

## THE DAY OF PENTECOST

Acts 2:1-4,22-47

**The Point:** God calls us to rely on the Holy Spirit as we share the gospel.

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#### The Holy Spirit Indwelt the Believers at Pentecost

In the Spirit's coming, Jesus' promise to always be with us makes sense, as does the prophet Joel's promise one day God would pour out His Spirit on all people (Joel 2:28). When we respond to the gospel with faith in Jesus, we receive this extraordinary gift—the promised Holy Spirit. The Spirit brings us the invitation and the power to participate in God's redeeming work, as well as the assurance that we are never alone in this work. The promise of Immanuel, "God with us," was fulfilled in Jesus (Matt 1:23), who took on flesh and walked among us, and His Holy Spirit is with us and in us, even to the end of the age.

- ▶ How would you have responded if you had seen what happened at Pentecost?
- In what way does the Spirit enabling the believers that day give you confidence to do what God has called you to do?

#### The Holy Spirit Empowers the Spread of the Gospel

It didn't take long after the Holy Spirit's arrival for Him to reveal His great passion and purpose. The sound of the rushing wind caught the attention of a great crowd of Jews in Jerusalem who were there for the festival of Pentecost. These Jews from every nation gathered together to investigate and heard the good news of Jesus—each in their own language, as the Spirit enabled the disciples to speak in different languages. Filled with the Spirit, the Apostle Peter responded to the crowd's confusion as he stood before them and preached this sermon.

When has love led you to speak out?

#### The Holy Spirit Builds the Community of Faith

This kind of abundant, intense, and dedicated community life should be seen for the miracle it is. This kind of living doesn't just happen. When you force people to live in small, shared spaces, usually the opposite occurs. Closeness leads to conflicts, and conflicts lead to strengthened borders. In Acts 2, this newly formed community pressed into one another's lives and the boundaries around possessions and wealth disappeared. As believers were moved by the Spirit, their interests shifted from self to the good of the community of faith.

#### **Essential Doctrines**

**Deity of the Holy Spirit:** The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity, possessing the fullness of deity like the Father and Son. His deity can be seen in the fact that He is eternal (Heb. 9:14), omnipresent (Ps. 139:7-8), the Creator and Giver of life (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:30; John 3:5-7), and directly identified with the Triune God (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14).

<ul> <li>What are some obstacles that might prevent people from experiencing true community? Why do you think we sometimes struggle with overcoming these obstacles?</li> <li>What are some ways we can contribute to this Spirit-filled community of faith?</li> <li>How was the gospel of Jesus communicated in Peter's sermon? What implications should it have for how we share the gospel?</li> <li>YOUR MISSION</li> <li>Head</li> <li>Too often we act as if the gospel story ends with Jesus' resurrection and ascension. If that were the case, then the church exists only to retell the story. However, we need to see that the Holy Spirit's coming at Pentecost not only adds to the gospel story, but also completes the revelation of God as Trinity and serves as our direct line to both the Farther and the Son.</li> <li>What thoughts or expectations do you have about believers being filled with the Holy Spirit?</li> <li>How would you explain the importance of the Spirit's presence in believers' lives?</li> <li>Heart</li> <li>In Ephesians 5:18-19, Paul described being filled with the Spirit in the language of worship: speaking/singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Likewise, the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit as they faced resistance to the gospel (Acts 13:50-52). The Spirit fills us as we find our joy in God—not in our circumstances and our successes. This filling from the Spirit will also overflow with words of love and praise for our Savior to those who need to hear about what He has done for us.</li> <li>Read Ephesians 5:18-19 and Acts 13:50-52. What stands out most to you about these passages?</li> <li>How should the indwelling of the Spirit change the way believers live?</li> <li>Hands</li> <li>This account in Acts 2 challenges the way we thing about sharing the gospel. Many people struggle to speak up, know when to share their faith, or start conversations about Jesus. Different techniques are often suggested for making those conversations</li></ul>	YOUR STORY
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## THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL

Acts 3:1-10; 4:5-31

**The Point:** When Christians are bold in their faith, the gospel will spread.

#### **HIS STORY**

#### Peter and John Healed a Man

In a public space, for all to see, Peter told the crippled man to get up and walk. The man took Peter's hand, stood, and began walking, leaping, and praising God. Peter seized the opportunity to speak to the gathering crowd about Jesus being the crucified and risen Messiah, in whose name this healing occurred (Acts 3:11-26).

Peter's response (Acts 4:5-12) to their interrogation was revolutionary. He could easily have sought to save his own skin, deny any knowledge of the events, or minimize the involvement of Jesus' name. (Let's not forget that denying Jesus was something Peter had struggled with before.) Instead, he confronted them directly. He defied their hatred of Jesus and clearly accused them of murdering the Messiah. Peter was not trying to be a hero by taking a bold stand and defying of the religious authorities. He was simply telling them the truth about who Jesus is—the cornerstone of all creation, the only source of salvation in the world. This marks the difference between spiritual boldness and being a jerk: Peter wasn't just trying to prove a point, he was pointing to Jesus. Peter allowed his Spirit-filled witness to be driven by his Jesus-focused worship.

- If you were there with Peter and John, or faced a similar situation today, how would you respond to the leaders' questions?
- How do you think people today would respond to what Peter said about Jesus being the only One who can save?

#### Peter and John Were Threatened by the Authorities

We need three things to resist the pressure to minimize Jesus. First, we need to keep our eyes on Jesus—on who He is and what His life, death, and resurrection have accomplished for us. Second, we need the gathering of God's people. When we gather with the church, we're reminded that we're citizens of a different kind of kingdom, and we're under a different kind of authority than the political and social kingdoms we live in now. Third, we need the boldness that comes from being filled with the Holy Spirit. According to Acts 4:19-22, Peter and John were prepared for this moment. Filled with the Spirit of God, they answered their oppressors with faith and boldness, refusing to deny Jesus in order to satisfy the Jewish leaders.

#### God's People Are Unafraid to Share the Gospel

There's an important connection here between bold prayer and bold ministry. After a string of Spirit-filled ministry victories, even in the context of an unjust imprisonment, the church responded by seeking God in worshipful prayer. These Christians were extremely aware that all that had happened—the healing, the bold confrontation with the Jewish leaders, the favor of the crowds—was the work of God, and more specifically, the work of the Holy Spirit. In response, the church looked to God and asked Him to continue His work. They prayed for continued boldness, for healing, signs, and wonders to happen in the name of Jesus.

► How do you think your life would change if you prayed with the same kind of boldness as the early church?

