not anything you could see?

Paul concluded the depths of the gospel he explored throughout in poetry:

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:31-39)

This was Paul's way of asking, "Well? What now? If you believe all this incredible stuff, what does it do to your heart and your life?" As Paul reflected on what the Holy Spirit prompted him to write in the prior verses, he was overcome with joyful confidence. *Yes, we still will struggle with the flesh. Yes, we will experience suffering and pain. But God is faithful and His grace is unshakable.*

TIMELINE

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Standing firm with the armor of God

GENEROUS LIVING

A model and motivation for generosity

THE HALL OF FAITH

Examples of living by faith

Paul described a courtroom drama unfolding to drive home the reason for his confidence. We are pictured in the defendant's seat, and God Himself is the judge behind the bench. Paul first asked who would bring an accusation against us to the Judge. The answer is no one, because God is the One who justifies and can answer any charge brought against His own. Next, Paul asked who could reach a guilty verdict and condemn? Again, the answer is no one, because Jesus paid our sentence in His death and resurrection, and He intercedes on our behalf. Finally, Paul asked who could carry out a guilty sentence and separate us from the love of Christ. Once again, the answer is no one or no thing. Even if an accusation could be brought, even if a guilty verdict could be given, there is no way we can be separated from God's love.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Adoption (p. 55, PSG)

Adoption into God's family is one the positive benefits of justification. We are pardoned from the judgment against us through justification and experience a change of identity—we become children of God (John 1:12; Gal. 4:5). Adoption restores our relationship with God, which was once lost through the fall. Adoption also gives believers the benefits of being heirs of God and coheirs with Christ (Rom. 8:16-17).

CHRIST CONNECTION

God's people are in the process of being conformed to the image of His Son. We have been adopted into His family, no longer slaves to sin but children of God. Because of Christ's work on the cross, we are welcomed into God's family and are now coheirs with Christ, eagerly awaiting the glorious future He has promised.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **How does the assurance of your adoption into God's family influence the way you see yourself and live?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How does it encourage you to know that Jesus is making all things new?** *Hopefully this truth will bring comfort to us now by helping us understand that Jesus is in control and is working for our good and joy. In addition, it should also encourage us to look to the future, knowing the difficulties and sorrows we experience today will one day seem small in comparison to the greatness of the glory we will see.*
- **How does God's plan for the world determine how we treat it now?** *God has always intended for us to be stewards and co-managers of creation. That plan was disrupted during humanity's fall into sin, but is restored in Christ. This is why Christians have a voice when it comes to the environment or caring for animals—our Creator gave us this responsibility and desire to reflect Him in the way we care for the creation He has placed us over.*
- **What are you particularly worried about right now in your life? How does the gospel of God's love speak to that situation or anxiety?** *Answers will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION

10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

At the moment of salvation, the Holy Spirit awakened our hearts to receive Christ; He began to dwell within us and establish Christ's lordship in our lives. After that happens, we don't relate to God as slaves or servants who are trying to work off a debt. We are no longer burdened by the reality that there is nothing we can do to make up for a debt with eternal consequences. We aren't plagued with fear that we haven't done enough. Instead, we relate to God as a loving Father. We are not in debt to Him because Christ has paid the debt for us. And by His virtue, we become heirs alongside Him.

- **Why do you think so many Christians think of their relationship with God in terms of “pay back?” Is this instinct all bad? Why or why not?** *We naturally think this way, one reason being that the idea of “pay back” prevents us from realizing that we are completely incapable of saving ourselves. We don't want to be seen as beggars, but that is who we are.*
- **Why is it important for us to maintain the gospel truth that the debt of sin is paid while not lapsing into the sin of thinking we don't need to obey God at all?** *Answers will vary.*



HEART

Romans 8 sends up a resounding hallelujah, giving us words of worship we can use to respond to all God has accomplished without us, but also for us (vv. 31-39). In short, Paul praised because, although he was dead apart from Christ, in Christ he would be totally, eternally, and irreversibly alive.

- **How can the gospel cultivate in believers a profound humility and confidence at the same time?** *The gospel produces grace-esteem, not self-esteem. Self-esteem often leads to pride; grace-esteem recognizes that all we have is from God, while creating in us confidence because we know we are adopted children of God.*
- **By ending this passage with poetic verse, Paul reflected how “life in Christ” is understood as worship. How does thinking about our daily lives this way transform our view of the Christian life?** *Answers will vary.*



HANDS

The key to living through anything we experience in life is to keep our focus on what is in store. We are beloved children of God, waiting for the completion of God's irreversible promises to us. This is our motivation to live purposefully for the gospel, through the power of the gospel. This is the joyful news we have to share. This is why we patiently endure suffering and life's difficulties, not with a plastic grin, but with genuine peace, joy, and confidence because this world is temporary.

- **How should Christians' view of difficulties differ from the unbeliever's view?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some current difficulties in your life that you can face by focusing on Jesus and His love for you?** *Answers will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #12, which contains an informational poster on the Book of Romans.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPSPR18Letters)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
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08

SESSION EIGHT

Once Apart, Now Together

SESSION SUMMARY

This session helps us understand how God changes us and brings us into fellowship with Him and with others. We will also learn how we are called to carry out the mission God has given us—to extend this fellowship to the world around us.

SCRIPTURE

Romans 12:9-18; 1 Corinthians 1:9; Philippians 1:3-7

THE POINT

God changes us by bringing us into fellowship with Him and with His people.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

Almost twenty years ago, political scientist Robert Putnam published a book titled *Bowling Alone*. It was apparently about the collapse of what he saw as the American community. Putnam's point was that Americans were becoming more individualistic. He cited plenty of sociological data and demographic studies, but the title was drawn from the consideration of one of America's great community activities—the bowling league. Men and women used to gather at their local lanes to experience friendship, teamwork, and the kind of social interaction integral to community happiness; however, Putnam noted that more and more people were “bowling alone.”¹

While Putnam may have exaggerated the problem about Americans' personal isolation a bit, cultural loneliness is a real thing. Today, the coffee shop, rather than the bowling alley, is the place most people gather. While it is not uncommon to see groups hanging out in local coffee shops, most of the customers are having coffee alone, often kept company only by earbuds, books, computers, or cell phones. The value of community may be making a comeback among Millennials, but in many parts of our country, neighborhoods are filled with people who are close in proximity but not in relationship.

- **How have you seen or experienced this drift toward being isolated in our culture today?**

Option 2

Place students in two to three equal groups, depending on the size of your class. Then, from each group ask for a volunteer to help you with an activity. Then, explain to students that they will be playing trivia, answering questions from the previous week's lesson. The volunteer will be playing against the rest of their group—the group can discuss answers to questions, but will only have 30 seconds to write out their answer on an index card. The individual volunteer will have one minute to come up with an answer, but cannot consult with other students or the internet, and can only ask one yes-or-no question of the teacher. If able, allow each student to experience being on a “team” alone. To make sure students have adequate time to experience being on a team and playing as individuals, only ask one question per rotation. Here are some questions to use while playing trivia:

- What does God deliver us from?
- How does He give us life?
- What passage did we cover last week?
- Who wrote that passage?
- Who was the original audience?

After each student has rotated through, ask them whether it was more difficult to answer the questions on their own or as part of a group. God created us to go through life with Him. We work with Him and other believers to share the gospel message with a lost and dying world.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

God changes us by bringing us into fellowship with Him and with His people.

CHARACTERS

- **Paul:** former persecutor who became a Christ-follower and apostle to the Gentiles

PLOT

All people want to know others and be known, but our desire goes beyond that: We long to be known and accepted. Our hearts desire the significance and belonging that comes with meaningful community. This desire comes from being made in the image of God. While sin may have brought brokenness to what it means to know and be known, the gospel brings healing and restoration to the meaningful community we all seek.

TIMELINE

FELLOWSHIP WITH BELIEVERS

Believers love one another as God has loved us.

LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

Works of the flesh versus the fruit of the Spirit

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Standing firm with the armor of God

WE NOW HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST

We can trace our natural human sense of alienation all the way back to the first man and woman. Adam and Eve were made free and sinless by a good God who gave them dominion over all they could see. They were made to fellowship with God and one another and to grow in that fellowship. However, when they disobeyed God, their rebellion had spiritually fatal consequences. Yes, there were physical ramifications—work became tiresome, birth became painful, and the ground itself was cursed toward their difficulty. Still, the biggest consequence of the fall was the death that resulted both physical death—when we will be separated from the body—and spiritual death—separation from God.

