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UNIT 1



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HOW TO USE

01 SESSION ONE
Standing Firm on the Gospel

SCRIPTURE
Galatians 2:11-21

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

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT
This session begins with a quick look into an intense conversation Paul and the apostle Peter. These two giants of the faith—both church—were having difficult conversation that was necessary to the issue.

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

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

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

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

- What are some ways churches today understand and practice Christianity differently? Are any of these differences reasons to divide? Why or why not?

PAUL REMINDED THEM OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH, NOT BY WORKS
The ground is level at the cross. Regardless of socioeconomic status or ethnicity, whether we are male or female or young or old, we all come to God through the same door: Jesus.

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

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

FAITHFUL LIVING COMES FROM BEING UNITED WITH CHRIST
In one of the most formative New Testament passages regarding the Christian life, Paul declared how his life of holiness flowed out of being united with Christ.

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

STANDING STRONG
Believers compromise when they doubt the gospel & its truth.

UNITY IN THE CROSS
Believers are united together in Christ.

SHOWING MERCY
Those who know mercy show mercy to others.

A NEW IDENTITY
All believers share a portion of their identity in Christ.

© 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

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

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

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

THE RESURRECTION IS ESSENTIAL
Christ's resurrection is the basis of our faith.

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

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

12 Session 1

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 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.

► **When have you been confronted by someone else or comforted someone else because of faith? How did it feel in the moment and how did it turn out in the end?**

► **How can we determine when a sin requires confrontation and when that confrontation should include other people?**

► **What are some examples of how the church can speak and act in ways that distort the gospel?**

► **How has this session challenged you personally when it comes to thinking about the fact that our lives either reflect or deflect the gospel?**

13 Session 1

YOUR MISSION

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

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

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

- How does the gospel propel you toward breaking down racial and ethnic barriers?
- What are some ways the church can actively promote gospel reconciliation among people groups?

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

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

14 Session 1

FROM THE EDITOR



Andy McLean

Editor

*The Gospel Project
for Students*

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

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

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

UNIT 1

The God Who Directs His People

GALATIANS, 1 CORINTHIANS, 1 TIMOTHY,
2 TIMOTHY, JAMES, 1 PETER, 1 JOHN

MEMORY VERSE

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

GALATIANS 2:19-21

01

SESSION ONE

Standing Firm on the Gospel

SCRIPTURE

Galatians 2:11-21

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

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

HIS STORY

PAUL CHALLENGED PETER'S BEHAVIOR

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

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

- **What are some ways churches today understand and practice Christianity differently? Are any of these differences reasons to divide? Why or why not?**

Galatians 2:11-14

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STANDING STRONG

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



UNITY IN THE CROSS

Believers are united together in Christ.

PAUL REMINDED THEM OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH, NOT BY WORKS

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

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

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FAITHFUL LIVING COMES FROM BEING UNITED WITH CHRIST

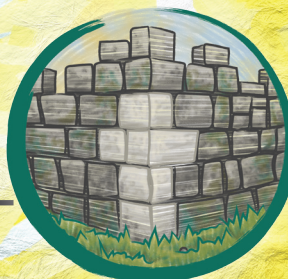
In one of the most formative New Testament passages regarding the Christian life, Paul declared how his life of holiness flowed out of being united with Christ.

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SHOWING MERCY

Those who know mercy show mercy to others.



A NEW IDENTITY

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

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**Bonus Session*

THE RESURRECTION IS ESSENTIAL

Christianity stands or falls with the resurrection.



LOVE IN ACTION

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

YOUR STORY

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- ▶ **What are some examples of how the church can speak and act in ways that distort the gospel?**
- ▶ **How has this session challenged you personally when it comes to thinking about the fact that our lives either reflect or deflect the gospel?**

HIS STORY


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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION


HEAD



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

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

02

SESSION TWO

The Gospel Calls for Unity

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 1:10-31

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

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

HIS STORY

CHRISTIANS ARE UNIFIED IN CHRIST

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

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

- How does the gospel help us maintain unity despite being diverse in so many other ways?

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

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



UNITY IN THE CROSS
Believers are united together in Christ.



SHOWING MERCY
Those who know mercy show mercy to others.