#### **Essential Doctrines**

**Personality of the Holy Spirit:** The Bible not only affirms the full divinity of the Holy Spirit but also His personhood. Many people have mistakenly believed that the Spirit is a force or power, not a person. However, Scripture affirms His personhood by acknowledging that He is treated as a person (Acts 5:3; 7:51; Heb. 10:29), acts like a person (John 14:26; 15:26; Rom. 8:14), has attributes of a person (1 Cor. 2:10-11; Eph. 4:30), and acts in personal ways (Isa. 63:10; Acts 13:2). In addition to these, the Bible also affirms that Christians relate to Him personally (Acts 5:3-4; 7:51).

YOUR STORY	
▶ What risks are involved in proclaiming Jesus as the only way of salvation in the world?	
What attitudes and motivations should we resist as we share the gospel of Jesus with others?	
What are some ways you have experienced the pressure to minimize your witness to Jesus?	
Why should we pray both in response to circumstances and in preparation for our acts of ministry?	
YOUR MISSION	
<ul> <li>Head</li> <li>We can follow in the disciples' footsteps by dedicating time and energy to the prayers surrounding our own ministries. By taking prayer as seriously as we take the "actual" work in our ministry—be it music ministry, feeding people in need, sharing the gospel with friends and neighbors—we put the work of ministry in its proper place. Bold ministry requires bold prayer, and bold prayer enables bold ministry.</li> <li>What things might keep us from praying for God's power and boldness in the ministry of our group/church?</li> </ul>	
What are some ways you can include a more structured time of prayer in your life each day?	
Heart  There's a wonderful sense of perspective in the prayer from Acts 4. These Christians saw that God's work began long before them, and they were merely participating in the bigger story. This perspective humbled them because they knew God's story was much larger than their own. This perspective also empowered them because they saw how God had faithfully carried out the work for centuries. So, the people were able to go out with boldness. The pressure was off of them; God had been doing and will continue this work.  How does praying through the story of God's work in Scripture, in history, and in our lives embolden our prayers?	
How does the continuous act of reminding ourselves of what God is doing give us boldness in our everyday lives?	
<b>Hands</b> Like the first Christians, we face spiritual resistance. Most of us haven't had to risk our lives	
(though some Christians in the world certainly do), but we do risk ridicule and rejection from an unbelieving culture, friends, neighbors, and family. It's tempting to try to prove ourselves right when we confront resistance, but we should take a cue from the way Peter and John responded to the Jewish leaders. Rather than trying to win an argument, Peter simply declared what he knew to be true—Jesus is the cornerstone and salvation comes by no other name.  • What will it look like when a Christian's ultimate allegiance is to Jesus?	
How can your story of hearing and believing the gospel open doors for sharing the gospel with others?	



### THE CHURCH GREW IN UNITY

Acts 4:32-5:11

**The Point:** God calls us to show our unity with other believers.

## **HIS STORY**

#### The Church Grew in Unity

It's important not to misunderstand what's happening here. This isn't a call to poverty or a demand for Christians to sell everything they have and give it to the poor. In fact, it isn't a demand at all; it's an invitation. These new Christians found themselves as part of this new family. If someone had a need, then they responded with radical generosity. Those who were wealthy and had more than they needed sold their resources to provide for others in their new family.

▶ What are some ways our group and our church can show this kind of generosity today?

#### **Generous and Greedy Giving**

The problem with Ananias and Sapphira's gift wasn't that they held back a portion of the profit but that they presented it as if it were the whole value of what they sold. The lie revealed the truth of Ananias and Sapphira's hearts. They weren't giving out of generous hearts but greedy ones, and their greed wasn't simply material; it was spiritual. They wanted to give so they would be seen as radically generous. They wanted the praise of the crowd.

#### The Spirit Judges and Purifies the Church

Ananias was confronted for his deception, and he dropped dead. Later, his wife did too. Some might think this was a harsh punishment, but it was a sign of the depth and severity of their sin, and ours too, for that matter. This wasn't about an accounting error, and it really wasn't about money at all. Instead, the issue was the unity of the family of God and how sin violates the trust, intimacy, and communion of His family.

Because of the gospel, these Christians were living sacrificial and generous lives and enjoying the fruit of that generosity. Those with more than they needed took joy in giving to others. Those in need rejoiced in having their needs met. Ananias and Sapphira wanted the credit for their giving. More specifically, they wanted the credit for a greater sacrifice than they were willing to make. They wanted the apostles to think they had given all they had received from the sale of their land, just as Barnabas had done. It seems unlikely that they'd have dropped dead if they'd either truly given it all or been honest about keeping a portion for themselves. Judgment came because they pursued their own glory rather than God's, their own good rather than the church's.

#### **Essential Doctrines**

Social Concern: All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society. Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. In the Spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. In order to promote these ends, Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth (Mic. 6:8; Eph. 6:5-9; 1 Thess. 3:12).

YOUR STORY	
➤ What would a life of radical generosity in the church look like today?	
How can reflecting on the gospel of Jesus lead us to joy in generous giving for the benefit of others in need?	
How might this biblical narrative feed into some misconceptions people have about the God of the Bible?	
▶ What truths of the Bible help us respond to those misconceptions?	
YOUR MISSION	
Head	
The discipline we experience may not be as severe as Ananias and Sapphira's, but sin always has consequences. The pain of those consequences is one way God purifies and shapes us. The Spirit works through and bears that pain with us and can heal us. He brings us to an awareness of our sin and to the possibility of being purified from our sin.	
<ul><li>What are some ways dishonesty might creep into our giving?</li></ul>	
► How can we guard ourselves against dishonesty in giving?	_
Heart	
It's worth saying again that the key to this story isn't in the details of Ananias and Sapphira's accounting. It's in their hearts, motives, and desire to grab fame and glory for themselves. If we seek to live a life in the Spirit, then we must begin to pay careful attention to our hearts—where the Spirit meets us and carries out His work. If what we find there is self-centered, self-glorying, and self-seeking, then we must take it as our cue to turn to Jesus and ask for His Spirit to transform	
our hearts.  Note: What do Ananias and Sapphira's deaths say about the purity of the church?	
▶ What role do the people of God have in preserving the purity of the church?	
Hands	
This account emphasizes two things: the importance of family unity in the body of Christ and the role of generosity in the heart and life of a Christian. These two important truths are not necessarily separate, as we see in the story itself. In order to have genuine church unity in a culture that is already very individualistic and greedy, generosity is needed.  How have you experienced the blessing of the family of God?	
► What are some biblical examples of radical generosity that inspire you?	



## THE FIRST MARTYR OF THE CHURCH

Acts 6:8-15; 7:44-60

**The Point:** God calls us to make much of Jesus, even when we are persecuted.

## **HIS STORY**

#### **Stephen Faced His Accusers**

Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, received a reputation for performing signs and wonders while testifying to the Jews about who Jesus is. As a result, he attracted the attention of men who wanted to argue with him. They challenged him and hoped to stop his testimony, but because he was wise and filled with the Spirit of God, their efforts fell short.

As the story went on, Stephen was taken before the Sanhedrin, a body of religious leaders who oversaw the Jewish community. There, his opponents resorted to low and dirty tactics, lying about what Stephen had been preaching and teaching.

