

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

## HIS STORY

### 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).*

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## 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).*

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## 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?**

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## YOUR MISSION

### Head

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.

- ▶ **What things might keep us from praying for God's power and boldness in the ministry of our group/church?**
- ▶ **What are some ways you can include a more structured time of prayer in your life each day?**

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### 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?**

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### Hands

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?**

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## 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).*

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## 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).*

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## 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).*

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## YOUR STORY

- ▶ **Have you encountered people giving up their rights and/or comforts for the sake of others? If so, how did it make you feel? Why do you think this type of sacrifice is so rare?**
- ▶ **How can we demonstrate in our lives the humble attitude Jesus displayed in becoming a human being?**
- ▶ **What is the connection between humility and obedience?**
- ▶ **How can we prepare ourselves for the potential consequences of our own obedience to the Father as we share in Jesus' humble attitude?**

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## YOUR MISSION

### Head

Setting aside His glory and privilege, Jesus took on servitude and suffering for the sake of God's will. A monumental example to follow, no doubt, but one we must pursue. Instead of giving in to the cravings of consumerism, Paul encourages us to take on the mind of Christ and follow the example of His life. Just as Christ lived and died for the sake of God's glory, we also give our humble attitudes and sacrificial actions as a continual offering of praise to the Father.

- ▶ **How can you adjust your plans to make this Christmas season even more about the celebration of your Savior and all He's done for you?**
- ▶ **What types of New Year's resolutions will you make that challenge you to deny yourself and pursue humility?**

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### Heart

Many commentators agree that Philippians 2:5-11 was part of an early church hymn. If this is true, Paul would then be pointing to well-known and loved words that celebrated and affirmed the lordship of Jesus. Most of us can sing songs from our childhood, even after years of not hearing them. The early church carried on this beautiful tradition of memory and worship through song. The tradition continues to this day as we worship both individually and corporately for the glory of the Father in the name of Jesus through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

- ▶ **What are some of your favorite songs and hymns that point to the truth of who Christ is?**
- ▶ **How can you use the words of these songs to encourage Christians in the faith and even call others to turn to Jesus in saving faith?**

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### Hands

Glorifying God in our humility will work itself out in our interactions with other Christians and in our actions in the world. In the midst of a Christmas season when people are easily driven to observe a holiday for selfish reasons, we should stand out as we unselfishly celebrate our Savior (Phil. 2:15). We should humbly serve one another rather than seeking to be served. We should live as pure children of God in the sight of all people so they glorify God when they see our good works (Matt. 5:16). And like Christ, though we will suffer in this world living lives of humility, we will be exalted when the time is right (1 Pet. 5:6).

- ▶ **In what ways do your Christmas celebrations point you to the accomplishments of Christ?**
- ▶ **How can you better demonstrate humility toward those around you?**

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## 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).*

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**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.*

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**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.*

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## YOUR STORY

- ▶ **Why do some Christians struggle to accept that salvation is by grace alone and we don't need to do anything to earn or keep it?**
- ▶ **What are some of the dangers of relying on our experiences to validate what God is doing? How can we safeguard against those dangers?**
- ▶ **If someone said being a good person plus faith in Jesus is what saves a person, then how would you respond?**
- ▶ **What can we learn from this account about how to deal with controversies within the church today?**

## YOUR MISSION

### Head

The way the Jerusalem Council handled the dispute surrounding circumcision in Acts 15 is an example for how we should handle disputes in the church today. We address disagreements as they arise, appeal to Scripture and what God has done, and call for freedom in Christ and love to guide how we all live together after the issue has been resolved. The Jerusalem Council also emphasized the sufficiency of faith in Jesus for salvation and inclusion into God's family by stating that He alone is all we need for salvation. The early church protected the core message of the gospel.

- ▶ **Why is the doctrine of faith alone in Christ alone and not works so important?**
- ▶ **What can we learn from the way the early church addressed controversy that applies to how we address controversy today?**

### Heart

Circumcision had been a mark of purity and separateness from the world for God's people. Now, in Christ, that mark comes by faith. In Christ, purity and separateness do not lead into salvation, but instead flow out of it. Requiring circumcision before salvation undermined this essential aspect of the gospel. As the apostle Paul would say elsewhere, those who follow Christ experience a circumcision of the heart when they put off the old self and take up the new (Rom. 2:28-29). It is the inner life of faith in Christ that is important, not a ritual act.

- ▶ **Why is it important for us to stress that purity flows from faith rather than preceding faith?**
- ▶ **What are some other ways our lives demonstrate a genuine faith in Christ?**

### Hands

Requiring a Gentile to be circumcised before salvation would mean they had to do something to earn the right to be saved, but no one is worthy to be saved. No one deserves an invitation into a relationship with the living God. Salvation is by grace. Grace initiated it. Grace sustained it. Grace fulfills it. Gentiles should not have to do something to earn salvation when no one else did anything to deserve it either.

- ▶ **What are some beliefs and traditions we hold onto that may interfere with others understanding the gospel?**
- ▶ **How should the truth that salvation is by grace rather than works change the way we live?**

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

## HIS STORY

### 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).*

**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

- ▶ **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?**

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## 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?**

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### 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?**

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### 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?**

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## 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.

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 witness supported by a Christian lifestyle.*

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## 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

### Head

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."<sup>1</sup> 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?**

1. John Brown, John Bunyan: His Life Times and Work (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1888), 389.  
2. Kyle Idleman, Gods at War: Defeating the Idols that Battle for Your Heart (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 22.



**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).*

**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

- ▶ **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?**

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## 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?**

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### 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?**

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### 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.**
- ▶ **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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