

CONTENTS

UNIT 1: THE SPIRIT WHO EMPOWERS

Memory Verse	08
Session 1: The Day of Pentecost	09
Session 2: The Spread of the Gospel.....	15
Session 3: The Church Grew in Unity.....	21
Special Session: The First Christmas Carol.....	27
Session 4: The First Martyr of the Church.....	33
Session 5: Philip the Evangelist	39
Session 6: God Doesn't Show Favoritism	45

UNIT 2: THE GOD WHO SENDS

Memory Verse	52
Session 7: Paul's Conversion	53
Session 8: The Church Sends Missionaries	59
Session 9: The Message of the Gospel	65
Session 10: The Gospel is for Everyone	71
Session 11: The Gospel Meets Culture.....	77
Session 12: Intentional Living.....	83

GOSPEL PROJECT[®] CHRONOLOGICAL

THE GOSPEL PROJECT FOR STUDENTS

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE / WINTER 2017-18

VOLUME 6, NUMBER 2

PRODUCTION AND MINISTRY TEAM

VICE PRESIDENT, LIFEWAY RESOURCES: Eric Geiger

GENERAL EDITORS: Ed Stetzer and Trevin Wax

MANAGING EDITOR: Brian Dembowczyk

CONTENT EDITOR: Andy McLean

MANAGER, STUDENT MINISTRY PUBLISHING: John Paul Basham

DIRECTOR, STUDENT MINISTRY: Ben Trueblood

SEND QUESTIONS/COMMENTS TO:

Content Editor, Andy McLean

The Gospel Project for Students: Personal Study Guide,

One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234-0102;

or make comments on the Web at

www.lifeway.com.

Printed in the United States of America

The Gospel Project for Students (ISSN 1939-0742; Item 005508013) is published quarterly by LifeWay Christian Resources, One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234, Thom S. Rainer, President. © 2017 LifeWay Christian Resources.

For ordering or inquiries, visit www.lifeway.com or write LifeWay Church Resources Customer Service, One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234-0113. For subscriptions or subscription address changes, e-mail subscribe@lifeway.com, fax (615) 251-5818, or write to the above address. For bulk shipments mailed quarterly to one address, e-mail orderentry@lifeway.com, fax (615) 251-5933, or write to the above address.

We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To review LifeWay's doctrinal guideline, please visit www.lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline.

All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission.

AUTHORS

UNIT 1



Mike Cospser (Sessions 1-6) is the founder and director of Harbor Media, where he develops podcasts that help Christians navigate a post-Christian world. He previously served for sixteen years as one of the founding pastors of Sojourn Community Church in Louisville, Kentucky, where he oversaw Sojourn Music—a collective of musicians writing songs for the local church. He is the author of four books, including (most recently) *Recapturing the Wonder*.



Katie Orr (Special Session), creator of the *FOCUSed15* Bible study method, is passionate about equipping busy women to experience God daily. She is a teacher, speaker, podcaster, and prolific writer for blogs, magazines, and Sunday School curriculum. A former Cru (Campus Crusade for Christ) staff member and mother to three young children, Katie and pastor-husband, Chris, are part of the church revitalization movement.

UNIT 2



Jason C. Dukes (Sessions 7-9) has been a church starter, a church renewer, and tries to be a disciple-maker. He's currently the Multiplication Minister with Brentwood Baptist Church near Nashville, Tennessee. He has authored books and periodically authored blogs, which you can learn more about at livesentresources.wordpress.com. He and his wife, Jen, are thankful for their seven children.



Daniel Im (Sessions 10-12) serves as the Director of Church Multiplication for NewChurches.com at LifeWay Christian Resources. He is also a teaching pastor at The Fellowship in Nashville, Tennessee, and author of *No Silver Bullets: Five Small Shifts That Will Transform Your Ministry* and *Planting Missional Churches*. He is married to Christina, and they have three children, Victoria, Adelyn, and Makarios.

HOW TO USE

01 SESSION ONE
The Day of Pentecost

SCRIPTURE
 Acts 2:1-4, 32-47

THE POINT
 God calls us to rely on the Holy Spirit as we share the gospel.

CHARACTERS

- **The Holy Spirit:** third person of the Trinity
- **The Disciples:** initial group of men Jesus chose to follow Him, take part in His ministry, and share the gospel with others

PLOT
 Not long before Pentecost, Jesus had arrived in Jerusalem like a king for His coronation. The whole city greeted Him, hailing the new King of the Jews. A few days after that, He died on a cross with a sign marked by the same title. But three days later, in the Gospel accounts, the disciples seemed bewildered, as if they had never expected it. Rome remained in control, but no more freedom from the tyranny of their oppressor. They'd seen Him taken up into the heavens with the promise in the same way. Before His return, though, the Spirit would...

INTRO

The first page of each session contains a brief overview of what to expect in the His Story section. This will include the Scripture passage(s), the main point, key figures, as well as a basic plot that sets the scene for the Bible study.

HIS STORY

Acts 2:1-4
 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Acts 2:32-40
 This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand; until I make your enemies your footstool.'" Let all the houses of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified. Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation."

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 hear 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.

- What 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 conflict, and conflict leads 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.

COMMUNITY OF GENUINITY
 The Holy Spirit empowers us to live in genuinity.

COMMUNITY OF COURAGE OF THE DISCIPLES
 Jesus and His disciples modeled and preached the gospel with boldness.