▶ When has someone lied about something you said or done in order to get you in trouble? How did the false witnesses do the same to Stephen?

#### **Stephen Spoke to His Accusers**

When Stephen spoke about where God dwelled, the audience had this history of the temple in mind. God had never been confined to these dwelling places, which no one in Israel disputed, but Stephen also told them that they were missing the point of what was happening in Israel right then. God had come back to Israel, but He wasn't manifesting Himself in the temple; He was there in flesh and blood. The Righteous One had come, and they had killed Him.

#### Stephen Glorified Christ in His Death

It is important to notice how God was with Stephen during the final moments in his life. We often hear stories of Christians enduring beatings, torture, and the threat of death while refusing to deny their faith. We might wonder how someone would be able to keep faith under such pressure. It would be tempting to deny our faith to save ourselves. Wouldn't God forgive us if we did?

What stands out about Stephen's final words in these verses? Why?

#### **Essential Doctrines**

Life After Death: The Bible teaches that when a Christian dies, he or she immediately is with the Lord (Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 5:8). This is what some people call an intermediate state, given that the final state for believers takes place at the future resurrection (Rev. 6:10-11). For those who are not in Christ, life after death results in being separated from Christ in a state of suffering, even though future judgment remains (Luke 16:19-31).


YOUR STORY STORY
What are some stories you've heard of Christians suffering for their faith? How have those stories influenced your faith?
What can the church learn from the suffering and persecution of saints and martyrs who have gone before us?
How can looking to Jesus help us keep our motives in check when we need to defend our faith?
▶ How have you experienced the Holy Spirit sustaining your faith in the midst of trials?
YOUR MISSION
Head  As the culture around us becomes more hostile to Christianity and a Christian worldview, we shouldn't be surprised if we experience hostility similar to Stephen's. Stephen was accused of speaking blasphemy against the temple. In our case, it's more likely that we'll be accused of hateful speech, bias, and intolerance, simply because we hold to biblical beliefs about the value of human life, the meaning of marriage, and the origins of sexuality.  How have you seen Christians be falsely accused?
▶ What role does the Holy Spirit play in our response to opposition?
Heart Stephen didn't let the fact that he was right make him judgmental or arrogant in his speech. He may have had some harsh rebukes for the religious leaders, but as he died, he cried out for God not to hold their actions against them. Like Jesus, asked for mercy for his persecutors. His actions were not motivated by pride—an eagerness to be right and to prove his rightness—but by love. He wanted them to believe in Jesus, not simply to believe him. Preaching, evangelizing, and defending the faith must come from a heart of love and compassion for the lost, not from an ego that simply wants to win.  Why do you think people respond better to a humble person than an arrogant one?
▶ What are some ways our inner motives of love can be outwardly demonstrated?
Hands Spirit-filled Christians find themselves doing many strange and wonderful things. Perhaps nothing is so strange and powerful as the fearlessness with which they can face suffering and death. A supernatural strength sustains them, and it's just as powerful when they face a mob as when they face cancer. Empowered by the Spirit and looking with hope to Jesus, we have a confidence that overshadows the power of death (1 Cor. 15:51-58). Stephen died at the hands of persecutors, but he died with confidence because Jesus is alive, the grave is defeated, and we have nothing to fear in this world.  How have you seen faithful suffering encourage believers?
▶ How have you seen suffering open doors to sharing the gospel with unbelievers?



## **PHILIP THE EVANGELIST**

Acts 8:26-40

**The Point:** God calls us to be faithful and obedient witnesses.

## **HIS STORY**

#### **Philip Obeyed God**

This story is significant in the Book of Acts. For starters, during that time, Ethiopia was about as far away as you could get. Talking about Ethiopia would be like talking about the other side of the world, even though these regions don't seem so far apart on modern maps. The introduction of an Ethiopian—especially one who had to come to Jerusalem in search of God—to the story was a big deal to the original readers of Acts. This story introduces the global scope of the gospel message and shows us the universal hunger for God in the heart of humanity. The gospel message is a word for the nations, not just the Jews.

Philip was sent by God to be on mission for Him. Upon hearing the angel's command, Philip obeyed immediately. Just a few verses earlier, Philip was enjoying a thriving ministry in Samaria (8:4-8). One could imagine that a command like this—to undertake a lengthy journey, prompted only by the voice of God—might be met with some inner resistance. Any thriving work is difficult to leave and doing so takes a great deal of faith.

- Philip's response was immediate. If you had a thriving ministry like Philip and God asked you to leave, how would you respond?
- ▶ When has God asked you to leave something familiar for the unknown?

#### Philip Guided Him through the Scriptures

The whole story of the Bible, from one end to the other, points to Jesus. The story of Israel and the whole of the Old Testament are about anticipating Jesus. We see it in how they longed for a king, though all their kings fell short of the glory they aspired to. We see it in the high demands of the law, which no person can attain. We see it in the countless sorrows described in the Psalms and Prophets, where the brokenness of the world was displayed and the people cried out, "How long, oh Lord?" Jesus manages to embody all that the Old Testament longs for and points to. Even the broader story of the Old Testament—exile from the garden of Eden, longing for the promised land, and exile (again) at the hands of the Babylonians—points to Jesus as the conquering King who defeats Satan, sin, and death and brings us back home to God.

Like Philip, you probably aren't a Bible scholar. What are some ways you can use Scripture you know to share the gospel and point others to Jesus, right where you are?

#### Philip Led Him to Respond in Faith

All of the elements of true conversion are on display here. The Ethiopian was eager to believe, not forced to believe or pressured to convert. Philip explained how the passage of Scripture he was reading pointed to Jesus, whose death and resurrection reconciles us to God. It seems Philip also explained enough that the Ethiopian was eager to identify with Jesus through baptism.

His question was crucial: What reason was there that he shouldn't have been baptized that very moment? Some might have offered a variety of reasons not to baptize him: He was an Ethiopian, a foreigner—not an ethnic Jew. Philip was filled with the Spirit and didn't put any stock in those hindrances. It is clear the Ethiopian believed what he heard about Jesus, so Philip baptized him without delay.

#### **Essential Doctrines**

Mission of the Church: The church is a sign and instrument of the kingdom of God, a people united by faith in the gospel announcement of the crucified and risen king, Jesus. The mission of the church is to go into the world in the power of the Spirit and make disciples by proclaiming this gospel, calling people to respond in ongoing repentance and faith, and demonstrating the truth and power of the gospel by living under the lordship of Christ for the glory of God and the good of the world.