Thankfully, there is an answer, a way to end this ache, a way to replace it with the vibrant relationship with God He intended from the beginning. That answer rests in the person of Jesus Christ. Take a look at the way Paul explained it:

9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Cor. 1:9)

Through the power of the gospel, we are never truly alone, even when no one else is around. Our God is always with us; His Spirit has taken up residence in us, and we are “hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3). This is what it means that God called us into fellowship with Jesus. We are personally connected now in an eternal, unbreakable relationship with Him.

Our fellowship with Jesus also means we can experience peace, comfort, and joy in our lives in ways we never have before. It is freeing to know God and be fully known and accepted by Him. No matter what, God will always be there with us; always graciously loving us and extending His peace, comfort, and joy to us. The world can only experience these as shadows because the substance is found only in Christ. This does not mean we will be spared from all suffering and pain when we are in Christ because, as we saw in the last session, part of sharing in Christ is sharing in His sufferings. However, this does mean we will be able to patiently endure our suffering, because we know it is temporary and not without purpose, and God is working to bring Himself glory through it.

Our reconciliation with Christ is fundamental to what the gospel is about. It announces our way back to God through union with His Son, who died for our sins and rose for our eternal life in Him. But the gospel runs deeper and further than our individual reconciliation to God.

- **Describe a time when you felt you had true community or fellowship. How does fellowship with Christ differ from that? How is it similar?**
(p.60, PSG)

WE NOW HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH OTHERS

The primary “death” in the fall of mankind is the death of our relationship with God. Because of sin, we are separated from Him. Even Adam and Eve’s sin didn’t just separate them from God individually; it separated them from each other as well (Gen. 3:16). Sin influences all relationships.

So, the gospel doesn’t just unite us to God in Christ, but it unites us to God together in Christ. When we are brought into fellowship with Jesus, we are also brought into fellowship with all other people who are reconciled in Christ. The New Testament refers to this community of reconciliation in Christ as the church. The New Testament frequently shows the reconciling work of the gospel in community, but one of the most vivid—at least in showing how the gospel works practically in relationships of reconciled sinners in the church—is found in Romans 12:9-18.

⁹ Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. ¹⁰ Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹ Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. ¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. (Rom. 12:9-18)

This passage shows us a picture of fellowship in action. As God’s people, we share fellowship with God through Jesus Christ because of His death and resurrection. As Christ’s people, we share fellowship with each other, loving one another as God has loved us.

Here, Paul wrote about sinners who have been reconciled to God (vertically) through Christ reflecting that reconciliation (horizontally) with one another. The two are fused together. If we are in Christ and loved by Him, we will love others and seek to live in unity together—a unity that is based on our shared identity in Christ and our love for Him.

As you look over the commands Paul listed, it doesn’t take long to notice the depth of relationship God desires of us. Each person seeks to “out-honor” the other. Imagine if our churches were known for being busy building up others, and going out of our way to make sure others felt welcomed, encouraged, and comforted rather than looking out for our own preferences and needs. That would certainly lead to beautiful gospel community, but it would also make a mark on the culture around us. Living as selflessly as this passage described is counter-cultural; it will make us look different, but in a good way.

WE NOW HAVE A COMMON MISSION

We exist for a purpose that gives our lives meaning. We would be short-changing the gospel if we gathered together to talk about the gospel but failed to share it with others; especially since God reconciled us to Himself and to each other! When God moves within individuals and the church, it creates an outward vision of the gospel for a lost and unbelieving world. In Philippians 1:3-7, Paul wrote:

³ I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. (Phil. 1:3-7)

Paul saw the gospel community as a “partnership.” The reconciling work of the gospel isn’t seen as being complete until this partnership results in sharing the gospel with those around us.

While the gospel may save us as individuals, it does not save us to an individualistic faith. What has reconciled us, makes us ministers of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18). This means we are not following through on our own gospel union with Christ if we aren’t joining the church on mission to share this gospel with those who don’t know Him. Being part of the church is not above and beyond God’s calling for a Christian; it is not the “icing on the cake.” Partnering with other believers requires us to unite around the gospel, set aside or work through all other differences, and sacrificially pursue our shared mission together. This is not an extra requirement; it is at the core of the gospel.

If we are pursuing mission together, then we will need to set aside our preferences and focus on our real priorities. We will need to help others grow instead of seeking our own fulfillment. We will need to value church membership, not for any privileges we may receive from it, but for the responsibilities and obligations we can help fulfill. It’s about what we can give toward the mission of the church, not what we take from it.

This is certainly a challenging way to see the church and ourselves, but don’t miss who will make this happen. God is the One who began this work in us, and it is God who will complete it (Phil. 1:6); He is at work in us and through us. Therefore, we work in our role of advancing the gospel, but God empowers us to work.

- **What are some ways you can begin looking at your small group, church, or youth group as a partnership in sharing the gospel?**
(p. 62, PSG)

TIMELINE

GENEROUS LIVING
A model and motivation for generosity

THE HALL OF FAITH
Examples of living by faith

**Beginning Summer 2018*

THE PLOT AGAINST PAUL
Jews organized a conspiracy to kill Paul.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Union with Christ (p. 61, PSG)

Believers' union with Christ is at the heart of salvation. The Bible describes salvation as entering into a covenant relationship with God and describes the church (which is made up of believers) as the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:23-32). Christians believe Christ dwells in our hearts through faith (Christ in us) and that we dwell in Him (Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:27; 3:1-4). This union is permanent; it will last for all eternity.

CHRIST CONNECTION

Fellowship is an important theme throughout the Bible, especially in the New Testament. As God's people, we share fellowship with God through Jesus Christ because of His death and resurrection. As Christ's people, we share fellowship with each other, loving one another as God has loved us.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **Do you ever struggle with feelings of loneliness? Where and how do you seek encouragement to fight against it?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Why do you think many people don't connect their own sense of loneliness to their lack of a relationship with God?** *People often incorrectly believe something in this world might fulfill their longings and desires. However, that is faulty thinking. As C. S. Lewis once stated, "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."² In other words, God created us with these longings, which are ultimately fulfilled in Him.*
- **Looking at the church of Rome as an example of a church centered on the gospel, what areas do you see today's churches struggling with the most? What is most difficult for you? Why?** *Answers will vary.*
- **In a world full of broken relationships, how does it make you feel to know that God knows you completely and at the same time accepts you eternally?** *Answers will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION

10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

Our sin and selfishness drive us toward isolation and our culture only adds to it. We want to be in meaningful community—to enjoy fulfilling relationships—but we can't on our own. But God has made a way—the way—to experience relationship with Him and with others that satisfies the deepest longings of our souls. That way, of course, is through Christ. Because of Christ, we are brought into relationship with God and community with one another.

- **How does a right relationship with God create the opportunity to have meaningful relationships with other people?** *It allows us to see others in God's image, gives us the motivation and grace to forgive others as we have been forgiven, and so forth.*
- **What are some daily habits and choices that lead us toward isolation from others? What are some changes we can make in those areas?** *Answers might include burying ourselves in our video games, books, homework, hobbies, and so on.*



HEART

The gospel is God's love revealed, and the church is the gospel of God's love made visible. And God's love cannot make us prideful, selfish, arrogant, rude, gossipy, or accusers. So the more we press into the gospel, the more the gospel takes over our hearts, the more we will see something similar to what occurred in Romans 12:9-18.

- **What do we stand to lose if we seek to honor others ahead of ourselves? What do we stand to gain?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What would it look like in the community life of your group and church to outdo each other in honoring others?** *Answers will vary.*



HANDS

Many Christians have their understanding of the church upside down. Having been saved as individuals, they tend to see their faith only as something personal—private even—and struggle to embrace the importance and depth of being a partner in the gospel with others. They attend church, but might not truly invest in the work of the church. Or they might partner in the work of the church in safer, somewhat distanced ways such as through giving money, but not through serving.

- **Why do you think it is sometimes difficult to move away from individualism and toward the mission of the church?** *Sometimes selfishness can get in the way, or even the idea that our time belongs to us and can be used however we desire, and the like.*
- **What does the idea of being a partner on gospel mission mean for your daily routines—at school, home, and so on?** *Answers will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack items #4, #12, and #13, which contain informational posters on the books of Romans, 1 Corinthians, and Philippians.

SOURCES

1. "About the book," *Bowling Alone*, accessed September 6, 2017, <http://bowlingalone.com/>.
2. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 1980), 136-137.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPSPR18Letters)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at
GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit
MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject



09

SESSION NINE

Once Works, Now Fruit

SESSION SUMMARY

This session helps us dig into Paul's teaching on grace, works, and personal transformation to obedience in the light of the gospel. We will see that what we do certainly matters, but the reasons and motives behind our actions matter more.