THE CROSS OF CHRIST IS THE WISDOM OF GOD

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

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

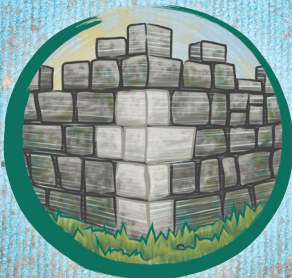
²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Body of Christ

The New Testament describes the church as the body of Christ. The church lives and operates as Christ's representative here on earth, with Christ as its head (Col. 1:18). This means the church is an extension of Christ's ministry, carrying out His work by fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20).

The picture of the church as the body of Christ also shows us the connection between individual Christians as members depend on each other for growth and sanctification (1 Cor. 12).



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



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

*Bonus Session

THERE IS NO ROOM FOR PERSONAL BRAGGING

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

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

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

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

CHRIST CONNECTION

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



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



LETTERS TO YOUNG PASTORS
Paul instructs Timothy and Titus.

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 the gospel help us maintain unity despite being diverse in so many other ways?**

- ▶ **What are some ways we draw attention to ourselves instead of Christ?**

- ▶ **Name a spiritual leader God has used to bring you closer to Him. What has this person taught you?**

- ▶ **How does the gospel allow you to see your gifts and talents and those of others in proper perspective?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION

HEAD



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

- Who are some heroes of the faith you look to personally?
- Why is it important that the author of Hebrews instructed us to examine the outcome of a leader's faith before imitating him or her?

HEART



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

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

HANDS



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

- Why is it incorrect to only think of church as a place we go to receive something?
- What are some areas where you can begin to give back through serving those around you this week?

03

SESSION THREE

The Gospel Calls for Mercy

SCRIPTURE

James 2:1-13

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

The half-brother of Jesus, the apostle James, opens our eyes to the fact that favoritism has no place among the people of God. In writing to a culture very much like our own, the people of James' day faced the temptation to favor one group of people over another. However, just like in the first century, our political stances and our cultural identities today do not mean much in light of eternity. We exist to give glory to Christ through bringing the gospel to all nations and we must be willing to cross social, political, cultural, and national lines to bring the freedom of Christ to every soul in bondage to sin and death.

HIS STORY

James 2:1-4

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

JAMES WARNED AGAINST FAVORITISM

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

- **When have you struggled with showing favoritism among your friends, classmates, or siblings? Explain.**

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



SHOWING MERCY

Those who know mercy show mercy to others.



A NEW IDENTITY

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

James 2:5-7

⁵ Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?

⁶ But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

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

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

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

- How do your goals, desires, and choices reflect God's will for your life rather than the world's?
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THE RESURRECTION IS ESSENTIAL

Christianity stands or falls with the resurrection.

*Bonus Session



LOVE IN ACTION

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

James 2:8-13

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

MERCY TRIUMPHS OVER JUDGMENT

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

- **When you find it difficult to extend mercy to others, what can you do to respond in grace rather than judgment?**

CHRIST CONNECTION

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

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

God Is Just

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



LETTERS TO YOUNG PASTORS

Paul instructs Timothy and Titus.



CO-HEIRS WITH CHRIST

Benefits of being adopted through 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.

- ▶ **In what ways do you think people around you can see Christ in their interactions with you?**
- ▶ **How do we sometimes side with the world and act and think according to its values instead of the gospel?**
- ▶ **Share about a time when you or someone you know made a decision marked with an eternal perspective which seemed like foolishness to the world.**
- ▶ **How has this session challenged you when it comes to not being judgmental or showing favoritism to others?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION

HEAD



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

- What are some ways your church values and advocates for diversity?
- Why is it important for Christians not to remain silent when it comes to fighting for diversity?

HEART



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

- Why can it be so difficult to treat others with mercy sometimes?
- Read the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18:21-35. What does this teach us about our need to show mercy to others?