YOUR STORY STORY	
What are some ways you've been surprised by how God has led you, your church, or your friends to be on mission?	
Do you think it is possible to tell the good news about Jesus from anywhere in the Scriptures? Why or why not?	
What are some reasons we might feel intimidated to try explaining the Scriptures to an unbeliever?	
▶ How can we grow in our ability and confidence to share Christ from the Scriptures?	
YOUR MISSION	
Head It would have been easy for Philip to cling to this spiritually rich moment, much like Peter, James, and John during the transfiguration in Matthew 17. We see that temptation at work, when Jesus allowed them to witness His transfiguration. Peter offered to build shelters for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, as if to say, "Let's just stay here and keep this thing going." Almost as soon as he said it, the moment ended—Jesus' physical appearance returned to normal and Moses and Elijah were gone. This is a perfect metaphor for what we all experience in similar situations. We want to make the good times last, to stay where we are, to linger over what God has done. We feel this way sometimes at the end of a retreat, camp, or in the midst of a rich worship experience.  • Why do you think God doesn't mean for us to linger in these moments for now?	
► How can these spiritually rich moments fuel us toward faithful witnessing?	
Heart	
When we think about sharing the gospel with a lost world, we often focus on the hostility and resistance Christians experience. However, resistance and hostility aren't always the reactions to the gospel. The story of the Ethiopian reminds us that many are seeking God as a result of God first seeking them. In this case, the Ethiopian knew enough to come to Jerusalem to look for Him, but in many cases, people will look wherever some semblance of hope and spirituality can be found.  How have you witnessed people looking for God in all the wrong places?	
How can we cultivate beauty willing to respond abadiently to the Cairit's landing no	
How can we cultivate hearts willing to respond obediently to the Spirit's leading, no matter the risks?	
Ulanda	
Hands The next leg in Philip's journey continued his ministry of expanding the kingdom among the Gentiles. Azotus, where he suddenly appeared, was about nineteen miles away. This expansion of the kingdom happened because someone with a willing and submissive heart obeyed God's call to leave a thriving ministry in Samaria and seek out one person who needed to hear the gospel.  What are some ways you can do the work of a Spirit-empowered evangelist in the coming days?	
Where are some places in your life where you imagine this work will occur?	



## **GOD DOESN'T SHOW FAVORITISM**

Acts 10:1-16,34-48

**The Point:** God shows no favoritism but offers salvation to people of every ethnicity.

## **HIS STORY**

#### God Worked in Cornelius' Heart

God had been cultivating a hunger for Himself in Cornelius. When He commended Cornelius' good heart and good work, He described his efforts as a "memorial offering" (v. 4), a worthy sacrifice before the Lord. Notice how God drew Cornelius into a deeper relationship with Himself. He didn't simply reveal Jesus to Cornelius in this vision. Instead, God commanded Cornelius to meet with Peter, one of Jesus' disciples. God-fearing Cornelius obeyed, gathering some servants and sending them off to find Peter.

That's one of the most surprising things about Cornelius' story. As pious as he was and as much as his heart seemed to be in the right place, he needed more than good motives to find God. He needed the church, the community of faithful saints who are filled with the Spirit and telling the world about Jesus.

When has a more mature believer helped you understand the Bible or know God better?

#### **God Challenged Peter's Thinking**

In the vision God gave him, Peter saw something coming down from the heavens, lowered by "four corners" (v. 11). More than describing the geometrical shape of this sheet, this phrase indicated an occurrence with big implications. The sheet with four corners resembles the four corners of the Earth (Isa. 11:12; Rev. 7:1). In other words, whatever God revealed to Peter had world-wide consequences.

In the sheet, Peter saw all the animals and birds of the earth represented. Peter, who lived according to the rules and traditions of Jewish culture, would have been scandalized by this sight and even more scandalized by the command to "kill and eat" (v. 13). Dietary laws were integral to Jewish national and cultural identity. God gave the law to Israel as a way of distinguishing them from the culture of their neighbors. Breaking with this pattern was seen as dishonoring to God, family, and nation.

#### **God Calls All People to Believe**

Peter's message to Cornelius and all the people who had gathered reflected God's vision for the inclusion of Gentiles into the church. God's desire has always been a restored humanity and in Jesus that's possible. Yes, Jesus came through Israel—but through Israel He came to the world. What matters is not your religious or ethnic pedigree but your faith in the One God sent.

#### **Essential Doctrines**

God's Plan and Human Action: God's sovereignty over all of life encompasses the free actions of human beings. Proverbs 19:21 says, "Many plans are in a person's heart, but the LORD's decree will prevail." In ways we are unable to fully comprehend, the Lord's plan goes forward through the choices of human beings as moral agents. Even freely chosen sinful actions are factored into God's overarching plan, as is the case with the crucifixion of Jesus—an event both purposed by God through foreknowledge that was also carried out by the wicked decisions of human beings (Acts 2:23). Knowing that God is working all things for the good of those who love Him (Rom. 8:28), we trust in His promise to fulfill His plan, even when we do not understand our present circumstances.

YOUR STORY STORY
▶ Why do you think God chooses to use Christians to spread the gospel?
▶ What are some ways God has surprised you or disrupted your expectations?
How have you been surprised by God's grace getting through to someone and calling them to faith in Jesus?
▶ How has this story challenged you personally in your own efforts to share the gospel?
YOUR MISSION
Head
We can still find people who are seeking after God but don't know Jesus. We live in an age where, alongside rigid secularism, religion abounds. If we pay attention to what motivates and attracts people to their various religious practices, we might discover hearts that are truly seeking God. We might discover hearts that long for truth. We might discover people with an awareness of their spiritual poverty, people who are looking everywhere for the possibility of an encounter with the Divine. At the same time, we shouldn't expect those people to find what they're looking for apart from God's own miraculous intervention. Moreover, we shouldn't expect them to find God apart from His church.  • What are some ways you see non-Christians seeking God in the world around you?
▶ How might you point them to Jesus in light of their misguided efforts to find God?
While the story of Peter and Cornelius might be familiar, we may still be unaware of the way our own hearts are biased toward certain people. We would be wise to pause, examine our consciences, and ask whether our attitudes toward people—especially those who are not like us for racial, social, economic, or political reasons—might be hindering the unity of the body of Christ. It's a tough question but one worth pressing into for the sake of a church that knows no favoritism or distinctions among believers.  How can we protect our hearts from developing negative attitudes toward other people?
▶ What will your response be if you uncover biases toward others in your heart?
Hands We should consider how this story can be translated in our own contexts. For any number of cultural, political, racial, and social reasons, Christians throughout church history have had to wrestle with the temptation to write off certain people as potential Christians. We assume "that person" would never get saved or "that group" is too hostile to the gospel. We assume those who are different from us would be unwilling to hear us. Sometimes we just assume certain people are too sinful or too "something" to hear us. It is always a mistake to think this way. The gospel once surprised us with grace, and through sharing the gospel, we might be surprised at who else accepts His grace.  • What groups of people might we be prone to write off as too resistant to the gospel?
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What are some specific ways this story should change our perspective?