SCRIPTURE

Galatians 5:16-26

THE POINT

Change in behavior comes from a heart transformed by the Spirit.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

There is a typical scene in many houses today where a father or mother instructs his or her son or daughter to clean up their rooms. Not a “clean it up this weekend” or “pick it up after dinner,” but a “clean it up now!” The piles of clothes have reached a breaking point for Mom, and the odor floating down the upstairs hallway is enough for Dad to demand it be picked up immediately.

While we can sometimes manipulate or even force someone to do something we want them to do, it isn't as meaningful or fulfilling as if they did it because they wanted to. This is the key difference between behavior modification and heart change—changing our actions verses changing the motivations underneath our actions.

- **What are some ways you feel loved and valued by others? Is it the action itself that matters, or the heart behind the action?**

Option 2

Place students in pairs. Once students have gathered with their partners, instruct them to share about two different situations. The first situation they describe should be one in which they were told to behave a certain way and either obeyed or disobeyed that command (ex: being quiet while Dad was on the phone). The second situation should be one in which they were able to do something nice for someone without being asked or told to do so (ex: noticing a sibling struggling with homework and helping while Mom was at work). In their pairs, students should answer the following:

- **Which situation brought you more joy in doing something nice/helpful? Would you be more likely to do that again? Explain.**
- **What was different about your response in these situations? What about the people you helped?**

Now, instruct the students to come up with at least two people they can help and specific actions or gifts that would be meaningful to those people. Doing things because our hearts are willing is much more meaningful than doing something because we've been asked or commanded. Thankfully, God sent the Holy Spirit to dwell within us; He changes us from the inside out, the motives to the actions. The Holy Spirit produces fruit in our lives, inward changes that result in outward changes that people see. Pray that God would use those changes to lead others to Him.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

Change in behavior comes from a heart transformed by the Spirit.

CHARACTERS

- **Paul:** former persecutor who became a Christ-follower and apostle to the Gentiles

PLOT

Behavior modification, or changing behaviors, versus heart change is exactly the kind of dynamic at play in Paul's letter to the Galatians. Paul addressed this briefly when he confronted Peter and highlighted that justification comes by faith, not by works. However, in this passage, Paul explained more in depth the concept of personal works (behaviors changed) versus works done as a result of walking in the Spirit (heart changed).

LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

*Works of the flesh
versus the fruit of
the Spirit*

**SPIRITUAL
WARFARE**

*Standing firm with the
armor of God*

GENEROUS LIVING

*A model and motivation
for generosity*

WALK BY THE SPIRIT, NOT BY THE FLESH

When we continue in sin without repenting or measure ourselves or others by how well we keep God's commands, we live according to an old reality. This old reality has been overturned, canceled, and even crucified. Paul said it this way:

16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (Gal. 5:16-18)

Paul wrote because he was concerned about the Galatian church and how they were teetering on the edge of self-righteousness. They had been influenced by false teachers (the Judaizers) who insisted that justification comes by the gospel plus some work on our part (in this case, circumcision). This is what it means to “fall from grace”—we don't have to fall into some terrible sin, but we can divert our thinking from justification by faith to justification by works. Paul was essentially saying, “If you were born again by the Spirit, you ought to walk according to that Spirit.”

Then, what does it mean to walk by the Spirit? The word translated “walk” here doesn't simply mean to move using your legs and feet, but can carry the idea of walking in a certain direction or following after someone. Walking by the Spirit means following Him or moving in the direction He indicates. When we walk by the Spirit, we go where He goes, or more accurately, we live how He directs us to live.

Some Christians struggle with this, not because they don't want to follow the Spirit's guidance, but because they don't know how to recognize it. If we are to walk by the Spirit, we need to spend time being quiet, praying, and listening to Him. We also need to remember that the primary way for determining His will is by reading, studying, and meditating on God's Word.

We follow the Spirit when we walk by the Spirit. When we walk by the Spirit, how we live will change. The desires of the flesh and walking by the Spirit take us in completely opposite directions—so change is inevitable. So, let's walk by the Spirit, since the Spirit has indwelt us and is bearing fruit in us that glorifies Christ.

- **Why do you think it's so important to be still, pray, and read God's Word in order to understand where the Holy Spirit is leading you?**
(p. 66, PSG)

CAST OFF THE WORKS OF THE FLESH

It's certainly easier to diagnose the sins in others than in ourselves. It's also easier to highlight more obvious and glaring failings in others rather than to deal with the little character issues that chip away at our witness in incremental measures. Paul didn't tolerate ranking sins, though. In his list of "the works of the flesh," he left no room for "big" sins versus "little" sins or culturally "acceptable" sins versus "unacceptable" sins. All sin is unfitting in the cause of Christ; it's all about indulging in the appetites of the flesh instead of walking by the Spirit. Paul wrote:

¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal. 5:19-21)

Notice how little Paul left out. Even in this relatively short list, hatred was listed alongside promiscuity, divisiveness along with drunkenness. Paul mentioned sins that often happen outside the church and sins that often occur inside the church. Paul noted sins that are obvious (carousing, sorcery) and sins that can be deceptive and subtle (envy, selfish ambition). Nobody was left out of this indictment. Every person's scorecard was stained here, and Paul's list is far from exhaustive.

The scariest part of all is Paul's note that those who practice these sins will not inherit God's kingdom. Why? Well, because the kingdom is for those who have repented of living according to the flesh and who have committed to living according to the Spirit.

Does this mean that Christians don't sin any more? It can seem that way, can't it? There's no getting around how serious Paul made the life of sin sound in this passage. Disobedience to God is a heavy and terrible thing. But Paul's use of the phrase "those who practice such things" is helpful. Obviously Christians, this side of glory, still struggle with sin. But that is exactly the point—they struggle! When Paul says "people who practice" he is referring to people who either do not feel convicted about committing these sins (indicating the absence of the Holy Spirit in their lives) or who do not seek repentance (indicating their lack of submission to the Holy Spirit). "Practice" in this context refers to a commitment to a lifestyle of sin, not simply to an occurrence of sin.

Doing flows from being. In other words, who or what you believe yourself to be will direct how you live. Being crucified with Christ means to doing away with our fleshly passions and desires and following the Spirit.

- **What are some things that make it difficult to always follow the Spirit?**
(p. 67, PSG)

DISPLAY THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Doing flows from being. We behave according to who or what we think we are at any given moment, whether we see ourselves correctly or not. You can't get away from this concept in the pages of Scripture. Biblically speaking, this means that when we embrace our identity in Christ, His power enables us to live accordingly.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. (Gal. 5:22-26)

The first thing to notice is how this list of spiritual fruit differs from the previous list of “works of the flesh” (5:19-21). Notice that the works of the flesh are generally just that—works. However, the list of fruit of the Spirit mostly consists of qualities or conditions.

There are plenty of people who don't have sex outside of marriage, don't get drunk, and don't watch R-rated movies, but they are also loveless, joyless, impatient, unkind, and ungentle. This is one of the major problems with so many approaches to Christian discipleship today—they are focused more on *doing* different rather than *becoming* different.

By calling these qualities and characteristics the “fruit of the Spirit,” Paul showed that the Spirit produces these things. We aren't passive in demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit, but we aren't the prime cause of them either. If we have repented of our sin and placed our faith in Jesus Christ—decisions also empowered by the Holy Spirit—the Holy Spirit goes to work bearing the fruit of these things in us.

As the Holy Spirit produces the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control within us, we will also see that our external lives will change. A person who is loving will act in loving ways. A person who is joyful will act joyfully before others. Being leads to doing. And in this case, when we are changed to be more like God on the inside, we will live more like Him on the outside.

- **Which spiritual fruit do you find yourself growing more in? Which do you need to grow more in? How do you know? (p. 68, PSG)**

If you're a Christian, then you will obey because you want to obey, not because you have to! The Spirit of God living inside of us ensures that we will bear good fruit. Producing good fruit doesn't make us sinless, but it does make us sure of spiritual growth, and more conscious and convicted of our sin.

TIMELINE

THE HALL OF FAITH

Examples of living by faith

** Beginning Summer 2018*

THE PLOT AGAINST PAUL

Jews organized a conspiracy to kill Paul.

PAUL BEFORE EARTHLY KINGS

Paul testifies before earthly rulers.