FROM HUMILIATION TO EXALTATION
 Jesus' ministry ended in humbly-accepted persecution.

THE Gospel Project for Students

HIS STORY

Intended for group and personal use, the His Story section follows the storyline of the Bible, focusing on what God has done in redemptive history throughout the pages of Scripture. These pages also feature questions to engage with, Essential Doctrines to learn, and a visually helpful timeline to follow throughout the study. In addition, there is a Christ Connection section at the end, helping you to connect the dots between Jesus and the biblical storyline for each session.

THIS STUDY

Acts 2:41-47
 "So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. "And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. "And all who believed were together and had all things in common. "And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, "praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily by those who were being saved."

CHRIST CONNECTION
 Just before His ascension, Jesus instructed His disciples to wait in Jerusalem "for the Father's promise" (Acts 1:4)—the Holy Spirit, who would empower Christ's disciples to be His witnesses on earth. God gives the Holy Spirit to those who trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior, and the Spirit changes us to be more like Jesus.
 While receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit is a once-and-for-all occasion when we put our faith in Jesus, being filled with the Spirit is believers' lifelong responsibility. This requires turning to God in faith and joy and learning to live with a deeper and more abiding trust in Him. As we are filled, we should overflow—to our friends, neighbors, families, and more—with the love and joy that come from abiding in the gospel of our Savior. This is our greatest way of bearing witness: not the beguiling, I-should-do-this-even-though-I-feel-awkward kind of evangelism but the natural joy-filled heart's reaction to redemption. This comes only as a gift, only as we're filled with the Spirit, and only as we turn our own attention to His good news.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES
Duty 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 duty can be seen in the fact that He is eternal (John 9:14), omnipresent (Ps. 139:8), the Creator and Giver of life (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:30; John 3:7), and directly identified with the Triune God (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14).

THE FIRST MARTYR
 Stephen became the first martyr in church history.

THE ETHIOPIAN TRAVELER
 Philip boldly shares the message of the gospel.

12 Session 1

YOUR STORY

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

- ▶ How should the revelation of God as Trinity shape the way we pray? The way we worship?
- ▶ What are some obstacles that might prevent people from experiencing true community? Why do you think we sometimes struggle with overcoming these obstacles?
- ▶ What are some ways we can contribute to this Spirit-filled community of faith?
- ▶ How was the gospel of Jesus communicated in Peter's sermon? What implications should it have for how we share the gospel?

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

YOUR STORY

Intended for group and/or personal use, the Your Story section is designed to connect what God has done in the past to the present. As you discuss and answer these questions, you'll begin to realize that what God was doing in the lives of these biblical characters easily connects with life today.

YOUR MISSION

Also intended for group and/or personal use, the Your Mission section is designed to show how God's Story is capable of creating lasting transformation into how we think, feel, and live from this day forward. It is intended to show that every session goes beyond mere Bible study to a calling to be on mission with God in this world.

YOUR MISSION

HEAD
 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 Father and the Son.
 • What thoughts or expectations do you have about believers being filled with the Holy Spirit?
 • How would you explain the importance of the Spirit's presence in believers' lives?

HEART
 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.
 • Read Ephesians 5:18-19 and Acts 13:50-52. What stands out most to you about these passages?
 • How should the indwelling of the Spirit change the way believers live?

HANDS
 This account in Acts 2 challenges the way we think 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 these conversations easier. In fact, many churches offer whole classes on the subject, and that's not a bad thing at all. But at its most basic level, maybe the easiest way to become bold in sharing the gospel is by seeking to be filled with the Spirit.
 • What struggles might keep Christians from sharing the gospel with others?
 • How does being filled with the Holy Spirit overcome these struggles and empower our evangelism?

14 Session 1

FROM THE EDITOR



Andy McLean

Editor

*The Gospel Project
for Students*

Our journey picks up on a hillside near Jerusalem, forty days after Jesus' resurrection. The once timid and frightened disciples became confident and assured after being with Jesus for over a month. They fully expected, surely, Jesus would then restore the kingdom to Israel and overthrow Roman oppression. Once again, they learned that their expectations and Jesus' plans are not the same. Jesus instructed them to wait in Jerusalem for a promise to be fulfilled—one that would empower the disciples for their mission of taking the gospel to the end of the earth.

In this volume of *The Church on Mission*, we see this promise fulfilled with the arrival and indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. From the moment we open the Book of Acts (acts of the Apostles) and witness the Spirit's arrival at the day of Pentecost, we'll quickly see how the Spirit empowered and transformed. He empowered the disciples to carry out the mission Jesus gave and transformed the hearts of men and women, bringing them together for the building up of the church of God. He empowered people to speak the Word of God boldly. He strengthened and comforted those who experienced suffering and persecution to value Christ more than their own safety. He softened Lydia's heart to receive the gospel, strengthened Stephen to reflect Christ even in his death, and transformed Saul the persecutor into Saul the missionary. The Spirit of God is constantly at work in the lives of God's people.

The Book of Acts is certainly about the acts of the Apostles and their missionary efforts in spreading the gospel throughout the world. However, it is really about the acts of the Holy Spirit in and through the hearts and lives of the disciples. He is the third Person of the Trinity, the One Jesus promised would arrive after He departed. And it is the Holy Spirit who still empowers and equips the church to move forward with the mission God entrusted to us.