## THE GOD WHO SENDS | SPECIAL SESSION

#### THE FIRST CHRISTMAS CAROL

Philippians 2:5-11

**The Point:** God calls us to adopt the posture of a humble servant we see in Christ.

## **HIS STORY**

#### Christ's Humility: From Heaven to Earth

For our sake, Jesus let go of more than we can ever imagine so we could enter into an eternal relationship with God the Father. As the apostle Paul wrote, Jesus demonstrated His grace to us by becoming poor so we might become rich in Him (2 Cor. 8:9). Christ temporarily gave up His exalted seat next to the Father so that we might enjoy God's exalted presence for eternity.

Not only did Christ let go, but He also took on. It's one thing to pass up a first-class ticket. It's quite another to move to the worst seat and choose to serve the rest of the people on the plane. Jesus emptied Himself of His right to glory and privilege and instead took on limitation and servitude. This was not a one-time decision. Throughout His human life, the Son of God followed the calling of a humble servant and lived a life of stripped-down humanity, beginning with Him being born as a defenseless, dependent infant. He continually chose the posture of a servant. He voluntarily washed feet. He faithfully endured insult and injury. Why? Because He came to serve and give His life for us, not to be served by us (Mark 10:45).

Jesus' whole life was drenched in humility. What can you learn about the way you should live your life from the way He lived His?

#### Christ's Obedience: From the Manger to the Cross

From birth to His last day on earth, complete obedience—though not automatic—was the only option Jesus entertained. He was always about His Father's business, despite the consequences He knew would come and because He knew what would ultimately result from His suffering.

▶ List some of the ways Jesus was tempted in Scripture and ways He would have been tempted because of His human nature. What encouragement should we receive because Jesus remained perfectly obedient to the Father?

#### Christ's Exaltation: From the Cross to the Throne

Just as the word therefore or the phrase for this reason in Scripture is often important, the phrase so that is as well. In this passage, both phrases "for this reason" and "so that," help us see a very important theme in the Bible: All things are for God's glory. God's exaltation of Christ had purpose; it wasn't simply to celebrate the acts of Jesus as we tend to celebrate them here on earth. Granting Christ the name above every name was not a one-time gift like a trophy for Christ to leave on His bookcase. This name was a giving and restoring of the honored position He left behind when He entered Earth as a child in Mary's womb. Jesus' exaltation continues to echo throughout all of history. All of this, in turn, glorified the Father, the One who glorified the Son as He had been before the foundation of the world (John 17:4-5).

#### **Essential Doctrines**

**Jesus' Humanity:** In addition to being fully divine, the Bible also affirms that Jesus is fully human. Not only does the Old Testament affirm that the Promised One (Messiah) would be a man (Isa. 7:14; 9:6; Mic. 5:3), but the New Testament also affirms that Jesus' earthly life bore all the marks of being a human. He experienced the circumstances common to living as a human being, such as hunger (Matt. 4:2), thirst (John 19:28), weariness (Matt. 8:24), sorrow (John 11:35), and pain (the crucifixion).



# THE GOD WHO SENDS | SESSION 7 PAUL'S CONVERSION

**The Point:** Only Jesus can transform hearts and turn lives around for His glory.

DENTS Acts 9:1-25

## **HIS STORY**

#### Saul Encountered Jesus

Saul approached Damascus, planning on capturing and eliminating those who followed Jesus of Nazareth. On his way, he encountered a voice, an overwhelmingly bright light, and a question. The question confused Saul. He did not recognize the voice as Jesus, because he did not know Jesus. Jesus identified Himself as the One being persecuted, because Saul was persecuting His followers. What Saul was doing to the disciples, he was actually doing to Christ Himself. At that moment, humiliation and humility began to set in. The world as Saul knew it was about to change.

► In what ways do you think Saul's thoughts about Jesus started to change in that moment? What about the way he thought about himself?

#### **Ananias Obeyed God and Went to Saul**

Ananias obeyed and his heart was opened to a man who should have been his enemy, but became his brother. Saul's eyes were opened to the gospel of Jesus, he was filled with the Holy Spirit, and baptized as a sign of being a true disciple of Jesus. The former Christ-persecutor became a Christ-follower.

#### Saul Proclaimed Jesus as Messiah

The God who delights in doing the unexpected didn't stop with Saul's conversion. God transformed Saul through the power of the gospel and graciously called him to be the greatest missionary in history. God's conversion and calling of Saul reveals His heart as the God who sends.

- ▶ When have you been tempted to view someone as too far beyond the reach of God's redemptive power? Why?
- ▶ How might the story of Saul's conversion change your perspective?

#### **Essential Doctrines**

**Calling:** The calling of God to salvation happens in two ways: externally through the proclamation of the gospel and internally through the Holy Spirit working in the heart of the person who hears. Both of these callings are essential, and both work together to bring someone to faith in Christ (2 Tim. 1:8-10).

Leader Note: Because some content
from the Personal Study Guide will not be
available on the One Sheet, make sure to
adapt the session based on how you use
the material with your group.

YOUR STORY
► God used a unique collision with Saul to get his attention. In what ways do you see Jesus "colliding" with people today?
▶ Have you thought God called on you to do something that didn't make sense or that you
didn't want to do? How did you respond?
► Ananias needed courage to obey Jesus and go to Saul. How can we have courage to obey God no matter what? Where do we get this courage and what is it based on?
► How does Saul's story of conversion deepen your own gratitude for God's grace
and mercy?
YOUR MISSION
Head
As in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), the challenge here is not for the
self-indulgent, wandering younger brother who clearly rejected his father, left home, and wasted his inheritance. Instead, the challenge is for the self-righteous older brother who stayed home and
worked diligently for his dad, believing he had earned his father's love. Saul was like the older
brother because he also sincerely believed he was obeying and pleasing God.
What are some of the challenges we often face when it comes to sharing the gospel with others?
▶ What can we do to overcome these challenges?
Heart
Jesus doesn't collide with us to produce superficial, religious obedience. Saul excelled in that before his encounter with Jesus. Jesus meets with us to show us who He is and to transform our hearts,
leading to loving, genuine obedience. Jesus' encounter with Saul shows that He can soften the
hardest hearts, even the hearts of people who are full of themselves.
► What are some ways we can be blind and confuse religious obedience with what truly
pleases God?
▶ What is at the heart of your story of following Jesus? How can you tell your story in a
compelling way?
Hands
Put yourself in Ananias' shoes. Imagine what it would be like to be called to go to Damascus to share the gospel with a man known to be hostile to Christianity. Imagine traveling to the Middle
East today, knocking on that man's door, and sharing how Jesus sent you there to share the gospel
with him. Would you obey? Would you go? It's difficult to say, but Ananias did. We should all be
grateful for this Damascus resident's obedience, because God used him to encourage the man who
would become possibly the greatest missionary and theologian of the church.  • We normally think of being sent by God as being sent to share the gospel to unbelievers.
How does God send us to other believers too?
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▶ How have other believers come alongside you like Ananias did for Saul?