HANDS



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

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

04

SESSION FOUR

The Gospel Calls for a New Identity

SCRIPTURE

1 Peter 2:1-17

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

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

HIS STORY

THE CHURCH AS LIVING STONES

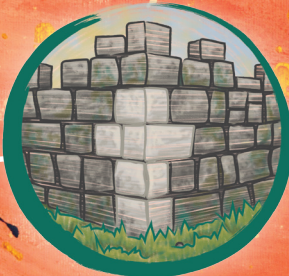
The first thing Peter said was for us to aggressively and urgently fight our sinful flesh. Yet all too often we find ourselves complacent, even comfortable, with our sinful patterns. Instead of waking up to the shock and terror of sin's presence, we cozy up to it and allow it to take over. Anger, selfishness,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

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

- How can we better see the battle over sin as a moment-by-moment, urgent war rather than an occasional activity?

1 Peter 2:1-8

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



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



*Bonus Session

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

1 Peter 2:9-10

⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

THE CHURCH AS A CHOSEN PEOPLE

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

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

People of God

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



LOVE IN ACTION

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



LETTERS TO YOUNG PASTORS

Paul instructs Timothy and Titus.

1 Peter 2:11-17

¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

¹³ Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. ¹⁵ For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. ¹⁶ Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. ¹⁷ Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

THE CHURCH AS A HEAVENLY PEOPLE

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

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

- Which of the three ways Peter taught us to live is most challenging for you?

CHRIST CONNECTION

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



CO-HEIRS WITH CHRIST

Benefits of being adopted through Christ.



FELLOWSHIP WITH BELIEVERS

Believers love one another as God has loved us.

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 would you describe your desire for God and His Word? How might focusing on God's goodness increase your affections for His Word?**
- ▶ **How do you best draw near to God when you are alone? With others?**
- ▶ **Which of Peter's descriptions of a Christian is most challenging for you to grasp? Why? Which connects with you most deeply? Why?**
- ▶ **In what ways can we live differently in the world without giving an appearance of superiority?**

HIS STORY


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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION


HEAD



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

- Why do you think God designed it that we should be stronger together rather than apart?
- What are some examples of when you have been strengthened in your faith as a result of being surrounded by God's people?


HEART



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

- How might greater effort focusing on eternity change our attitudes and actions each day?
- What difference will it make in our attitudes and actions if we love our place in the world more than we love our citizenship in God's kingdom?

HANDS



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

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

05

SESSION FIVE

The Gospel Calls for Acts of Love

SCRIPTURE

1 John 3:10-18

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

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

HIS STORY

1 John 3:10-13

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

GOD'S MESSAGE IS ONE OF LOVE

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

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

- What are some new qualities or characteristics we would expect to see in someone who has new life in Christ?
-
-



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



LETTERS TO YOUNG PASTORS
Paul instructs Timothy and Titus.

1 John 3:14-15

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

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

God Is Love

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

GOD'S PEOPLE ARE MARKED BY THEIR LOVE FOR OTHERS

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

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



CO-HEIRS WITH CHRIST

Benefits of being adopted through Christ.



FELLOWSHIP WITH BELIEVERS

Believers love one another as God has loved us.

1 John 3:16-18

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

THE EXAMPLE OF CHRISTIAN LOVE IS FOUND BY LOOKING TO JESUS

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

- **What are some practical ways you can show love to the people around you?**
-
-

CHRIST CONNECTION

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



LIFE IN THE SPIRIT
Works of the flesh versus the fruit of the Spirit



SPIRITUAL WARFARE
Standing firm with the armor of God

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 changes God has made in you since you became a Christian?**
- ▶ **When was a time when you were able to love someone and the only explanation for that love was the work of Christ within you?**
- ▶ **How does the reality of Christ's right standing with God, which has been given to you, change how you think about loving others?**
- ▶ **What are some practical ways you can love others according to the love you have been given?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION

HEAD



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

- How does the world's love differ and fall short of God's love?
- Why should love always seek to lead people to the source of love—God?

HEART



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

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

HANDS



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

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

06

SESSION SIX

The Gospel Calls for Obedience

SCRIPTURE

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

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

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

HIS STORY

PASTORS SHOULD SET AN EXAMPLE

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

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

- **What are some ways you personally could choose to follow the advice Paul gave to Timothy in these verses?**

1 Timothy 4:11-16

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



LETTERS TO YOUNG PASTORS
Paul instructs Timothy and Titus.



CO-HEIRS WITH CHRIST
Benefits of being adopted through Christ.