UNIT 1

The Spirit Who Empowers

ACTS

MEMORY VERSE

³⁸ And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” ⁴⁰ And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.”

ACTS 2:38-40

01

SESSION ONE

The Day of Pentecost

SCRIPTURE

Acts 2:1-4,32-47

THE POINT

God calls us to rely on the Holy Spirit as we share the gospel.

CHARACTERS

- **The Holy Spirit:** third person of the Trinity
- **The Disciples:** initial group of men Jesus chose to follow Him, take part in His ministry, and share the gospel with others

PLOT

Not long before Pentecost, Jesus had arrived in Jerusalem like a king for His coronation: The whole city greeted Him, hailing the new King of the Jews. A few days later, He died on a cross with a sign marked by the same title. But three days after that, He rose from the dead.

In the Gospel accounts, the disciples seemed bewildered by what took place—it was far less than they'd expected. Rome remained in control of Jerusalem. There would be no new Israel, no freedom from the tyranny of their oppressors. Yet, so much more had happened. Jesus had risen from the dead. They'd shared meals and conversations with Him. They'd touched His scars. They'd seen Him appear behind locked doors in a glorified body that was all at once recognizable and unrecognizable, familiar and new. They'd seen Him taken up into the heavens with the promise that He would come again in the same way. Before His return, though, the Spirit would come as Jesus had promised.

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?**

Acts 2:1-4

1 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

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



PENTECOST
The Holy Spirit empowers the spread of the gospel.



COURAGE OF THE DISCIPLES
John and Peter perform miracles and preach the gospel with boldness.

Acts 2:32-40

³² "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.³³ Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. ³⁴ For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, "The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, ³⁵ until I make your enemies your footstool." ³⁶ Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." ³⁷ Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" ³⁸ And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." ⁴⁰ And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation."

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.



COMMUNITY OF GENEROSITY

The church displays unity and generosity.



*Bonus Session FROM HUMILIATION TO EXALTATION

Jesus' arrival is one of humility, obedience, and exaltation.

Acts 2:41-47

⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common.

⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,

⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

CHRIST CONNECTION

Just before His ascension, Jesus instructed His disciples to wait in Jerusalem “for the Father’s promise” (Acts 1:4)—the Holy Spirit, who would empower Christ’s disciples to be His witnesses on earth. God gives the Holy Spirit to those who trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior, and the Spirit changes us to be more like Jesus.

While receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit is a once-and-for-all occasion when we put our faith in Jesus, being filled with the Spirit is believers’ lifelong responsibility. This requires turning to God in faith and joy and learning to live with a deeper and more abiding trust in Him. As we are filled, we should overflow—to our friends, neighbors, families, and more—with the love and joy that come from abiding in the gospel of our Savior. This is our greatest way of bearing witness: not the begrudging, I-should-do-this-even-though-I-feel-awkward kind of evangelism but the natural joy-filled heart’s reaction to redemption. This comes only as a gift, only as we’re filled with the Spirit, and only as we turn our own attention to this good news.

99 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).



THE FIRST MARTYR
Stephen reflects Jesus in his life and his death.



THE ETHIOPIAN TRAVELER
Philip faithfully shares the message of the gospel.

YOUR STORY

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

- ▶ **How should the revelation of God as Trinity shape the way we pray? The way we worship?**

- ▶ **What are some obstacles that might prevent people from experiencing true community? Why do you think we sometimes struggle with overcoming these obstacles?**

- ▶ **What are some ways we can contribute to this Spirit-filled community of faith?**

- ▶ **How was the gospel of Jesus communicated in Peter's sermon? What implications should it have for how we share the gospel?**

HIS STORY


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

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION


HEAD



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 Father and the Son.

- What thoughts or expectations do you have about believers being filled with the Holy Spirit?
- How would you explain the importance of the Spirit's presence in believers' lives?


HEART



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.

- Read Ephesians 5:18-19 and Acts 13:50-52. What stands out most to you about these passages?
- How should the indwelling of the Spirit change the way believers live?

HANDS



This account in Acts 2 challenges the way we think 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 easier. In fact, many churches offer whole classes on the subject, and that's not a bad thing at all. But at its most basic level, maybe the easiest way to become bold in sharing the gospel is by seeking to be filled with the Spirit.

- What struggles might keep Christians from sharing the gospel with others?
- How does being filled with the Holy Spirit overcome these struggles and empower our evangelism?

02

SESSION TWO

The Spread of the Gospel

SCRIPTURE

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

THE POINT

When Christians are bold in their faith, the gospel will spread.

CHARACTERS

- **Holy Spirit:** third person of the Trinity
- **Peter:** formerly called Simon, brother of Andrew, known as the apostle to the Jews
- **John:** most known for being the “beloved disciple”; wrote the Gospel of John; 1, 2, and 3 John; and Revelation
- **High priest, Elders, and Scribes:** a group of prominent spiritual and political individuals during Jesus’ earthly ministry who oversaw temple worship in Jerusalem and were in charge of Jewish Law and interpretation of Scripture

PLOT

Following the arrival of God’s indwelling Spirit, the disciples lives began to change. These once timid and fearful disciples became bold communicators of the gospel and were able to even perform signs and miracles that validated the truthfulness of their message and mission. In this session, we will see one of these miracles and its outcome.

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.