## THE GOD WHO SENDS | SESSION 8

## THE CHURCH SENDS MISSIONARIES

Acts 13:1-3; 14:8-28

**The Point:** God calls His church to send and support missionaries to those who have never heard the gospel.

## **HIS STORY**

#### **Paul and Barnabas Were Commissioned as Missionaries**

As the leaders were worshiping and fasting, they heard from the Holy Spirit. These leaders, and the church, were in the right posture to hear from God and respond accordingly when the time came.

The Holy Spirit instructed them to set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work God had called them to do. God separated these two men from the normal rhythms of being part of the church at Antioch for something else. Barnabas and Saul would leave their church and life as they knew it in Antioch to advance the gospel to unreached regions as missionaries.

When have you experienced a church praying over or sending off people to do short- or long-term mission work? How does that experience compare to what happened to Barnabas and Saul?

#### God Sustained Paul and Barnabas through Opposition and Suffering

Some Jews came from where Paul and Barnabas had previously journeyed, with the sole purpose of causing them harm. They won over the crowd and turned them against Paul and Barnabas. They even stoned Paul and left him for dead.

Paul was stubbornly courageous though. After the disciples gathered around him, he got up and went right back into town. He was willing to lose everything, even his life, for the sake of the gospel. This is the call of the missionary—to trust God completely for every need, even in the midst of opposition and suffering.

Why do you think Paul returned to Lystra?

#### **God Strengthens His Church**

Notice the method Paul and Barnabas used to encourage the churches about facing hardships. Paul and Barnabas did not encourage the churches to pray for God to spare them from hardship. They did not minimize hardship. Instead, they encouraged the churches by helping them embrace the reality and certainty of difficulties. Hardship will come because God uses it for His kingdom purposes, so prepare for it.

#### **Essential Doctrines**

Church and Kingdom: The church and the kingdom of God are closely related, though not identical. When the Bible speaks of the kingdom of God, it is referring to the reign of God in the world. The church is the people of God who live under His loving rule now, anticipating the full manifestation of God's kingdom in the future. The church's mission is to witness to God's kingdom, proclaiming God's message of salvation through Christ and demonstrating the power of the gospel through good works so that others may be brought to live under God's reign.


▶ Would you be willing to be sent somewhere else as a missionary? Why or why not?
What would be difficult about surrendering as a missionary? What would be most difficult for you if God called you to be a missionary?
What ways can you sacrifice to live on mission more or support missionary efforts to deliver the gospel where it is needed most around the world?
▶ How has this story challenged you when it comes to your own efforts to share the good news with others?
YOUR MISSION
<ul> <li>Head</li> <li>Paul and Barnabas took on an identity as being sent by God away from their home for the purpose of helping others discover their Christ-given identity (Acts 13:2). We also have this compelling identity. This is why we make disciples. This is why we "go" wherever we are. The good news of the gospel we believe pushes us to go and help others believe it too. We are disciples of Jesus sent to make disciples with Jesus among our neighbors and the nations.</li> <li>How do you see yourself—through what you do or who God has made you to be in Christ? Why does it matter how we see ourselves?</li> </ul>
► How does your understanding of your identity frame how you live each day?
Heart Encouragement has a much more significant purpose than making someone feel good. At the heart of encouragement is the goal of motivating another to action. Encouraging others gives them confidence to do what they need to do, even if the action is difficult or comes with big risk. As we encourage other believers, we should do so with the goal of living more and more like Christ.  How does experiencing hardship and suffering advance the gospel?
▶ What are some ways you were encouraged by someone else and then able to act in faith?
Hands The God who sends continues to call us to share His heart for unreached people and to send more missionaries around the world. If we want to be faithful to His calling, we need to personalize this sending. We must each ask ourselves: Where is God sending me as a missionary? If God's answer is that we should stay where we are, then we ask how we will support those who have been sent.  How are you making disciples of Jesus wherever you are?
► How do you support missionaries sent by your local church?



# THE GOD WHO SENDS | SESSION 9 THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL Acts 15:1-35

The Point: God calls us to proclaim the message that salvation is available through faith in Christ alone, not through works.

## **HIS STORY**

#### The Question of Whether Jesus Alone is Enough to Save

When Paul and Barnabas heard what the men were teaching, they confronted them and argued about this matter with them. The whole debate can be boiled down to the question of whether Jesus alone is sufficient for salvation, or if something else—such as circumcision in this case—was needed in addition.

Paul and Barnabas rejected their teaching for at least two reasons. The primary reason concerned the core of the gospel—salvation by grace through faith alone (Eph. 2:8-9). The men from Judea were teaching that faith alone was not sufficient for salvation. They argued that a person first had to belong to God's covenant community, the people of Israel, and that becoming part of God's community required the mark of circumcision. Paul and Barnabas understood that you do not have to be part of the right people before you can be saved; anyone, anywhere can be saved the moment they trust in Jesus Christ.

What are some issues we need to defend, like Paul and Barnabas defended the Gentiles' salvation?

#### **Letting Scripture Settle the Dispute**

Peter then presented God's gift of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles as evidence of the Gentiles' conversion apart from circumcision. God had given the Gentile believers the Holy Spirit just as He had given the Holy Spirit to them. No distinction was made based on circumcision or any other factor—everyone had been saved by faith, and the giving of the Holy Spirit confirmed that God accepted that faith.

After Peter finished, the entire assembly fell completely silent. Peter's strong defense of the gospel resonated with the gathering. Paul and Barnabas then took the opportunity to echo Peter and share how God had worked through them to see Gentiles come to faith. Paul and Barnabas relayed story after story of how God had transformed the lives of many Gentiles.

#### **Essential Doctrines**

**Justification and Works:** Justification is not the result of human effort or good works; it comes through faith in the righteousness of Christ. Although good works do not lead to justification, justification leads to good works in the life of a believer (Eph. 2:10). Faith without works is dead (Jas. 2:17). While good works do not establish justification, they do verify a genuine faith and make our justification evident to others.



## THE GOD WHO SENDS | SESSION 10

## THE GOSPEL IS FOR EVERYONE

Acts 16:11-34

**The Point:** God uses different ways to communicate His gospel message to different kinds of people.

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#### A Businesswoman Named Lydia

When the disciples had finally arrived in Macedonia, they were probably full of expectation for God to work in a mighty way. However, after a few days in the city, they didn't experience any dramatic signs, miracles, or conversions. Maybe they had heard wrong? Maybe the vision they had received was made up? Who knows the numerous thoughts that probably went through their minds?

Instead of being discouraged, Paul and the others most likely followed their normal rhythm when they arrived in this new city, seeking out a synagogue to attend on the Sabbath. They didn't find one. A city needed at least ten Jewish men to form a synagogue. Apparently, there were not even that many, so a group of women gathered outside of the city by the river to pray. Paul and the disciples found this group of women and sat down to talk with them.