2 Timothy 4:1-8

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

PASTORS SHOULD FAITHFULLY TEACH THE WORD

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

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Inspiration of Scripture

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



FELLOWSHIP WITH BELIEVERS

Believers love one another as God has loved us.



LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

Works of the flesh versus the fruit of the Spirit

Titus 2:11-14

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

PASTORS POINT PEOPLE TO CHRIST

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

CHRIST CONNECTION

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



SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Standing firm with the armor of God



GENEROUS LIVING

A model and motivation for generosity

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 we can faithfully call on others to obey God's commands without sounding harsh or timid?**
- ▶ **How have you been corrected or encouraged by a pastor or leader that proved helpful?**
- ▶ **What are some of the theological convictions that are becoming more difficult for us to hold faithfully in our culture?**
- ▶ **How should remembering the gospel change the way we live each day in our homes, schools, neighborhoods, and beyond?**

HIS STORY


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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION


HEAD



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

- How can we relate Paul’s instructions to Timothy to our lives, even if we are not pastors?
- What are some ways we can encourage our pastor(s) and leaders as they lead out in practicing spiritual disciplines?


HEART



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

- What are some personal challenges in your daily life that distract you from pursuing godliness?
- How should Christ’s return and future redemption of all things frame how we live now?

HANDS



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

- What are some ways you can serve the pastors and leaders of your church in the coming weeks?
- How have the pastors and leaders in your church encouraged you to follow Christ?

SPECIAL SESSION

The Resurrection is Central to the Faith

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 15:1-28

THE POINT

Christianity stands or falls with the resurrection of Jesus.

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

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

HIS STORY

THE GOOD NEWS OF THE RESURRECTION

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

- **What are some things you're sometimes tempted to build your life around, other than Jesus?**

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

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



*Bonus Session

THE RESURRECTION IS ESSENTIAL

Christianity stands or falls with the resurrection.



LOVE IN ACTION

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

1 Corinthians 15:12-19

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

THE RESURRECTION IS BOTH HISTORIC AND PHYSICAL

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

JESUS' RESURRECTION POINTS TO OUR OWN

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

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



LETTERS TO YOUNG PASTORS

Paul instructs Timothy and Titus.



CO-HEIRS WITH CHRIST

Benefits of being adopted through Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

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

CHRIST CONNECTION

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

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Resurrection

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



FELLOWSHIP WITH BELIEVERS

Believers love one another as God has loved us.



LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

Works of the flesh versus the fruit of the Spirit

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 remembering the past, present, and future implications of the gospel help you live your life daily?**
- ▶ **How should Jesus being the firstfruits frame how we think, feel, and act in daily life?**
- ▶ **What impact does the future resurrection of the lost have on your life today?**
- ▶ **How can we speak into our culture to share the hope of the end of sin and death and completion of all things through Christ?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION

HEAD



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

- According to 1 Corinthians 15:3-5, what basic content of the gospel do we need to remember daily?
- How does remembering the power of the gospel give you hope in God’s transforming work in your life?

HEART



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

- How does your life demonstrate you are a genuine follower of Christ?
- How does our future resurrection give us strength to endure difficulties now?

HANDS



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

- How can we become more mindful of the people around us because of our belief in the resurrection?
- Who do you know needs to hear the good news that God will one day create all things new?

UNIT 2

The God Who Changes us

ROMANS, 2 CORINTHIANS, GALATIANS,
EPHESIANS, HEBREWS

MEMORY VERSE

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

GALATIANS 5:22-26

07

SESSION SEVEN

Once Slaves, Now Children

SCRIPTURE

Romans 8:12-39

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

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

HIS STORY

Romans 8:12-17

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

FROM SLAVES TO SONS

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

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

- **What does it mean not to live according to the flesh? Does that mean Christians should expect never to sin? Why or why not?**
-
-



CO-HEIRS WITH CHRIST

Benefits of being adopted through Christ.



FELLOWSHIP WITH BELIEVERS

Believers love one another as God has loved us.