This gospel-driven way of living means that we ourselves are a project, always being developed and shaped by the gospel. It also means that we are always acknowledging that the changes in us have not come through our own efforts, but through the Spirit of Christ working in us. We don't get the glory—He does.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Sanctification (p. 67, PSG)

After we are justified by faith—declared to be in right standing with God through the righteousness of Christ—we undergo a lifetime of sanctification, meaning we are continually made more like Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16-26; 2 Thess. 2:13). Scripture speaks of sanctification as a present position (we have already been sanctified) and as a continuing process. Sanctification affects the whole person, transforming the heart, mind, and character to reflect Jesus.

CHRIST CONNECTION

In contrasting the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit, Paul showed the Galatian church what it looks like to belong to Christ Jesus. Being crucified with Christ means to put away our fleshly passions and desires and to follow the Spirit.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **Do you agree that Christians tend to focus more on the sins of the world than the sins of the church? Why or why not?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Why is it so much easier to see the sin in others than the sin in ourselves?** *Pride causes us to think of ourselves as better than others, which is why we try to look for their flaws and mistakes. We also don't spend much time examining our own lives, considering the areas we might need to be more vigilant in prayer and fighting against sin, and so on.*
- **If Jesus died, in part, to kill sin, what does our choice to consistently engage in sin say about our understanding of His death?** *When believers choose to sin, it seems as if we care more about indulging our flesh than honoring Jesus' worth and sacrifice and what He did for us.*
- **What stood out to you in Paul's description of sins and the fruits of the Spirit in believers' lives?** *Answers will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION

10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

Paul's list of diverse sins are presented as equally serious. Jealousy is just as serious as sexual immorality. Anger just as serious as idolatry. Selfishness the same as sorcery. Paul was intent on putting an end to the thinking that some sins are more serious than others or that some sins are not as serious as others. While sins have different consequences, they all share the same legal impact—condemnation before a holy God.

- **Why do you think people tend to view their sins in a hierarchy?** *Viewing sins in levels may be an easier way to judge sins against the sins of others. We have a tendency to think the best of ourselves, which means if we can place ourselves at the bottom level of a hierarchy, then we surely must not be as bad as those at the top.*
- **What other sins would you add to Paul's list?** *Answers will vary.*



HEART

There's one other thing to notice. Some of the works of the flesh Paul mentioned can be seen by others because they are external in nature, such as drunkenness and outbursts of anger. However, some are internal. For example, no one can physically see hatred, jealousy, selfish ambition, or envy. Still, these postures of the heart need to be discarded as well. While they may not show themselves immediately, they will work themselves out of us in some way. All works of the flesh—internal and external—need to be cast off by Christ-followers. We cannot walk by the Spirit and practice these sins.

- **How can internal sins actually be more dangerous to us than external sins?** *Internal sins are the root cause of external sins. In other words, every external sin originates in the heart. If try to build the willpower to fix the external display of a sin but fail to recognize its point of internal origin, then we could easily overlook the need for our hearts to be transformed by Christ.*
- **What are some ways we can be on the lookout for internal sins?** *Answers will vary.*



HANDS

Casting off the works of the flesh is just part of new life in Christ. However, if we truly want to demonstrate that the old self has died and now no longer lives, but Christ lives in us (Gal. 2:20), then we have to “put on” the new self. This means we live life according to the Spirit and allow His fruit to become evident in our hearts and our actions.

- **What are some evidences you can point to in your life that indicate you are walking by the Spirit?** *Answers may include the fruit of the Spirit, love for others, love for God, and so on.*
- **What are some fruits of the Spirit you can be praying for this week in your own life?** *Answers will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #3, which contains an informational poster on the Book of Galatians.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPSPR18Letters)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



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10

SESSION TEN

Once Weak, Now Strong

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we will learn how God has exchanged our weakness with His strength as He prepares us to stand firm in battle against our true enemy, Satan and his forces of evil. God has given us spiritual armor that enables us to stand firm against his attacks and advance the gospel no matter what opposition we face.

SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 6:10-20

THE POINT

We are called to put on the full armor of God as we stand against the enemy.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

Maybe you've heard the story of David and Goliath (1 Sam. 17). The Israelites and the Philistines were facing off in the Valley of Elah. The Philistines are impressive, intimidating. The Israelites? Not so much. A sort of ancient "gentleman's agreement" of warfare was suggested, in which the best warrior from each side would face the other. Whoever won, would win the victory for his entire nation. The Philistines sent out Goliath, a giant of a man. Then came the shepherd boy, David—without armor, without a sword—who, because of his courageous faith, faced Goliath on behalf of the nation of Israel.

As we look at this narrative, we often see ourselves in David's place. Certainly, we can learn from his bravery and determination. When the Lord is on our side, we don't need to fear any opposition. This is how the story has been taught in countless Sunday School classes for decades. But maybe the best place to see ourselves in the story is not in the place of David. What if we ought to see ourselves in the place of the Israelites? Frightened, intimidated, passive, weak. We look at our enemy and realize we don't have what it takes to defeat him.

- **Why do we tend to place ourselves in the role of the heroes in Bible stories like this one? What are the dangers of reading the Bible that way?**

Enter the shepherd from Bethlehem, Jesus Christ. He faced off against death, hell, and the prince of the power of the air—and He defeated them all. Then, like the Israelites after Goliath was killed, we get to enjoy the victory purchased for us, the victory we did not and could not accomplish on our own.

Option 2

What is it about underdog stories that draw us in? What makes us pull for the team no one expects to win? What makes us want good to triumph over evil, even when the odds are stacked against those who fight for good? In many ways, we look like the underdogs in the fight of good versus evil. But what often happens with underdogs? They come from behind, and they win.

- **What is your favorite underdog story? Why?**

Maybe Christians are the underdogs in the greatest battle ever fought. People don't expect us to win. The outlook is often bleak, and they don't believe that good will triumph over evil once and for all. But what if Good has already triumphed over evil? Jesus died on the cross, but rose to life. And in that, He defeated sin and death for us. We will still sin, but sin cannot win unless we allow it to because we are "*more* than conquerors" (Rom. 8:37, emphasis added) through the One who loves us. Through the power of the Holy Spirit who lives within us—and by using the spiritual armor God has given to us—we can win, and we will win.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

We are called to put on the full armor of God as we stand against the enemy.

CHARACTERS

- **Paul:** former persecutor who became a Christ-follower and apostle to the Gentiles

PLOT

Various news sources and social media feeds fill us in on the world-wide issue of military conflicts. However, maybe we are less familiar with the spiritual battle that takes place each day, all over the world. Paul made it clear that Christians have an enemy, and because of that, we have to put in place defensive and offensive procedures in order to advance the mission of the gospel we have been called to.

TIMELINE

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Standing firm with the armor of God

GENEROUS LIVING

A model and motivation for generosity

THE HALL OF FAITH

Examples of living by faith

IDENTIFYING OUR ENEMY

Satan is a fantastic student of humanity. And he should be because he's been studying us for centuries. Satan understands our weaknesses, our blind spots, and vulnerabilities. He knows which sins we struggle with the most and what often and easily irritates, frustrates, and distracts us. He knows what we desire and what tend to be our deepest longings. And every day, Satan takes all the information he has been gathering for so many years and plays all the angles he can to bring us down. He is at work every minute of every day to make sure we fail.

Do you ever think about it that way? The enemy is often more conscious of our weaknesses than we are. He will do whatever it takes to get us to neglect our faith and forget God's grace. If he can get us to stumble or use us to get others to stumble, he will not let up until he is successful. He does all of this because he hates Jesus and wants to see Jesus' glory obscured in the world.

This is why Paul's words were so strong on the subject spiritual war. This is not something we can afford to ignore. The apostle Peter warns us: "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). Look at the way Paul said to prepare:

° Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Eph. 6:10-12)

The first rule of warfare is practical awareness of the enemy. You can't fight well if you don't know who you're fighting or if you don't know where they are. Knowing your enemy's character (what they're willing to do) and their position (where they may be attacking you from) are key components to successful warfare. Paul mentioned two very important things here. First, he said that our enemy is the Devil, not other people. This is important because we often mistake the unbelieving world as our battle targets, but Paul said we don't fight against "flesh and blood."

However, we also need to remember the enemy's position. He attacks us from the spiritual realm. Christians often attempt to fight the devil's tricks in the devil's ways. We assume legalistic behavior will solve our sin problems, for example. But the devil is totally fine with all of us becoming more religious, so long as we don't actually love Jesus. We cannot wage a spiritual war with human strength.