When have you seen the gospel change someone so much that it also affected the people around that person?

#### A Demon Possessed Slave Girl

The slave girl and Lydia offer an interesting contrast. Lydia was a business owner who probably had significant financial means. She was probably open and eager to hear about Jesus. It was probably easy for Paul to step into her life with the gospel.

However, the slave girl had nothing, not even her freedom. She was not a worshiper of God and probably not even looking for Him. While this girl might have received a lot of attention in public, she probably frightened most people away from her.

#### A Prison Guard

When the jailer woke up and saw that the doors of the prison were open, he believed his life was over. He was asleep on the job and thought all the prisoners had escaped. Roman jailers were personally responsible for their prisoners and could be executed for allowing them to escape. However, unknown to him at the time, no one left. Everyone stayed put.

When the jailer realized no one had escaped, something happened in his heart and he realized there really was a God and that Paul and Silas knew this God! Maybe the jailer had heard Paul and Silas preaching in the city before this. Maybe it was seeing them live selflessly and not try to escape when given the opportunity. Maybe it was their concern for his life, or maybe it was that he fell asleep listening to worship songs. Whatever prompted him, we know God was at work, and Paul and Silas were prepared to respond.

#### **Essential Doctrines**

New Identity of the Believer: When a person places his or her faith in Christ, that person undergoes a fundamental change of identity. He or she goes from being an enemy under God's wrath to being welcomed into God's family as a beloved child (Eph. 2:1-3,19). The believer in Christ is declared righteous on account of Christ's perfect life and substitutionary death and resurrection. No longer is the person a slave to sin, defined by past failures or present struggles. The person has been delivered from the realm of darkness and now belongs to the kingdom of light (Col. 1:13). Anyone who is in Christ is a "new creation" in whom the old, sinful self is passed away and the new, redeemed self is alive and progressing, becoming more and more like Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).

YOUR STORY	
What are some things people might be "enslaved" by today? What would it look like for people to be free from what enslaves them?	
Who are the people we most easily look past in our lives? Why? What can we do to not only notice them, but to also step into their lives to bring the hope of the gospel?	
▶ In what areas of your life do you need to experience freedom?	
What did Paul and Silas' behavior (praying, singing hymns, etc.) in the prison communicate about their faith during those circumstances? What can we learn from their example?	
YOUR MISSION	
Head	
Through Lydia's story, we discover that God doesn't just care about the large miraculous events or only about the masses. God also cares about the smallest of details, and He is deeply involved in the lives of all people—one person at a time—and we should be too. It is tempting for us to want to be used by God to teach large groups of people or lead many people to Christ, and there's nothing wrong with that. However, we also need to look for that one person, who may even be easy to look past, who is ready to hear and respond to the gospel.  • Why is it so easy to value ministry to the masses over ministry to the individual?	
▶ In what ways are both types of ministry important?	
Heart  Experiences like the jailer's can happen all around us any day. While there may not be a literal earthquake involved, people around us are being shaken in different ways. Just like the jailer, many will experience something or receive news that causes them to despair and feel hopeless. Will we be ready to step in with the hope of the gospel? Others will hear, see, or experience something that opens the door for them to consider the gospel. Will we be ready to turn our attention away from ourselves and what we are doing to share Jesus with them?  How are you preaching the gospel with your life as well as your words?	
► Why is this important?	
Hands We often have the tendency to keep the good news of the gospel to ourselves after hearing it rather than sharing it with others. We say things like, "I need to grow deeper in my own faith before I can share the gospel with others," or "I need to take apologetic classes before I can share my faith." While it's important for us to grow in our knowledge of the Scriptures and understand how to share and defend the gospel, it's also vital for us to simply build relationships with our lost classmates, friends, and family. Live out the gospel before them, and pray for an opportunity to share the gospel with them.  How does this session encourage you in the mission of sharing the gospel?	
► Who are you burdened to share the good news with this week?	



# THE GOD WHO SENDS | SESSION 11 THE GOSPEL MEETS CULTURE

The Point: The gospel must be presented in a way that is easy for people in different cultures to understand...

## **HIS STORY**

#### Paul Grieved for the Lost

After preaching and proclaiming the gospel in a Jewish synagogue in Thessalonica and Berea, Paul found himself in Athens, an intellectual and religious center filled with idols.

Acts 17:16-33

Paul had experience in cities where people worshiped idols, but Athens was on another level. This is why we read that Paul was troubled by the sight of a city so deep in idolatry. Paul was not troubled the way you might be troubled when you realize you forgot to study for an exam. Paul was not fearful of the idols or the amount of them in the city. Paul was more grieved that there were so many idols in the city. This provoked him to stop waiting for Silas and the others to join him and to begin sharing the gospel in the synagogue and the marketplace.

- ▶ What are some "idols" you see in our culture today?
- What is your response to seeing how many idol's our culture has? What can you do to help turn people toward Jesus?

#### Paul Studied Their Culture and Proclaimed the Truth to Them

When Paul reasoned with the Athenians, he did not expect them to come to faith the way he did—by first becoming devout Jews and then Christians. Instead, he started with their worldview and with what they knew. Then, he laid a foundation for sharing the gospel with them.

Paul began by applauding the Athenians for wanting to explore and seek the truth since they gave him the opportunity to talk about the gospel to a large group of them (v. 20). After Paul was taken into the Areopagus to explain his message to them, he started his speech by affirming the good. He then commended them for being religious and for understanding that life was more than the here and now. At this point he made the transition from their culture's idea of the divine to biblical truth, commenting on the unknown god they worshiped ignorantly and teaching them the truth about who God was.

#### Paul Encountered Different Feedback to His Message

The Athenians' response varied. Some people ridiculed him because resurrection was such a strange concept in their culture. When you share the gospel with those who are far from God, you need to give the results to God (1 Cor. 3:5-9). The best response to those who reject, ridicule, or laugh is to end the conversation and begin interceding for them. Pray that God would soften their hearts to the truth of the gospel and that He would change them.

When you share the gospel with others, you will encounter some who want to continue the discussion and ask more questions, just like some of the Athenians. In situations like these, allow them to ask questions and do your best to answer. If you do not know an answer, then find it out together with them. Let the process be a part of the journey, but always start and end with a study of the Scriptures. God's truth will guide your way and the conversation.

#### **Essential Doctrines**

**Evangelism:** It is the duty and privilege of every Christian and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to make disciples of all nations. The new birth of man's spirit by God's Holy Spirit means the birth of love for others. Therefore, missionary effort from all believers rests upon a spiritual necessity of the regenerate life and is expressly and repeatedly commanded in Jesus' teachings. The Lord Jesus Christ has commanded the preaching of the gospel to all nations. It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal a witness supported by a Christian lifestyle.