Acts 3:1-10

¹ Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. ² And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. ³ Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. ⁴ And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." ⁵ And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. ⁶ But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" ⁷ And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. ⁸ And leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. ⁹ And all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰ and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.



COURAGE OF THE DISCIPLES

John and Peter perform miracles and preach the gospel with boldness.



COMMUNITY OF GENEROSITY

The church displays unity and generosity.

- 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

Acts 4:13-22

¹³ Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. ¹⁴ But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. ¹⁵ But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, ¹⁶ saying, "What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name." ¹⁸ So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, ²⁰ for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." ²¹ And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened. ²² For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.

99 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).

*Bonus Session FROM HUMILIATION TO EXALTATION

Jesus' arrival is one of humility, obedience, and exaltation.



THE FIRST MARTYR

Stephen reflects Jesus in his life and his death.

Acts 4:29-31

29 And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, 30 while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” 31 And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

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?**

CHRIST CONNECTION

Once the Holy Spirit arrived, the disciples began proclaiming Jesus as Lord and Savior. They put on display the power of His kingdom by performing miracles in His name. When confronted by earthly authorities, they reaffirmed their allegiance to Jesus and continued to declare the gospel with confidence that Jesus is mighty to save.



THE ETHIOPIAN TRAVELER

Philip faithfully shares the message of the gospel.



PETER VISITS CORNELIUS

The gospel goes to the Gentiles.

YOUR STORY

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

- ▶ **What 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?**

HIS STORY


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

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

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?


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?

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?

03

SESSION THREE

The Church Grew in Unity

SCRIPTURE

Acts 4:32–5:11

THE POINT

God calls us to show our unity with other believers.

CHARACTERS

- **Holy Spirit:** third person of the Trinity
- **Barnabas:** a Levite from Cyprus who sold his property and gave the proceeds to the Jerusalem church; later attended several missionary journeys as recorded in the Book of Acts
- **Ananias and Sapphira:** a married couple who demonstrated material and spiritual greed by lying to God and the Apostles about their financial contribution to the church

PLOT

Jesus modeled generous giving for us when He gave up heavenly riches to share His inheritance with all who trust in Him. In obedience to the Holy Spirit's prompting, the early Christians shared their resources and gave generously to those in need. But Ananias and Sapphira's deceptive action was a sin against the church and against the Spirit. The Spirit distinguishes between giving from a heart of generosity and giving that is greedy and deceitful.

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?
-
-

Acts 4:32-35

³² Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. ³³ And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold ³⁵ and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

Acts 4:36–5:2

³⁶ Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, ³⁷ sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. ... ¹ But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, ² and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet.



COMMUNITY OF GENEROSITY

The church displays unity and generosity.



*Bonus Session FROM HUMILIATION TO EXALTATION

Jesus' arrival is one of humility, obedience, and exaltation.

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.

99 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).



THE FIRST MARTYR

Stephen reflects Jesus in his life and his death.



THE ETHIOPIAN TRAVELER

Philip faithfully shares the message of the gospel.

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.

Acts 5:3-11

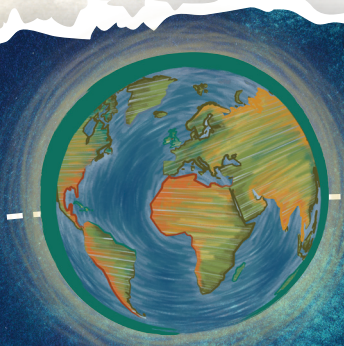
³ But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land?" ⁴ While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God."

⁵ When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. ⁶ The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. ⁷ After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." ⁹ But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." ¹⁰ Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

CHRIST CONNECTION

We live in an abundant world, as seen in the way God made the world and the way He pursues and provides for His people—whether it's a ram in a bush, a lamb at Passover, or manna in the desert. Of course, we also see His extravagant giving in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In this abundant world, giving somehow yields more than keeping. Jesus, our supreme example, became exalted above every name in giving His life away (Phil. 2:5-11).

In following Jesus, we're invited to do the same, not clinging to what we have but giving it away and becoming servants. We're invited to allow God to multiply it for His good and glory in His church and in the world around us. The Holy Spirit's presence in our lives should inspire such radical generosity, transforming our hearts to mirror Jesus' own so we give to those in need rather than clinging to what's "ours" by rights.



PETER VISITS CORNELIUS

The gospel goes to the Gentiles.



FROM PERSECUTOR TO PREACHER

The opposition leader, Paul, is forever changed when he encounters the risen Christ.

YOUR STORY

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

- ▶ **What 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?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

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.

- What are some ways dishonesty might creep into our giving?
- 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-glorifying, and self-seeking, then we must take it as our cue to turn to Jesus and ask for His Spirit to transform our hearts.

- 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?

04

SESSION FOUR

The First Martyr of the Church

SCRIPTURE

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

THE POINT

God calls us to make much of Jesus, even when we are persecuted.

CHARACTERS

- **Holy Spirit:** third person of the Trinity
- **Stephen:** recognized as the first martyr of the early church who was stoned to death because he preached the gospel and because of the good deeds he performed

PLOT

As the number of disciples grew, the Twelve set apart seven godly men to make sure the widows in the church would be cared for. One of the seven was a man named Stephen, who was recognized for his faith and being filled with the Spirit (Acts 6:5). Stephen performed signs and wonders among the people and showed the Sanhedrin how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament. When the leaders heard his testimony, they were outraged. They dragged him outside of the city and stoned him to death.