STANDING FIRM IN BATTLE

The battlefield doesn't always look like we think it should. Sometimes the devil even tries to distract us from focusing on Jesus while we're walking to our lockers or trying to get to class. Sometimes, he even tempts us in areas where we're vulnerable and weak while we're standing in church on Sunday, singing along to the hymns. The enemy often hits us where we're weak when we least expect it.

We have to become accustomed to seeing all areas of our lives as the place of the greatest spiritual battle. Remember when Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan? He was hungry and tired, having spent forty days fasting in solitude. The first way Satan tempted Jesus was by trying to convince Him to turn stones to bread and satisfy His hunger. You and I are tempted like this every day. No, not necessarily with food and drink, but to find our ultimate satisfaction in something or someone other than God.

What will protect us from this constant onslaught of temptation? Take a look:

13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. 14 Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. 16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; 17 and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God ... (Eph. 6:13-17)

- **Why do you think the shield that protects us from the devil is our faith and not our works?** (*p. 73, PSG*)
- **In what way does salvation serve as a helmet?** (*p. 73, PSG*)

Paul gave us the blueprint for complete protection against an unholy attack. We cover ourselves head to foot with God's armor for protection in the midst of the fierce battles we will face. Remember, this is God's armor, not ours. You will notice that every piece of armor listed corresponds to something God does. None of it corresponds to anything we could do in our own strength or intelligence.

The belt is the knowledge of God's truth. Knowing God's truth and living in light of it prepares us for battle against our enemy. The breastplate is Christ's righteousness. When the enemy attacks our hearts, we don't want our self-righteousness standing guard, but Christ's righteousness. Our feet are covered with the good news of Christ's work on the cross and through His resurrection. The shield represents the faith given to us by God, through which we have received his grace (Eph. 2:8) and live in it. The helmet is salvation, God's gift to us. The sword is the Holy Spirit Himself, working through the Scriptures He breathed out. This last piece of armor is especially important. At each point of satanic attack, Jesus responded with Bible verses. The Word of God not only keeps us alive, as Jesus noted (Matt. 4:4), but overcomes the lies of our devilish accuser.

PREVAILING IN PRAYER

Paul ended his examination of the spiritual armor by calling on us to infuse the battles we fight with prayer. However, we have to be very careful about the way we do this.

18 ...praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,¹⁹ and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel,²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. (Eph. 6:18-20)

The power doesn't come from us; it comes from God Himself. The Holy Spirit inspires, empowers, receives, and applies our prayers. When you're frustrated in school, irritated with your family, triggered by a reminder of your past, tripped up by a recurring sin, or depressed by an inconsolable loneliness, that "great power" is not something that comes to you naturally. It isn't found "within"—at least, not within your natural self. We also need to stay alert about this truth.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Demons (p. 73, PSG)

Demons are angelic beings who sinned against God and continually work evil in the world today (Job 1:6; Zech. 3:1; Luke 10:18). Demons oppose God and seek to destroy His work. The Bible even describes Satan, the head of demons, as one who seeks to "steal and kill and destroy" (John 10:10). Though demons have power, they are limited by God's control and can only act within the constraints of what God allows. In the end, all demons will be cast into the lake of fire, which was originally created for this purpose.

Prayer isn't magic, because we have no power in and of ourselves. Prayer is expressed helplessness. So in prayer, you are not commanding the Spirit or summoning the Spirit like He's a cosmic butler. In prayer, you are not in the place of control but in the place of submission. Through prayer we bare our hearts, minds, and souls to the God who wants to be our friend and deliverer. And the more we realize this, the more we will experience His power, even in our lowest and weakest of moments. Prayer is essentially weaponized weakness.

This is why the model prayer Jesus taught to His disciples when they asked Him how to pray (the Lord's Prayer) includes an acknowledgment that the kingdom is God's, not ours. We will not prevail if God does not prevail. And since He will prevail, the only way for us to prevail with Him is to put our prayers of faith in Him.

TIMELINE

* Beginning Summer 2018

THE PLOT AGAINST PAUL

Jews organized a conspiracy to kill Paul.

PAUL BEFORE EARTHLY KINGS

Paul testifies before earthly rulers.

SHIPWRECKED

Paul courageously faces the storm.

Apart from Jesus, we can accomplish nothing. But in Christ—having prevailed through Him over the enemy, having been strengthened to withstand spiritual attacks, and having direct access to his powerful presence through prayer—we are more than conquerors. Because of the blessings of the gospel, we who once were weak are now eternally strong!

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Angels (p. 74, PSG)

Other than humans and animals, the Bible mentions other beings God created—angels (who are also referred to in Scripture as “sons of God”), “holy ones,” “spirits,” “principalities,” and “powers.” In the original languages of the Bible, the word angel carries the meaning of a messenger, which indicates one of their primary reasons for existence. However, angels carry out a number of other functions throughout Scripture: bringing God glory, carrying out God’s plans and purpose, and reminding humanity that the unseen world is real.

CHRIST CONNECTION

The apostle Paul commanded Christians to be ready to engage in spiritual battle against the powers and principalities of this world. Because Jesus died and rose again, victorious over evil, we follow in His steps—not fighting for victory but fighting from victory.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **Why can it be so tempting for us to take the fight to other people instead of the true enemy?** *We simply fail to realize who our real enemy is, find it easier to identify an enemy we can physically see and feel we can deal with using our own capabilities, and so on.*
- **When can we be tempted to take off our armor? Why?** *When things seem to be going well in life, or when things seem like they can't get any worse.*
- **What are some ways you have found strength from the Lord to withstand the attacks of the enemy?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Why is it important to remember that the armor of God corresponds to things only God has done or only God can provide? What would happen if we tried to protect ourselves with our own accomplishments or skills?** *We would fail if we tried to protect ourselves using our own strength or talents. Our task is to live in the victory that has been provided for us, not to try and secure victory for ourselves.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION

10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

Because we are engaged in a spiritual war, we need spiritual weapons to protect ourselves and fight our enemy. This is why we must wear spiritual armor constantly. We should never take it off because you don't take your armor off in war; You take off your armor only when there is peace. You don't try putting on your seat belt when you see the eighteen-wheeler coming right toward you at 60 mph; you put it on before you leave the garage. Likewise, don't wait for the enemy to show himself before you start suiting up. You don't know when the attacks will come, but you know they will.

- **Do you approach the Christian life with a wartime mindset? Why or why not?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some daily habits we can put into place that will remind us about suiting up for spiritual battle?** *Answers may include remembering the different pieces of God's armor, having a stronger prayer life, practicing the spiritual disciplines, and so on.*



HEART

Paul used the image of a Roman soldier in this section, which the first readers would have understood quite well. A Roman soldier's shield was about two feet wide and over four feet tall—large enough to protect most of his body. Faith in God protects us in the same way. Faith will protect us even when the battle seems impossible to win or seems to be lost.

- **Why is it important to remember that our "good deeds" aren't what protect us, rather it's our faith in God?** *Our good works could never protect us simply because we are all sinners. Our protection comes directly from the grace of God through faith in Christ.*
- **What are some other parts of God's armor that stand out to you? Why?** *Answers will vary.*



HANDS

When it comes to fighting with prayer, we can't miss how God wants us to prevail. We are to prevail in the same way that Paul desired—in advancing the gospel. With all of the talk about being protected with armor, we cannot forget that our mission is to advance the gospel, not protect it. Our prayers must be centered on this reality. We are protected so that we can stand firm against the enemy's attacks. Then, as God's armor repels each one, we make the gospel known to those around us.

- **Paul mentioned the need for boldness two times. Why do you think boldness will serve us as we advance the gospel?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What does your prayer life look like today? How can you strengthen it in the coming weeks?** *You can build up the discipline of prayer by choosing specific times throughout your day to pray, ask other people to pray with you, or choose specific things to pray for, and so forth.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #14, which contains an informational poster on the Book of Ephesians.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGSPRI8Letters)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject

11

SESSION ELEVEN

Once Greedy, Now Generous

SESSION SUMMARY

This session shows us how the grace of God works deeply within us so it can also work out of us to benefit others. Certainly, God gives us grace to benefit us, but we cannot keep it to ourselves; if we do that, maybe we've misunderstood grace or never truly experienced it. God's gifts of grace are meant to be held loosely with generosity, not held onto tightly with greed.