## **YOUR STORY** How does Paul's boldness in addressing the Athenian philosophers challenge you in your own mission of sharing the gospel? Scripture says, as children of God, we are to live in the world but not be of it (John 17:14,16). What does this mean for us today? Though God may ultimately be in charge of growing the fruit from our sowing and watering, this does not excuse us from planting a lot of seeds. How can you make sharing the gospel a part of your everyday life and regular rhythms? When people believe the gospel and come to know Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, what should their next steps be? How should discipleship take place? What should they begin learning? **YOUR MISSION** John Bunyan once said, "It is wounding work...this breaking of the hearts, but without wounding there is no saving...Conversion is not the smooth, easy-going process some men seem to think." Like Paul, Bunyan understood that evangelism involves more than repeating a few memorized lines. Evangelism also takes studying the culture around you to understand the best strategy to use in communicating the truth with others. ▶ How might we use things within our culture (movies, music, internet, etc.) to reach people where they are? Why is it important that we study our culture in order to make an impact for Christ within it? Heart Like the Athenians, we also have an idol issue in modern day culture. It may not look the same with physical sculptures we bow down to and revere, but there are idols all around us nonetheless—many of these being hidden deep within our hearts. As Kyle Idleman says, "Idolatry isn't just one of many sins; rather it's the one great sin that all others come from. So if you start scratching at whatever struggle you're dealing with, eventually you'll find that underneath it is a false god. Until that god is dethroned, and the Lord God takes his rightful place, you will not have victory. Idolatry isn't an issue; it is the issue."<sup>2</sup> Is your city full of idols? What would you say that they are? What are some of the heart idols you are struggling with? How does the gospel challenge your allegiance to them? Hands Sadly, there are many Christians today who know what the gospel is, but fail to share it with others. However, the gospel is not only for knowing but also for sharing. So, pray for the lost in your neighborhood and at school. Engage with them, develop friendships with them, and look for opportunities to share the gospel with them through words and actions. Sadly, there are many Christians today who know what the gospel is, but fail to share it with others. However, the gospel is not only for knowing but also for sharing. So, pray for the lost in your neighborhood and at school. Engage with them, develop friendships with them, and look for opportunities to share the gospel with them through words and actions. How does a repentant life display the work of the gospel to a lost world? How do you live a life of repentance?



## THE GOD WHO SENDS | SESSION 12

#### INTENTIONAL LIVING

Acts 18:1-4,24-28; 20:17-38

**The Point:** All God's people are called to live on mission wherever He has placed them.

## **HIS STORY**

#### Paul Used His Job as A Tentmaker to Spread the Gospel

Paul left Athens for Corinth in order to continue spreading the gospel throughout the world. When we read about Paul in the New Testament, it is typically about him teaching, preaching, discipling, or evangelizing. Once in a while, we hear about Paul's other occupation—tentmaking (Acts 18:3). Paul shared that his work and his hands provided for his needs and those around him—referring to his tentmaking business (Acts 20:34). While Paul said those who preach the gospel should make their livings by doing so, he refused to use that privilege (1 Cor. 9:14-15). He went on to say that, although it would be okay and right for him to earn a living through preaching the gospel, he was called to do it "free of charge" (v. 18) because the Lord provided for him through his tentmaking business.

#### **Apollos Found a Mentor**

Instead of viewing Apollos as competition, Priscilla and Aquila saw him as a brother in the Lord and a coworker in the gospel. So, they helped him "win." After all, if he was able to powerfully and eloquently use the Scriptures to preach about Jesus Christ, even though he only knew about John's baptism, how much better would he be able to proclaim the gospel after he learned from more knowledgeable believers?

- ► What do you think would have happened if Priscilla and Aquila had seen Apollos as competition instead of helping him?
- ▶ Why do you think it's our natural tendency to compete with others, even in ministry?

#### Paul Viewed the Spread of the Gospel as More Important than His Own Life

Perspective is everything. Have you ever dug deep into a subject you thought you had a pretty good grasp on, only to discover just how much you didn't know? It's humbling, isn't it?

In the same way, when things are going well, it's easy to think that it was due to our good planning or foresight. However, when hard times hit, it can sometimes feel like you'll never see the light at the end of the tunnel. Many of us are often fickle in our emotions, plans, and perspective. That's why this passage matters.

► Why do you think we measure our spiritual lives by comparing ourselves with our neighbors?

#### **Essential Doctrines**

**Discipleship:** Discipleship is a process that takes place both formally and informally to effect spiritual maturity as people follow Jesus. Informal discipleship, as passages like Deuteronomy 6:4-9 suggest, happens everywhere, in every arena of life. Growing in our faith and deepening our walk with Christ is something that requires our whole life, not just the mind. Formal discipleship refers to periods of instruction. We make disciples through our words and actions, providing verbal instruction from God's Word and non-verbal examples through our lives (Acts 20:17-24).

VOLUE CEODY	
YOUR STORY	
▶ Read Ephesians 4:11-12. How does this support the notion that all believers, no matter what profession they are in, should see their jobs as their ministry? How does this challenge you personally when thinking about your future?	
How can your platform (as a student, academic club member, band participant, etc.) be used for proclaiming the gospel?	
▶ How can we reflect in our own lives what Paul said in Acts 20:20?	
▶ What does it look like to leave a legacy of faithfulness in your home? At school? In your extra curricular activities?	
YOUR MISSION	
Head	
The story of Apollos should encourage us that the Lord can use anyone, regardless of their past and what they know or don't know. God is looking for those who are faithful, who have a humble heart, and want to do His will whenever, wherever, and whatever. We see this in Jesus' disciples and here with Apollos.  • Why do you think God looks at our willingness rather than our natural talents, when it	
comes to using people for His kingdom?	
▶ How does this truth encourage you personally?	
Heart  After reading an account like this in Scripture, it is important for us to pray that the Holy Spirit would internalize the account's truths within us, leading to both an inner and outer transformation. Consider making this your prayer in response to this session: "Lord, give me the strength to stand up and unashamedly share your gospel with those around me. Help me to stop valuing the things of this earth so much. Help me to be about Your kingdom rather than mine."  Considering the fact that your life is like a drop in the ocean in light of eternity, what sort of legacy do you want to leave?	
What needs to change in your life today in order to reorient your perspective, priorities, and attitudes so that you see all of your life as being a part of God's mission?	
Hands  Sometimes we think we need to grow to a certain point, memorize enough Scripture verses, or know how to refute particular arguments before we can disciple others. This cannot be further from the truth. Just look at Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) or Jesus and the demon possessed man in the region of the Gerasenes (Mark 5:1-18). After experiencing the healing power of Christ, both the woman and the man went and told others about Christ. They did not take a class on evangelism or go to seminary. They simply went and testified about what they had experienced.  Looking back on this past year, share with your group one thing you've learned about	
living your life as a Christ-follower.	
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