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.

Acts 6:8-15

⁸ And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹ Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen. ¹⁰ But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. ¹¹ Then they secretly instigated men who said, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." ¹² And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council, ¹³ and they set up false witnesses who said, "This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, ¹⁴ for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us." ¹⁵ And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

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



THE FIRST MARTYR
Stephen reflects Jesus in his life and his death.



THE ETHIOPIAN TRAVELER
Philip faithfully shares the message of the gospel.

Acts 7:44-53

44 "Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness, just as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it, according to the pattern that he had seen. 45 Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers. So it was until the days of David, 46 who found favor in the sight of God and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. 47 But it was Solomon who built a house for him. 48 Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says, 49 "'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest?' 50 Did not my hand make all these things?' 51 "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. 52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, 53 you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it."

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?

A common principle throughout the Scriptures is also at work here: God supplies all we need to obey and follow Him. He provided a ram to Abraham in order to spare Isaac; He gave manna to the nation of Israel as they wandered the desert; He gave us Jesus as an atoning sacrifice to pay for our sins; and here, in a moment of acute suffering and persecution, He gave the power and vision to sustain Stephen. When suffering and trials come into our lives, we can be confident God will supply the strength, support, and encouragement we need to remain faithful.



PETER VISITS CORNELIUS

The gospel goes to the Gentiles.



FROM PERSECUTOR TO PREACHER

The opposition leader, Paul, is forever changed when he encounters the risen Christ.

Acts 7:54-60

⁵⁴ Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. ⁵⁵ But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." ⁵⁷ But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. ⁵⁸ Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

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

99 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).

CHRIST CONNECTION

In his death as the first martyr, Stephen followed in the footsteps of his Savior. Both Jesus and Stephen were falsely accused and charged with blasphemy. Both Jesus and Stephen prayed for their executioners. Both Jesus and Stephen entrusted their spirits to God as they died. As a follower of Jesus Christ, Stephen reflected his Master in life and death.



EARLY MISSIONARIES

Paul and Barnabas set out to plant churches among the nations.



CHRIST ALONE

Salvation comes by grace alone through faith in Christ alone.

YOUR STORY

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

- ▶ **What are some 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?**

HIS STORY


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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

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?

05

SESSION FIVE

Philip the Evangelist

SCRIPTURE

Acts 8:26-40

THE POINT

God calls us to be faithful and obedient witnesses.

CHARACTERS

- **Holy Spirit:** third Person of the Trinity
- **Philip:** an evangelist and Christ-follower, well known for a Spirit-led encounter he had with an Ethiopian traveler

PLOT

After Stephen was martyred, the church began to experience extreme persecution and many of Jesus' followers fled throughout Judea and Samaria. Philip, a Christ-follower, first went to Samaria. However, God called him to take a road which traveled between Jerusalem and Gaza. Philip obeyed and God used him to teach Scripture to an Ethiopian man on that road.

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?**
-
-

Acts 8:26-29

26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place. 27 And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship 28 and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. 29 And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot."



THE ETHIOPIAN TRAVELER

Philip faithfully shares the message of the gospel.



PETER VISITS CORNELIUS

The gospel goes to the Gentiles.

Acts 8:30-35

³⁰ So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” ³¹ And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³² Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. ³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.” ³⁴ And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” ³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.

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.



FROM PERSECUTOR TO PREACHER

The opposition leader, Paul, is forever changed when he encounters the risen Christ.



EARLY MISSIONARIES

Paul and Barnabas set out to plant churches among the nations.

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.

Acts 8:36-40

³⁶ And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" ³⁸ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. ³⁹ And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

99 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.

CHRIST CONNECTION

The most ordinary of circumstances might be a divine appointment. A "chance encounter," as the world often sees it, might be a crucial moment in someone's life. There are no coincidences. Before we let this make us anxious or fearful of missing an important moment, let's not forget that we never experience these moments alone. The Holy Spirit accompanies us, guides us, and provides us with these opportunities. He empowers us for this work with boldness and with words, and He has already gone ahead of us to soften hearts and open ears to hear the good news of Jesus Christ. As we go on our way in the world, let us go and make disciples for Jesus.



CHRIST ALONE

Salvation comes by grace alone through faith in Christ alone.



SALVATION AVAILABLE TO ALL

The message of the gospel reaches people of different backgrounds.

YOUR STORY

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

- ▶ **What are some ways 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?**

HIS STORY


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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

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 hearts willing to respond obediently to the Spirit’s leading, no matter the risks?

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?

06

SESSION SIX

God Doesn't Show Favoritism

SCRIPTURE

Acts 10:1-16,34-48

THE POINT

God shows no favoritism but offers salvation to people of every ethnicity.

CHARACTERS

- **Holy Spirit:** third Person of the Trinity
- **Cornelius:** a Roman commander stationed at Caesarea; Peter was led to Cornelius to share the gospel with him and his family.

PLOT

As we saw in the previous story with Philip and the Ethiopian, God is continually searching to save and redeem what is lost, including those outside the Jewish heritage. As we continue through the Book of Acts, we're constantly reminded of God's graciousness as He calls people from all backgrounds and ethnicities to know and follow Him.