SCRIPTURE

2 Corinthians 8:1-15; 9:6-15

THE POINT

God gives to us so we can share with others in need.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

The gospel of Jesus Christ takes total control in the heart of someone who has surrendered to it. The gospel works in our hearts and transforms us so that our desires begin to change, becoming more Christ-like under the powerful influence of the Holy Spirit who has taken up residence in us. This means that one of the places we most try to maintain sovereignty over—our stuff—is one of the places Jesus most wants to exercise His lordship.

Think of Jesus' encounter with the tax-collector Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10). Zacchaeus' heart was apparently as small and his wallet was large. When he climbed up into that tree to hear Jesus' teaching, he was confronted personally and directly, and the resulting change he experienced through Jesus' grace extended to his deepest idolatries. The treasure he'd found in the riches of Christ was so incredible that Zacchaeus was willing to hold all his worldly goods loosely, committing to give half of his possessions to the poor and to pay back everything he'd taken four times over.

You may not treasure actual treasure, but we all have idols in our hearts we are tempted to give our loyalty: things, people, ideas, ambitions, or dreams. From these idols we get our sense of worth, fulfillment, and validation. Until we're willing to put everything under Jesus' lordship and He graciously removes these idols from the throne of our hearts, we won't fully surrender to Him and we won't fully be of service to others.

- **What are some treasures that we value more than Jesus? How can we demonstrate a heart of greediness with these treasures at times?**

Option 2

Write the word *share* in the middle of a white board or poster at the front of the room. Draw a circle around the word. Then, ask students to name some things that are shared. Create a bubble map with their answers. If they seem to be stuck, provide a bubble with the answer *ideas*.

- **What are some things you've shared in the past that were difficult to share? When was it easy to share? What do you think made the difference?**

Just like we might share ideas or toys or even share physical similarities with our parents, God calls us to share in other ways. Because He has given to us such a great gift through Jesus' life and death, we are called to not only share that gift with others, but to also share our possessions and time with those who need them most. Encourage students to share with someone who's in need as they go throughout the week, even if that simply means loaning a pencil.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

God gives to us so we can share with others in need.

CHARACTERS

- **Paul:** former persecutor who became a Christ-follower and apostle to the Gentiles

PLOT

Generosity is a trait most people support. When we witness homes destroyed and people displaced because of a devastating hurricane, we support the idea that generous giving to those in need is a good thing. However, the Christian understanding of generosity goes much deeper than what we normally witness within culture—Christian generosity finds its source in the very gospel given to us sinners.

TIMELINE

GENEROUS LIVING

A model and motivation for generosity

THE HALL OF FAITH

Examples of living by faith

** Beginning Summer 2018*

THE PLOT AGAINST PAUL

Jews organized a conspiracy to kill Paul.

THE CALL TO BE GENEROUS

“I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that it’s not the answer.”¹ This quote, attributed to actor Jim Carrey, has become a popular meme on social media over the last few years. The fact that it is shared frequently reveals where we imagine our true treasures to be. Most of us know we will never be rich and famous, so it doesn’t hurt to adopt this sentiment because we don’t run much risk of finding out for ourselves.

Still, most of us continue to want more than we have. If we can only get to the next level of wealth—have just a little more—we will be happy and secure. The problem is that even if we reach that next level, we don’t stop wanting “just a little more.” We feel we need to get to the next level, and then we will finally be happy and secure. This endless cycle continues to rob us of contentment and generosity.

Maybe Paul had this human nature in mind when he instructed the church at Corinth to follow through on a commitment to give a gift to help meet the needs of some other Christians. Paul wasn’t concerned about the gift itself as much as he was concerned about the heart condition of the believers in Corinth. He didn’t want them to fall into the trap of greed and discontentment. Take a look at the way he began addressing generosity:

¹ We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—⁵ and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. ⁶ Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. ⁷ But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also. ⁸ I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. ⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. (2 Cor. 8:1-9)

For Paul and the Macedonian churches, casting aside greed and discontentment and spreading the love of God through sacrificial generosity made perfect sense because it was rooted in what Jesus did for us. Jesus was rich, but for our sake, He became poor so we might become rich (2 Cor. 8:9). Paul wasn't talking about money—that is too trivial of a way to measure poverty and wealth. Instead, Paul had Jesus' richness in glory in mind. The Son of God left His place of honor and glory with the Father (His riches) and became poor when He took on flesh and dwelt on earth with sinful people whom He had created. It was through His poverty that we exchanged our spiritual poverty for the riches of salvation.

How can we, who have been changed by all this grace turn around and be stingy toward others? We can't. When we experienced and rightly understand God's grace, it will drive us toward love. This is why Paul told the Corinthians their generosity would show the genuineness of their love. Grace compels us to love God as we also love others whom He loves. We go from grace to love to generosity; He is our motivation to live generously, sacrificially, before others.

Generosity essentially means being filled up with the gospel and finding so much satisfaction in it that we see giving to others as a privilege. Generosity is not measured by the amount we give, but by the joyfulness and heart behind what we give. That is what Paul wanted the Corinthians to experience, and what we should want to experience as well.

- **Since generosity demonstrates the genuineness of our love, what does your generosity say about your love for others? About the state of your heart?** (p. 78, PSG)
- **What can you do to have a more godly approach to generosity in the future?** (p. 78, PSG)

GOD'S GIFTS ARE MEANT TO BE SHARED

God does not give us the wealth of His grace for us to greedily keep it to ourselves. The same grace that gives our salvation impacts our witness. This is why Paul wrote about finishing the task.

¹⁰ And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. ¹¹ So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. ¹² For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. ¹³ For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness ¹⁴ your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. ¹⁵ As it is written, "Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack." (2 Cor. 8:10-15)

Paul's use of the word "equality" is curious here, as well. He wasn't saying that all people should, or even could, have the same amount of money. The Bible has plenty of passages about wealth and poverty, and not all of them make wealth out to be bad or poverty good. Christians are called to care for the poor. This is not optional for the church; it is a sign of the church's witness in a broken and unjust world. However, the kind of equality Paul spoke about concerns our intrinsic dignity as persons, as well as our universal spiritual poverty apart from God.

Why should people with surplus share with those who lack so that all may have some? Because we are all people made in God's image, standing equally in need of the gospel before the only holy God. Paul put this in spiritual context when he described monetary and material generosity as reflections of the gospel. We can financially and materially raise others up in a way that reflects our equality as persons—within the church, of course—to reflect our equal status as brothers and sisters in Christ. Thinking of it this way, we now worry much less about who hasn't "earned their keep" or worked as hard as we have for what we've achieved. All notions of earning and achieving go out the window when we realize we've been given an inheritance in heaven that nothing can destroy.

This is one of the reasons God gives to us so abundantly. Sure, God delights in providing for His own, but it is more than that—it is grander than that. God gives us more than we need precisely so we can share what we have been given with others. He gives so that we will also give, imitating His heart. God knows the joy of giving and wants us to experience that joy as well. For this reason, eagerness is heart-posture that should accompany giving with love. We should be eager to help others for their good, as well as to share God's heart of joyful giving.

GOD DESIRES CHEERFUL GENEROSITY

Imagine two small children arguing over toys. One child monopolizes a play set, refusing to share with the other. A well-meaning adult comes along and reprimands the selfish child and orders him to share, or else there will be consequences. The selfish child complies, offering up space to play and some of the toys belonging to the play set. The child who can now play with the toys is happy enough, but the child who shared is grumbling, even if just internally. How generous would we say the first child was being in this situation?

The Bible tells us that man looks at the outward appearance but God looks at the heart (1 Sam. 16:7). This is why the widow was praised for her tiny offering (Luke 21:1-4)—not because what she gave was impressive, but because she gave with real generosity, sacrifice, and joy. In contrast, the one who gives a large sum of money, but gives with strings attached, has not given much at all.

Giving to get receive something in return, or giving with reluctantly, is far from generosity. This is what Paul addressed when he wrote:

TIMELINE

PAUL BEFORE EARTHLY KINGS

Paul testifies before earthly rulers.

SHIPWRECKED

Paul courageously faces the storm.

JOY IN PRISON

The gospel advances in difficult circumstances.