Romans 8:18-30

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

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Adoption

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

FROM SUFFERING TO GLORY

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



LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

Works of the flesh versus the fruit of the Spirit



SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Standing firm with the armor of God

Romans 8:31-39

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

- What are some frustrations and pains you experience?
-
-

FROM DEATH TO LIFE

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

CHRIST CONNECTION

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



GENEROUS LIVING
A model and motivation
for generosity



THE HALL OF FAITH
Examples of living by faith

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 the assurance of your adoption into God's family influence the way you see yourself and live?**
- ▶ **How does it encourage you to know that Jesus is making all things new?**
- ▶ **How does God's plan for the world determine how we treat it now?**
- ▶ **What are you particularly worried about right now in your life? How does the gospel of God's love speak to that situation or anxiety?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION



HEAD

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

- Why do you think so many Christians think of their relationship with God in terms of "pay back?" Is this instinct all bad? Why or why not?
- Why is it important for us to maintain the gospel truth that the debt of sin is paid while not lapsing into the sin of thinking we don't need to obey God at all?



HEART

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

- How can the gospel cultivate in believers a profound humility and confidence at the same time?
- By ending this passage with poetic verse, Paul reflected how "life in Christ" is understood as worship. How does thinking about our daily lives this way transform our view of the Christian life?



HANDS

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

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

08

SESSION EIGHT

Once Apart, Now Together

SCRIPTURE

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

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

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

HIS STORY

1 Corinthians 1:9

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

WE NOW HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST

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

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

- Describe a time when you felt you had true community or fellowship. How does fellowship with Christ differ from that? How is it similar?



FELLOWSHIP WITH BELIEVERS
Believers love one another as God has loved us.



LIFE IN THE SPIRIT
Works of the flesh versus the fruit of the Spirit

Romans 12:9-18

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

WE NOW HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH OTHERS

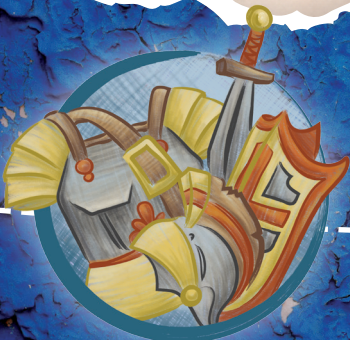
The primary “death” in the fall of mankind is the death of our relationship with God. Because of sin, we are separated from Him. Even Adam and Eve’s sin didn’t just separate them from God individually; it separated them from each other as well (Gen. 3:16). Sin influences all relationships.

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

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Union with Christ

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



SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Standing firm with the armor of God



GENEROUS LIVING

A model and motivation for generosity

Philippians 1:3-7

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

WE NOW HAVE A COMMON MISSION

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

- What are some ways you can begin looking at your small group, church, or youth group as a partnership in sharing the gospel?

CHRIST CONNECTION

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



THE HALL OF FAITH
Examples of living by faith



* Beginning Summer 2018

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

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.

- ▶ **Do you ever struggle with feelings of loneliness? Where and how do you seek encouragement to fight against it?**

- ▶ **Why do you think many people don't connect their own sense of loneliness to their lack of a relationship with God?**

- ▶ **Looking at the church of Rome as an example of a church centered on the gospel, what areas do you see today's churches struggling with the most? What is most difficult for you? Why?**

- ▶ **In a world full of broken relationships, how does it make you feel to know that God knows you completely and at the same time accepts you eternally?**

HIS STORY


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

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION


HEAD



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

- How does a right relationship with God create the opportunity to have meaningful relationships with other people?
- What are some daily habits and choices that lead us toward isolation from others? What are some changes we can make in those areas?


HEART



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

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

HANDS



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

- Why do you think it is sometimes difficult to move away from individualism and toward the mission of the church?
- What does the idea of being a partner on gospel mission mean for your daily routines—at school, home, and so on?

09

SESSION NINE

Once Works, Now Fruit

SCRIPTURE

Galatians 5:16-26

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

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

HIS STORY

Galatians 5:16-18

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

WALK BY THE SPIRIT, NOT BY THE FLESH

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

We follow the Spirit when we walk by the Spirit. When we walk by the Spirit, how we live will change. The desires of the flesh and walking by the Spirit take us in completely

opposite directions—so change is inevitable. So, let’s walk by the Spirit, since the Spirit has indwelled us and is bearing fruit in us that glorifies Christ.