HIS STORY

GOD WORKED IN CORNELIUS' HEART

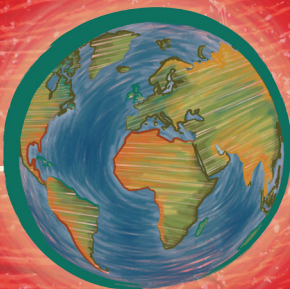
God had been cultivating a hunger for Himself in Cornelius. When He commended Cornelius' good heart and good work, He described his efforts as a "memorial offering" (v. 4), a worthy sacrifice before the Lord. Notice how God drew Cornelius into a deeper relationship with Himself. He didn't simply reveal 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.

Acts 10:1-8

¹ At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, ² a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. ³ About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius." ⁴ And he stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. ⁵ And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. ⁶ He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea." ⁷ When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him, ⁸ and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

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



PETER VISITS CORNELIUS

The gospel goes to the Gentiles.



FROM PERSECUTOR TO PREACHER

The opposition leader, Paul, is forever changed when he encounters the risen Christ.

Acts 10:9-16

⁹ The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. ¹⁰ And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance ¹¹ and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. ¹² In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. ¹³ And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." ¹⁴ But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." ¹⁵ And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common." ¹⁶ This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

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.



EARLY MISSIONARIES

Paul and Barnabas set out to plant churches among the nations.



CHRIST ALONE

Salvation comes by grace alone through faith in Christ alone.

Acts 10:34-48

³⁴ So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶ As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), ³⁷ you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹ And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, ⁴⁰ but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, ⁴¹ not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴² And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” ⁴⁴ While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. ⁴⁵ And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. ⁴⁶ For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, ⁴⁷ “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” ⁴⁸ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

CHRIST CONNECTION

God challenged Peter’s tradition of “clean” and “unclean” foods in order to further challenge his perspective of “clean” and “unclean” people. Peter learned God does not show favoritism. Rather, God calls His people to proclaim the message of Jesus’ death and resurrection to all people, to celebrate His work in their lives, and to welcome believers into His family, regardless of their ethnicity.

99 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.



SALVATION AVAILABLE TO ALL

The message of the gospel reaches people of different backgrounds.



ENGAGING CULTURE

Paul engages the surrounding culture with the message of Christ.

YOUR STORY

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

▶ **Why 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?**

HIS STORY


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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

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?


HEART



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?
- What are some specific ways this story should change our perspective?

SPECIAL SESSION

The First Christmas Carol

SCRIPTURE

Philippians 2:5-11

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

- **Jesus:** eternal Son of God; second Person of the Trinity

PLOT

This session takes us to Paul's letter to the Philippian church. This passage contains parts of an early church hymn, a carol relating to who Jesus is and what He did for us. May it shine brightly into your Christmas season, allowing you to see more of Christ and your need for Him during this time.

HIS STORY

Philippians 2:5-7a

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant.

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?**



** Bonus Session*
**FROM HUMILIATION
TO EXALTATION**
*Jesus' arrival is one of
humility, obedience,
and exaltation.*



THE FIRST MARTYR
*Stephen reflects Jesus in his
life and his death.*

Philippians 2:7b-8

7... being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

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?
-
-
-

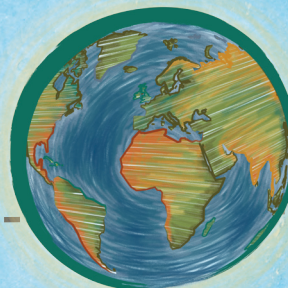
CHRIST'S EXALTATION: FROM THE CROSS TO THE THRONE

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).



THE ETHIOPIAN TRAVELER

Philip faithfully shares the message of the gospel.



PETER VISITS CORNELIUS

The gospel goes to the Gentiles.

Philippians 2:9-11

⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

CHRIST CONNECTION

The early Christians celebrated the significance of Christ coming to earth (incarnation), His death on the cross for our sins, and His exaltation as the Lord of the world.

99 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).



FROM PERSECUTOR TO PREACHER

The opposition leader, Paul, is forever changed when he encounters the risen Christ.



EARLY MISSIONARIES

Paul and Barnabas set out to plant churches among the nations.

YOUR STORY

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

▶ **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?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

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?



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?



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?

UNIT 2

The God Who Sends

ACTS

MEMORY VERSE

³⁰ The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

ACTS 17:30-31

07

SESSION SEVEN

Paul's Conversion

SCRIPTURE

Acts 9:1-25

THE POINT

Only Jesus can transform hearts and turn lives around for His glory.

CHARACTERS

- **Jesus:** eternal Son of God; second Person of the Trinity
- **Paul:** also known by his Hebrew name Saul; violent persecutor turned follower and apostle of Christ; known as the missionary to the Gentiles

PLOT

The conversion of the Apostle Paul (also known as Saul) is one of the most fascinating developments in the Book of Acts. God transformed the heart of the very man who collected the coats at Stephen's stoning—the same man who was adamant about eliminating the Christian church.

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.

Acts 9:1-9

¹ But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³ Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. ⁴ And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" ⁵ And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶ But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." ⁷ The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. ⁸ Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹ And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank..

- 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?



FROM PERSECUTOR TO PREACHER

The opposition leader, Paul, is forever changed when he encounters the risen Christ.



EARLY MISSIONARIES

Paul and Barnabas set out to plant churches among the nations.

Acts 9:10-19

¹⁰ Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." ¹¹ And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, ¹² and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." ¹³ But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem." ¹⁴ And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." ¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel." ¹⁶ For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." ¹⁷ So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; ¹⁹ and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus.