⁶ The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. ⁹ As it is written, “He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.” ¹⁰ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. ¹² For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. ¹³ By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, ¹⁴ while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift! (2 Cor. 9:6-15)

You will notice Paul ended this section with a word of praise by giving thanks to God. Why? Because true generosity is an act of worship. When Paul said we should not give reluctantly or out of necessity, he didn't mean we shouldn't give (v. 7). He simply meant that our hearts should be in the right place. We ought to give of our time, talents, and treasures in a way that shows we hold these things loosely compared to the security we have in Christ Jesus. Giving reluctantly says we really find money and worldly things to be comparable or even of greater worth than Christ.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Moral Influence Theory of Atonement (p. 79, PSG)

According to this theory, Jesus' sacrifice should be seen as a demonstration of God's love, a display that produces a change of attitude within humanity. This theory is only part of what Christ accomplished on the cross, since it leaves out God's wrath against sinners and His requirement of satisfaction for sin. Still, it does remind us that the cross is the greatest example of God's love—a love that must provoke gratitude and praise on our behalf.

CHRIST CONNECTION

In Jesus Christ, we have both a model and a motivation for generosity. Because God has been merciful and generous to us by giving us His Son, we are empowered to be merciful and generous toward others.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **Even the materially poor can be graciously generous with others. How?**
Remember, we can be generous with things other than money. For example, we can give our time and talents for others.
- **Describe a time when someone was sacrificially generous with you or your family. How did it affect you?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some ways you can expand your ability to be generous with others?**
Answers will vary.
- **How is our thankfulness for what we have connected to our level of generosity?**
The Bible is clear on this point—the more grateful we are toward God, the more generous our lives will be toward others.

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION

10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

Since Christians have something so much better than any possessions this world can offer, we can joyfully accept it when our possessions are lost or taken from us (Heb. 10:34). This is exactly what Paul was saying in 2 Corinthians 8. He knew that once people find the treasure of Christ, all earthly treasures become small in comparison. This doesn't make money or material possessions unimportant, but it does mean they are not the most important things.

- **What did Paul mean when he said generosity “completes” grace (2 Cor. 8:6)?** *He meant that grace isn't complete simply by receiving it, but by receiving it and then generously sharing it with others.*
- **Why would generosity be a good way to verify our love?** *There is a direct correlation between our level of giving and our level of gratitude/love.*



HEART

Solomon said God has put eternity into our hearts (Eccl. 3:11). This is a space only God can fill. Because we are made in God's image, we were made for more than life right now—we were made for eternity. Material possessions don't fill this deepest longing of the heart, only God does. When we experience God, we see money and possessions for what they really are—not a source of joy, but a means to joy as we live generously with what God has given us. Joy is not found in what we hold onto, but in what we give.

- **How can we as individuals and as a church strengthen the picture of giving as worship?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some material possessions that could become idols in your heart?** *Answers will vary.*



HANDS

Those who have not experienced the gospel often struggle to understand sacrificial giving. The world's value is to take care of yourself first and then, if you have anything left over, be generous. This generosity only comes from the surplus of a person's surplus—after savings, school costs, car payments, travel, and so forth have been made. Sacrificial giving is a foreign concept, before adding the idea of doing so “cheerfully.” When we give this sacrificially and cheerfully, we have the opportunity to present the gospel in powerful ways to those around us.

- **Will we receive a financial return on whatever we give financially (2 Cor. 9:6)? Why or why not?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How should the promise that we will always have what we need impact our level of generosity to others (2 Cor. 9:8)?** *God will supply all of our needs—that is the promise—not necessarily all of our wants. This is where we need to be careful because we can often confuse our needs and our wants.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #15, which contains an informational poster on the Book of 2 Corinthians.

SOURCE

1. "40 quotes about life (for a pessimist)," *The Telegraph*, February 28, 2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/books/what-to-read/40-quotes-about-life-for-a-pessimist/jim-carrey-/>.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPSPR18Letters)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject



12

SESSION TWELVE

Once Faithless, Now Faith-filled

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we will explore how the writer of Hebrews defined faith and the trace examples of men and women who demonstrated faith throughout the pages of the Old Testament. While this list of faithful ones encourages, their faith is not what we should ultimately imitate. Above all, we should imitate the enduring faith that belongs to Christ Jesus.

SCRIPTURE

Hebrews 11–12:2

THE POINT

Jesus is the source and perfecter of our faith.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

Martin Luther—a man always fearful of his place before God—once said, “If I could believe that God was not angry with me, I would stand on my head for joy.”¹ Luther was. Wracked by fear and guilt, he trembled at the idea of God’s judgment. But Luther had not yet discovered for himself in the Bible the very idea that turned the world upside down: justification by faith.

Could such a radical notion be true? Can we actually be totally saved from the wrath of God by ... belief? It was in the pages of Scripture that Luther came to the daring conclusion that the answer to that question is yes. Set loose to roam freely in the Word of God, he had rediscovered the gospel, helping to rescue it from the extra-biblical church traditions built on self-righteousness that had obscured it and confused it. He found the doctrine of “faith alone” all over the place, and it became like oxygen to his soul.

Luther said that the notion of justification by faith alone (in the Latin, *sola fide*)—today the hallmark doctrine of Protestant Christianity—is the article upon which the church stands or falls. It is the article of Christianity upon which our personal Christian life will stand or fall, also—that is, if we really understand what faith is, and what it isn’t.

- **How does the idea of justification by faith alone encourage you? Does it also concern you in any way? How?**

Option 2

As you begin today’s session, place students in groups of three to four. Instruct students to come up with a commercial to “sell” faith. Remind them that a good commercial should demonstrate what faith is, the benefits of faith, why it is different from all the other products out there, and what it costs to “buy” faith. Allow five minutes for students to come up with an idea, then allow each group one minute to present their commercial to the whole group.

- **Which commercial do you think best described faith? Why?**
- **How do you personally define faith?**

Throughout this session, students will learn what the true meaning of faith is, and that it cannot be bought by our works or any amount of possessions; our faith is a gift to us through Jesus Christ. He “bought” faith for us because we could do nothing to save ourselves.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

Jesus is the source and perfecter of our faith.

CHARACTERS

- **Author of Hebrews:** Unknown, though some possibilities might include Paul, Luke, Apollos, Priscilla, or Barnabas

PLOT

Faith is a popular term not in the church and Christian life, but also within pop culture. Many movies, songs, and hit television shows discuss, and often redefine, what it means to have faith. The final session of this study focuses on the Book of Hebrews, through which we take a look at one of the most famous chapters throughout the New Testament—a chapter dedicated to unpacking what it means to have faith.

THE HALL OF FAITH*Examples of living by faith***Beginning Summer 2018***THE PLOT****AGAINST PAUL***Jews organized a conspiracy to kill Paul.***PAUL BEFORE EARTHLY KINGS***Paul testifies before earthly rulers.*

DEFINING FAITH

Before we look at how faith should work itself out in our lives, we should probably first define faith itself. It's no good pushing forward in a study of faith if we don't know what faith actually is.

- **How would you define *faith*?** (p. 84, PSG)

So, what is faith? Some say faith is belief or trust. While both of these statements are true, they are lacking. Belief and trust are synonyms rather than a definition. Perhaps the best definition of faith is found right on the pages of Scripture:

¹ Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ² For by it the people of old received their commendation. (Heb. 11:1-2)

According to the author of Hebrews, faith is “the reality of” something which currently cannot be seen. This is why Paul said the Old Testament patriarchs were justified by their faith in the promise—a promise that had not been seen (Rom. 4). The Old Testament saints hadn't seen the object of their salvation (yet), but they trusted in God's promise to one day provide it—and He did in Jesus Christ.

What about us then? Since Christ—what we hope for—has come, do we still need faith? Without a doubt! Our faith is not only in who Christ is and what He has done, but also in what He has promised He will do. Our salvation is already and not yet. We are saved from the judgment of sin, but we eagerly await the fullness of our salvation when we will finally be rid of sin and when Christ redeems creation. Just like the patriarchs' faith, our faith looks forward with hope in what is still not seen.

Faith must have an object. The object of someone's faith isn't always God, of course. People have faith in their families, good grades, gifts and abilities, their religions, or themselves. People always have faith in something, whether they claim to believe in God or not.

Not only that, but if we tried to pay for God's grace with a single penny of our religious efforts or with a storehouse full of good works, the “deal” would be off. The gospel announces all of His righteousness in exchange for all of our need. Period.

- **How does it affect you to know that even if you wanted to, you couldn't buy righteousness through your own works?** (p. 84, PSG)

EXAMPLES OF FAITH

So it is faith alone, not our works, that justifies; however, this doesn't mean we don't work! We know that faith alone justifies, but we also know the faith that justifies is never alone. In other words, faith without works isn't really faith.