- **Why do you think it’s so important to be still, pray, and read God’s Word in order to understand where the Holy Spirit is leading you?**



LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

Works of the flesh versus the fruit of the Spirit



SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Standing firm with the armor of God

Galatians 5:19-21

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

CAST OFF THE WORKS OF THE FLESH

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

- **What are some things that make it difficult to always follow the Spirit?**
-
-

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Sanctification

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



GENEROUS LIVING
A model and motivation for generosity



THE HALL OF FAITH
Examples of living by faith

Galatians 5:22-26

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

DISPLAY THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

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

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

- Which spiritual fruit do you find yourself growing more in? Which do you need to grow more in? How do you know?
-
-

CHRIST CONNECTION

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



* Beginning Summer 2018

THE PLOT AGAINST PAUL

Jews organized a conspiracy to kill Paul.



PAUL BEFORE EARTHLY KINGS

Paul testifies before earthly rulers.

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.

- ▶ **Do you agree that Christians tend to focus more on the sins of the world than the sins of the church? Why or why not?**

- ▶ **Why is it so much easier to see the sin in others than the sin in ourselves?**

- ▶ **If Jesus died, in part, to kill sin, what does our choice to consistently engage in sin say about our understanding of His death?**

- ▶ **What stood out to you in Paul's description of sins and the fruits of the Spirit in believers' lives?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION



HEAD

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

- Why do you think people tend to view their sins in a hierarchy?
- What other sins would you add to Paul's list?



HEART

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

- How can internal sins actually be more dangerous to us than external sins?
- What are some ways we can be on the lookout for internal sins?



HANDS

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

- What are some evidences you can point to in your life that indicate you are walking by the Spirit?
- What are some fruits of the Spirit you can be praying for this week in your own life?

10

SESSION TEN

Once Weak, Now Strong

SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 6:10-20

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

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

HIS STORY

Ephesians 6:10-12

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

IDENTIFYING OUR ENEMY

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

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



SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Standing firm with the armor of God



GENEROUS LIVING

A model and motivation for generosity

Ephesians 6:13-17

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

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Demons

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

STANDING FIRM IN BATTLE

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

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

- **Why do you think the shield that protects us from the devil is our faith and not our works?**

- **In what way does salvation serve as a helmet?**



THE HALL OF FAITH
Examples of living by faith



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

* Beginning Summer 2018

Ephesians 6:18-20

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

PREVAILING IN PRAYER

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

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

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Angels

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

CHRIST CONNECTION

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



PAUL BEFORE EARTHLY KINGS

Paul testifies before earthly rulers.



SHIPWRECKED

Paul courageously faces the storm.

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 can it be so tempting for us to take the fight to other people instead of the true enemy?**
- ▶ **When can we be tempted to take off our armor? Why?**
- ▶ **What are some ways you have found strength from the Lord to withstand the attacks of the enemy?**
- ▶ **Why is it important to remember that the armor of God corresponds to things only God has done or only God can provide? What would happen if we tried to protect ourselves with our own accomplishments or skills?**

HIS STORY

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YOUR STORY

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YOUR MISSION

HEAD



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

- Do you approach the Christian life with a wartime mindset? Why or why not?
- What are some daily habits we can put into place that will remind us about suiting up for spiritual battle?

HEART



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

- Why is it important to remember that our “good deeds” aren't what protect us, rather it's our faith in God?
- What are some other parts of God's armor that stand out to you? Why?

HANDS



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

- Paul mentioned the need for boldness two times. Why do you think boldness will serve us as we advance the gospel?
- What does your prayer life look like today? How can you strengthen it in the coming weeks?

11

SESSION ELEVEN

Once Greedy, Now Generous

SCRIPTURE

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

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

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

HIS STORY

THE CALL TO BE GENEROUS

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

- **Since generosity demonstrates the genuineness of our love, what does your generosity say about your love for others? About the state of your heart?**
-
-

- **What can you do to have a more godly approach to generosity in the future?**
-

2 Corinthians 8:1-9

¹ We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—⁵ and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. ⁶ Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. ⁷ But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also. ⁸ I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. ⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.