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?**



CHRIST ALONE

Salvation comes by grace alone through faith in Christ alone.



SALVATION AVAILABLE TO ALL

The message of the gospel reaches people of different backgrounds.

Acts 9:20-25

²⁰ And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God."²¹ And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?"²² But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.²³ When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him,²⁴ but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him,²⁵ but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

99 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).

CHRIST CONNECTION

The conversion and calling of Saul (Paul) is a demonstration of God's power to save. Through an encounter with the crucified and risen Jesus, this once-hardened persecutor of God's people began his journey to becoming the greatest missionary the world has ever known. Only the gospel can transform a public opponent of Christ into a fervent witness to His salvation.



ENGAGING CULTURE

Paul engages the surrounding culture with the message of Christ.



LIVING ON MISSION

Paul viewed his day-to-day work as an opportunity to spread the gospel.

YOUR STORY

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

- ▶ **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?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

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?
- How have other believers come alongside you like Ananias did for Saul?

08

SESSION EIGHT

The Church Sends Missionaries

SCRIPTURE

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.

CHARACTERS

- **Paul:** also known by his Hebrew name Saul; violent persecutor turned follower and apostle of Christ; known as the missionary to the Gentiles
- **Barnabas:** traveled with Paul during his first missionary journey

PLOT

Being on mission. Living missionally. Being mission-minded. These are all terms and phrases you may have heard within the church, which are just different ways of expressing the mandate all Christians have been given from Jesus. In essence, they refer to being missionaries—those called and sent by God to deliver His good news to those who are lost.

HIS STORY

Acts 13:1-3

¹ Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

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?**
-
-
-



EARLY MISSIONARIES

Paul and Barnabas set out to plant churches among the nations.



CHRIST ALONE

Salvation comes by grace alone through faith in Christ alone.

Acts 14:8-20

⁸ Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. ⁹ He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, ¹⁰ said in a loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet.” And he sprang up and began walking. ¹¹ And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” ¹² Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. ¹³ And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. ¹⁴ But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, ¹⁵ “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. ¹⁶ In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. ¹⁷ Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.” ¹⁸ Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them. ¹⁹ But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. ²⁰ But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe.

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?**



SALVATION AVAILABLE TO ALL
The message of the gospel reaches people of different backgrounds.



ENGAGING CULTURE
Paul engages the surrounding culture with the message of Christ.

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.

Acts 14:21-28

21 When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. 23 And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. 24 Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. 25 And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, 26 and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. 27 And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. 28 And they remained no little time with the disciples.

99 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.

CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus told His disciples the gates of hell would not prevail against His church. This image helps us see God's people as "on offense," taking the powerful and good news of Jesus to places of deep spiritual darkness. All the while, we have full confidence that Jesus will build His church.



LIVING ON MISSION

Paul viewed his day-to-day work as an opportunity to spread the gospel.



**Beginning in Spring 2018*

STANDING STRONG

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

YOUR STORY

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

- ▶ **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?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION



HEAD

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.

- 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?
- 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?

09

SESSION NINE

The Message of the Gospel

SCRIPTURE

Acts 15:1-21

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

- **Paul:** also known by his Hebrew name Saul; violent persecutor turned follower and apostle of Christ; known as the missionary to the Gentiles
- **Barnabas:** traveled with Paul during his first missionary journey

PLOT

Like today's church, the early church had some disputes and controversies. These were imperfect people, like us, who were trying to live out their new lives in Christ together. Our story today takes us into one of these disputes—one that touches on the very heart of the gospel—the issue of whether Jesus alone is enough to save.

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.

Acts 15:1-5

¹ But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” ² And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. ³ So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. ⁴ When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. ⁵ But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.”



CHRIST ALONE
Salvation comes by grace alone through faith in Christ alone.



SALVATION AVAILABLE TO ALL
The message of the gospel reaches people of different backgrounds.

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

Acts 15:6-21

⁶ The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. ⁷ And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. ⁸ And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, ⁹ and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? ¹¹ But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will." ¹² And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. ¹³ After they finished speaking, James replied, "Brothers, listen to me. ¹⁴ Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. ¹⁵ And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, ¹⁶ "After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, ¹⁷ that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things ¹⁸ known from of old." ¹⁹ Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, ²⁰ but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood. ²¹ For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues."



ENGAGING CULTURE

Paul engages the surrounding culture with the message of Christ.



LIVING ON MISSION

Paul viewed his day-to-day work as an opportunity to spread the gospel.

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.

99 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.

CHRIST CONNECTION

The Jerusalem Council met to resolve a dispute in the early church: Was faith in Christ sufficient for salvation and inclusion into God's family or was something else needed? The early church's response affirmed the sufficiency of faith in Jesus for salvation. Because of His finished work on the cross, Jesus alone is all we need to be saved.



**Beginning in Spring 2018*

STANDING STRONG

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



UNITY IN THE CROSS

Believers are united together in Christ.

YOUR STORY

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

- ▶ **Why 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?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

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?

10

SESSION TEN

The Gospel is for Everyone

SCRIPTURE

Acts 16:11-34

THE POINT

God uses different ways to communicate His gospel message to different kinds of people.