What is the place of works in the Christian life? Well, works aren't optional or random. The Bible says we were created for good works (Eph. 2:10), so Christians must work—it's part of our very purpose Christ-followers. Still, we have to see our good works in the revealing light of grace, together with the vital doctrine of "faith alone." We have to understand that our good works are not done to repay God for what He has done or for our own glory.

The best way to think about the place of good works in the Christian life is to view them as worship. The good works that honor God are the works done in delightful response to the finished work of Jesus Christ. It's not about repayment; it's about praise. This is how the author of Hebrews went on to illustrate faith:

³ By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. ⁴ By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. ⁵ By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. ⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. ⁷ By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. ⁸ By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. ¹¹ By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. ¹² Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore. ¹³ These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. (Heb. 11:3-13)

**For additional context, read through verse 40.*

It is an epic passage full of wonder and worship. Men and women throughout biblical history authenticated their faith through their response to the promises of God. Some had visible earthly success while others experienced excruciating earthly failures. But, because of their faith, they all received the reward given to them by grace.

One thing to really appreciate about this “Hall of Faith” passage is how it doesn’t just include the obvious victories. It includes some apparent defeats, as well—difficulties, struggles, martyrdoms. It is not simply a catalog of strengths and heroic adventures. It reminds us of the very kinds of experiences that reveal the need for our faith.

We sometimes think that when we have faith in God, it will always lead to good things for us. Ultimately, our faith in God *does* lead to good things, but sometimes our faith will lead to agonizing defeat, crushing pain, loneliness, or torturous death. Sometimes the good that God brings through our faith doesn’t feel very good. But it is essential that we read that “all these were approved” (Heb. 11:39). Even amid such deep difficulties, their faith brought their approval from God. Eventually, their approval became ours since we are the benefactors of their faithfulness.

ENDURING IN FAITH

Just as grace through faith saves us from top to bottom, it is grace through faith that sustains us beginning to end. We do not start over in Christ by faith and then embark on a great “good works” self-improvement project. No, we “walk by faith” (2 Cor. 5:7). The author of Hebrews said that we actually run by faith.

¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb. 12:1-2)

What is it that can hold us back as we run and so easily ensnare (trap) us? The obvious answer is sin. When we take our eyes off of Jesus and fix our gaze on the world around us, we set ourselves up to fall (or even dive) into sin. Even sin that has been forgiven can be a crushing weight that will trip us up and hold us back.

Still, sin is not the only thing we need to be concerned about. Even good things can distract us from focusing on Jesus. The author of Hebrews says to focus our eyes on Him (12:2). Why did the author say this? I think it’s because it’s easy to pursue spiritual disciplines, religious efforts, and theological studies as the end game. We want to look more holy, be more knowledgeable, or seem more put together. This is not walking or running by faith at all; this is works-based self-righteousness.

TIMELINE

SHIPWRECKED

Paul courageously faces the storm.

JOY IN PRISON

The gospel advances in difficult circumstances.

CHRIST IS PREEMINENT

Paul magnifies Christ in prison.

No, we must keep our eyes on Jesus. As helpful as the examples of faith from are, the example of Jesus provided here is even more helpful. Jesus gave us the greatest example of enduring faith when He trusted in the Father during His journey to the cross. Jesus trusted in the Father throughout the greatest evil, the greatest difficulty, ever. He did trust with the joy that lay before Him—the joy of obeying the Father and glorifying Him.

- **How does Jesus keeping His faith all the way to the cross encourage your faith?** (p. 86, PSG)

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Faith (p. 86, PSG)

Biblical faith is the resting, or trusting, in Christ alone for salvation (John 3:16-21). More than being a mental agreement of historical facts, genuine faith begins with a recognition and confession of the truth of the gospel (1 John 4:13-16), followed by receiving Christ as Lord and Savior of one's life (John 1:10-13). Biblical faith is not blind faith because it rests on the historical life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

CHRIST CONNECTION

All the examples of faith in Scripture pale in comparison to the life of Jesus Christ “who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame” (Heb. 12:2). Because of His work, the faith and hope of all who have gone before us will be fulfilled when He returns. We have assurance of the reliability of God’s promises.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **Why is it important we remember “justification by faith alone” in times of defeat and hardship?** *The author of Hebrews mentioned people that experienced tremendous hardships “by faith” (11:35). In other words, having faith didn’t prevent them from suffering on this earth, nor does it mean that for us. What it does mean, is that we endure knowing that the promise God gave us will one day come to completion and the future glory we will one day see will far outweigh any struggles here on earth.*
- **Why it is important we remember “justification by faith alone” in times of success and comfort?** *Good times and success can certainly cause us to drop our guard by looking more to the comforts rather than toward Jesus with faith. Sure, we should certainly thank God for the success and comfort we have in this life, but we should not take more comfort in those successes than in Jesus. Faith serves us in both the good times and bad.*
- **What are some ways that we can keep our eyes on Jesus? What distractions do you need to set aside to help you focus more on Jesus and His gospel?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Why is it encouraging to know Jesus is not just the author of our faith but the perfecter, as well?** *Answers will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION

10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

When it comes to good deeds, we must remember that every good work must be submitted to the glory of Jesus. Every spiritual discipline must be done as a means of deepening our friendship with Jesus. Every religious book read and every biblical doctrine studied must be aimed at increasing our affection for Jesus. It is only by focusing on Jesus that we will be able to endure in the Christian life and have a faith that lasts to the finish line.

- **While it is important to connect faith and works, why is it also important to distinguish between the two?** *Works don't justify or make us right before God, only faith in Christ can.*
- **Why would the idea of justification by faith alone, not by works, be the idea upon which the church stands or falls?** *Without the doctrine of justification by faith alone, the church would be left to people trying to earn their way to God, which is impossible.*



HEART

We do not work in order to pay God back because our debt has been paid in full the moment we place our faith in Christ. This is what it means to be justified. Trying to repay God with our works results in legalism and graceless religion. We place the emphasis on what we can do, not what God has done. We even work to make ourselves look good, so we might get some glory instead of God being glorified. While every other religious system in the world is founded on “get to work,” only Christianity is founded on “it is finished.”

- **How might thinking of good works as worship shape the way you live each day?**
Answers will vary.
- **How can we hold on to the necessity of good works as part of the Christian life without believing we have to repay God or having a self-righteous attitude?** *We have to remember to see works as the fruit of the Christian life, not the root. The root of good works is faith in Christ.*



HANDS

The life of faith will not be easy. In fact, it can be quite difficult. But one day, we will experience a joy beyond all comparison. How do we know this? We have an entire chapter of faithful examples who have shown us the way. Moreover, we have the faithful witness of Jesus Himself and His promise that one day all things will be made right. Jesus' promise and these faithful examples encourage us to persevere in living by faith today.

- **Where does the endurance to run the race come from?** *It comes from looking to Jesus, which is faith. In other words, we endure not because we are clever or strong, but because we are weak and He is faithful.*
- **Who are some modern day examples of people living faithfully you can look up to? What qualities do they have that you would like to imitate in your own life?** *Answers will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #16, which contains an informational poster on the Book of Hebrews.

SOURCE

1. Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 315.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPSPR18Letters)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject

STUDY PLAN

YEAR 1

Fall 2015

God the Creator (Genesis 1-11)
God the Covenant-Maker
(Genesis 12-50)

Winter 2016

God the Redeemer
(Exodus)
God the Lawgiver
(Exodus, Leviticus,
Deuteronomy)

Spring 2016

God the Savior
(Numbers, Joshua)
God the Judge (Judges,
Ruth, 1 Samuel)

Summer 2016

God the King (1-2 Samuel)
God All Wise (1 Kings, Job,
Ecclesiastes, Psalms, Proverbs)

YEAR 2

Fall 2016

God the Revealer
(1-2 Kings, Isaiah)
God the Pursuer (Major
and Minor Prophets,
1-2 Chronicles)

Winter 2017

God the Sustainer
(Daniel, Ezra)
God the Provider (Esther,
Nehemiah, Malachi)

Spring 2017

God the Son (Gospels)
God Among Us (Gospels)

Summer 2017

Jesus the Storyteller
(Synoptic Gospels)
Jesus the Miracle-Worker
(Gospels)

YEAR 3

Fall 2017

Jesus the Savior (Gospels)
Jesus the Risen King
(Gospels, Acts)

Winter 2018

The Spirit Who
Empowers (Acts)
The God Who Sends (Acts)

Spring 2018

The God Who Directs His
People (Epistles)
The God Who Changes
Us (Epistles)

Summer 2018

God's Prisoner (Acts, Epistles)
The God Who Makes All
Things New (Epistles,
Revelation)