GENEROUS LIVING
A model and motivation for generosity



THE HALL OF FAITH
Examples of living by faith

2 Corinthians 8:10-15

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

GOD’S GIFTS ARE MEANT TO BE SHARED

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

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

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Moral Influence Theory of Atonement

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



THE PLOT AGAINST PAUL

Jews organized a conspiracy to kill Paul.

** Beginning Summer 2018*



PAUL BEFORE EARTHLY KINGS

Paul testifies before earthly rulers.

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

⁶ The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. ⁹ As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."

¹⁰ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.

¹² For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. ¹³ By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, ¹⁴ while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

GOD DESIRES CHEERFUL GENEROSITY

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

CHRIST CONNECTION

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



SHIPWRECKED

Paul courageously faces the storm.



JOY IN PRISON

The gospel advances in difficult circumstances.

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.

- ▶ **Even the materially poor can be graciously generous with others. How?**
- ▶ **Describe a time when someone was sacrificially generous with you or your family. How did it affect you?**
- ▶ **What are some ways you can expand your ability to be generous with others?**
- ▶ **How is our thankfulness for what we have connected to our level of generosity?**

HIS STORY

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YOUR STORY

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meets His.*

YOUR MISSION



HEAD

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

- What did Paul mean when he said generosity “completes” grace (2 Cor. 8:6)?
- Why would generosity be a good way to verify our love?



HEART

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

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



HANDS

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

- Will we receive a financial return on whatever we give financially (2 Cor. 9:6)? Why or why not?
- How should the promise that we will always have what we need impact our level of generosity to others (2 Cor. 9:8)?

12

SESSION TWELVE

Once Faithless, Now Faith-filled

SCRIPTURE

Hebrews 11:1-13–12:2

THE POINT

Jesus is the source and perfecter of our faith.

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

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

HIS STORY

Hebrews 11:1-2

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

DEFINING FAITH

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

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

- How does it affect you to know that even if you wanted to, you couldn't buy righteousness through your own works?
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THE HALL OF FAITH
Examples of living by faith



**Beginning Summer 2018*

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

Hebrews 11:3-13

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

EXAMPLES OF FAITH

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

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



PAUL BEFORE EARTHLY KINGS

Paul testifies before earthly rulers.



SHIPWRECKED

Paul courageously faces the storm.

Hebrews 12:1-2

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

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Faith

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

ENDURING IN FAITH

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

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

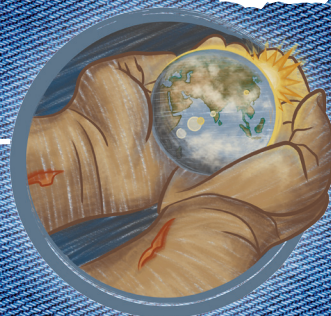
- **How does Jesus keeping His faith all the way to the cross encourage your faith?**

CHRIST CONNECTION

All the examples of faith in Scripture pale in comparison to the life of Jesus Christ, who endured death on the cross and the shame that went along with it, and He endured it for the joy over what would come. Because of His work, the faith and hope of all who have gone before us will be fulfilled when He returns. We have assurance of the reliability of God's promises.



JOY IN PRISON
The gospel advances in difficult circumstances.



CHRIST IS PREMINENT
Paul magnifies Christ in prison.

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 is it important we remember “justification by faith alone” in times of defeat and hardship?**
- ▶ **Why is it important we remember “justification by faith alone” in times of success and comfort?**
- ▶ **What are some ways that we can keep our eyes on Jesus? What distractions do you need to set aside to help you focus more on Jesus and His gospel?**
- ▶ **Why is it encouraging to know Jesus is not just the author of our faith but the perfecter, as well?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION



HEAD

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

- While it is important to connect faith and works, why is it also important to distinguish between the two?
- Why would the idea of justification by faith alone, not by works, be the idea upon which the church stands or falls?



HEART

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

- How might thinking of good works as worship shape the way you live each day?
- How can we hold on to the necessity of good works as part of the Christian life without believing we have to repay God or having a self-righteous attitude?



HANDS

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

- Where does the endurance to run the race come from?
- Who are some modern day examples of people living faithfully you can look up to? What qualities do they have that you would like to imitate in your own life?