CHARACTERS

- **Paul:** also known by his Hebrew name Saul; violent persecutor turned follower and apostle of Christ; known as the missionary to the Gentiles

PLOT

God's intention has always been to take the gospel to the nations. The stories in this session show different ways God gets His message to different types of people, emphasizing once again His desire for all to know Him and be saved.

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.

Acts 16:11-15

¹¹ So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, ¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. ¹³ And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. ¹⁴ One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵ And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

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



SALVATION AVAILABLE TO ALL

The message of the gospel reaches people of different backgrounds.



ENGAGING CULTURE

Paul engages the surrounding culture with the message of Christ.

Acts 16:16-24

¹⁶ As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." ¹⁸ And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour. ¹⁹ But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. ²⁰ And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. ²¹ They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice." ²² The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. ²³ And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. ²⁴ Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

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.

99 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).



LIVING ON MISSION

Paul viewed his day-to-day work as an opportunity to spread the gospel.



*Beginning in Spring 2018

STANDING STRONG

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

Acts 16:25-34

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, ²⁶ and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. ²⁷ When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." ²⁹ And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹ And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." ³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³ And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. ³⁴ Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

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.

CHRIST CONNECTION

The gospel reaches different people in different ways. In Philippi, Paul and Silas saw converts from different social and economic backgrounds come to faith through their witness and testimony. Their message was the same for all: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).



UNITY IN THE CROSS

Believers are united together in Christ.



SHOWING MERCY

Those who know mercy show mercy to others.

YOUR STORY

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

- ▶ **What are some 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?**

HIS STORY


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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

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?

11

SESSION ELEVEN

The Gospel Meets Culture

SCRIPTURE

Acts 17:16-33

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

- **Paul:** also known by his Hebrew name Saul; violent persecutor turned follower and apostle of Christ; known as the missionary to the Gentiles

PLOT

This session is filled with what might be called “evangelistic strategy.” The Book of Acts contains several evangelistic encounters, in which the gospel message was preached and received (or rejected). However, this session’s encounter takes place in a culture not too different from our own in many respects.

HIS STORY

Acts 17:16

16 Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols.

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 idols our culture has? What can you do to help turn people toward Jesus?



ENGAGING CULTURE

Paul engages the surrounding culture with the message of Christ.



LIVING ON MISSION

Paul viewed his day-to-day work as an opportunity to spread the gospel.

Acts 17:17-31

¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, "What does this babbling wish to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹ And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?" ²⁰ For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean." ²¹ Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new. ²² So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. ²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, ²⁷ that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, ²⁸ for "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, "'For we are indeed his offspring.'" ²⁹ Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. ³⁰ The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

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



*Beginning in Spring 2018

STANDING STRONG

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



UNITY IN THE CROSS

Believers are united together in Christ.

Acts 17:32-33

32 Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this." 33 So Paul went out from their midst.

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.

99 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.

CHRIST CONNECTION

When Paul reasoned with the men in Athens, he found points in common between the biblical view of the world and the Greek culture. Then, he explained that all nations came from the first Adam and that all nations will be judged by the second Adam (Jesus Christ). His message focused on the risen Jesus and included a fervent call to repentance.



SHOWING MERCY

Those who know mercy show mercy to others.



A NEW IDENTITY

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

YOUR STORY

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

- ▶ **How does 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?**

HIS STORY


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

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

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.”¹ 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.”²

- 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.

- How do you begin spiritual conversations with your friends, neighbors, and family members who are far from God? Share some examples.
- How does a repentant life display the work of the gospel to a lost world? How do you live a life of repentance?

12

SESSION TWELVE

Intentional Living

SCRIPTURE

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

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

- **Paul:** also known by his Hebrew name Saul; violent persecutor turned follower and apostle of Christ; known as the missionary to the Gentiles
- **Aquila and Priscilla:** married couple who accompanied Paul to Ephesus and hosted a church in their home; instrumental in instructing Apollos in the Christian faith

PLOT

Our last session in the Book of Acts helps us to see that God wants us to view every moment and interaction of our lives as opportunities to spread the gospel and strengthen the church. Sharing the gospel is not something you add to your schedule or something that has to happen at church. Instead, sharing the gospel is something you can do while sitting in class, hanging out in the park, or by talking with someone while playing video games online.

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?

Acts 18:1-4

¹ After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ² And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them,³ and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. ⁴ And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.



LIVING ON MISSION

Paul viewed his day-to-day work as an opportunity to spread the gospel.



*Beginning in Spring 2018

STANDING STRONG

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

Acts 18:24-28

²⁴ Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures.

²⁵ He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John.

²⁶ He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. ²⁷ And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, ²⁸ for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

- 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?

99 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).



UNITY IN THE CROSS

Believers are united together in Christ.



SHOWING MERCY

Those who know mercy show mercy to others.

Acts 20:17-24

17 Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. 18 And when they came to him, he said to them: "You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, 19 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; 20 how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, 21 testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. 22 And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, 23 except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. 24 But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

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?**

CHRIST CONNECTION

On his third missionary journey, the apostle Paul saw whatever situation he was in as an opportunity for spreading the gospel and strengthening the church. His way of life reflected the selflessness and grace of Jesus, who taught us to tell the truth, help the weak, and give generously as an act of worship. Paul's endurance was a testimony to the supreme worth of Jesus Christ, the One who called him.



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



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

YOUR STORY

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

- ▶ **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?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

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.
- If someone asked you to be his or her mentor, what do you think you could offer to that person? What could you teach him or her?