

**"THE CHURCH ROOTS AND
REACH -**

LESSONS FROM ACTS"

PRINCIPLES FOR TODAY'S CHURCH

WEEK 5

**OCTOBER 7TH
AND OCTOBER 15TH**





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TRANSFORMATION THROUGH THE GOSPEL

God calls people to be His messengers, with the first step being a commitment to follow Christ.



UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

USE THE FOLLOWING PAGES TO PREPARE FOR YOUR GROUP TIME.

Saul intended to imprison the messengers of Jesus and thereby silence their message about Jesus. He secured documents of authority from the high priest in Jerusalem so that he could arrest believers living in Damascus and extradite them to Jerusalem (see Acts 9:1-2).

Saul's journey to Damascus was interrupted by a blinding light from heaven and the voice of Jesus asking Saul why he was persecuting Him. Jesus told him to get up and go into Damascus, where he would receive further instructions (see vv. 3-9).

At the same time, God commanded a believer named Ananias, who lived in Damascus, to go to the house where Saul was staying and pray for him. Understandably, Ananias was reluctant to do so because Saul's violent reputation was widely known. The Lord explained to Ananias that Saul was His chosen instrument to present the gospel message to Gentiles and Jews, as well as to kings (see vv. 10-16).

Ananias obeyed the Lord. He found Saul and prayed for him. Saul immediately regained his sight and was baptized. Soon after, Saul began testifying about Jesus in the synagogues and proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God and the Messiah (see vv. 17-22).

Some unbelieving Jews plotted to kill Saul and silence his witness, but his friends rescued him and escorted him out of Damascus at night. Saul returned to Jerusalem, where Barnabas befriended him and introduced him to the apostles. Another attempt by some Jews to kill Saul led the believers to escort him to Caesarea, where he was sent to Tarsus. Meanwhile, the church kept growing (see vv. 23-31).

"THE GOSPEL IS ONLY
GOOD NEWS IF IT
GETS THERE IN TIME."

—Carl F. H. Henry

► ACTS 9:3-9,15-20

Think About It

*Identify and answer
the questions Jesus
asked in this passage.*

3 As [Saul] traveled and was nearing Damascus, a light from heaven suddenly flashed around him. **4** Falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" **5** "Who are You, Lord?" he said. "I am Jesus, the One you are persecuting," He replied. **6** "But get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." **7** The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the sound but seeing no one. **8** Then Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing. So they took him by the hand and led him into Damascus. **9** He was unable to see for three days and did not eat or drink.

15 The Lord said to [Ananias], "Go! For this man is My chosen instrument to take My name to Gentiles, kings, and the Israelites.

16 I will show him how much he must suffer for My name!" **17** So Ananias left and entered the house. Then he placed his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road you were traveling, has sent me so that you can regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." **18** At once something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. **19** And after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul was with the disciples in Damascus for some days. **20** Immediately he began proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues: "He is the Son of God."



EXPLORE THE TEXT

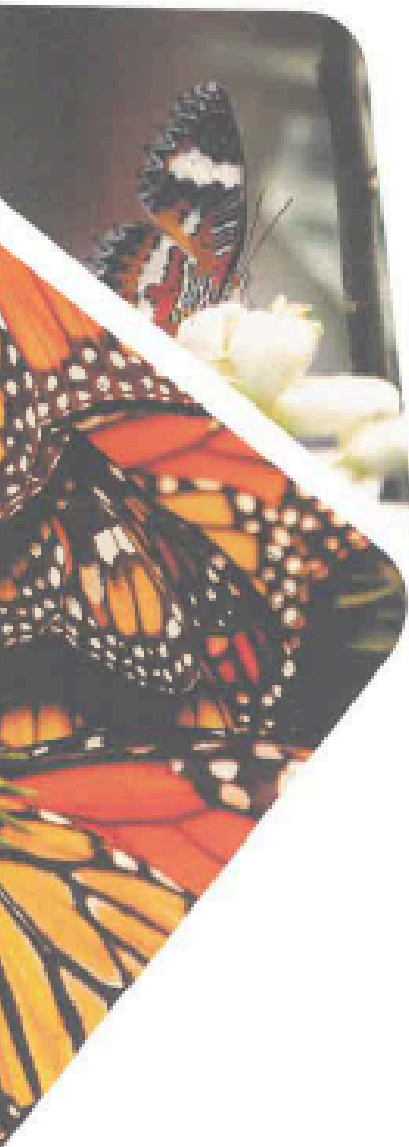
THE CONFRONTATION (Acts 9:3-6)

³As [Saul] traveled and was nearing Damascus, a light from heaven suddenly flashed around him. ⁴Falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” ⁵“Who are You, Lord?” he said. “I am Jesus, the One you are persecuting,” He replied. ⁶“But get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

Saul was headed to Damascus, armed with arrest warrants for followers of Christ. Somewhere near the city, however, he was confronted by the risen Christ. The phrase “a light from heaven” (v. 3) indicated a divine intrusion. Later, when recounting his conversion experience to a king, Saul described the intensity of this light as “brighter than the sun” (26:13).

The flash of light was so intense that it forced Saul to fall to the ground, and he heard a voice that called him by name. Saul was suddenly confronted with the fact that to persecute Jesus’ followers was to persecute the Son of God.

So far Saul was unsure of the speaker’s identity, although his use of the term *Lord* suggests that he knew the voice was from God. What a stunning—and piercing—revelation it must have been to hear the divine voice. The same Lord Jesus to whom the dying martyr Stephen had prayed as Saul watched (see 7:58-59) was indeed alive and reigning in heaven!



A dramatic change came over Saul. A few minutes before, he was a self-righteous persecutor of Jesus. Then the risen Lord arrested Saul's heart, mind, and soul with a piercing flash of light. Now blinded, humbled, and prostrate in the dust, Saul received his first order from the One he had persecuted. Saul had a new life that would come with a new purpose. A former ungodly rebel was being transformed into a godly revolutionary.

How would you characterize the confrontation between Jesus and Saul? In what other ways does Jesus confront people about their need for Him?

THE COMPANIONS (Acts 9:7-9)

⁷The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the sound but seeing no one. ⁸Then Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing. So they took him by the hand and led him into Damascus. ⁹He was unable to see for three days and did not eat or drink.

Saul's traveling companions were affected by the encounter but in a different way than Saul was. First, they were speechless. They couldn't find the words to explain what happened, although they too had been knocked to the ground by the light along with Saul (see 26:14). Second, the men heard the sound that occurred but didn't recognize it as the voice of Jesus speaking to Saul (see 22:9). Third, the men saw no one. They were unaware of the Lord's presence, because either the Lord prevented them from seeing Him or they were spiritually unable to see.

Saul's traveling companions were prohibited from hearing Jesus' message to Saul. What does this detail teach us about the way God relates to His people?

Bewildered, broken, and powerless, Saul slowly rose to his feet in obedience to Jesus. The veil over his heart concerning Christ had been lifted, but his physical sight was yet to be restored. He could open his eyes, but he couldn't see anything. He stood helpless and dependent, no longer the proud, self-righteous Pharisee but rather the humbled follower of Christ who needed his companions to lead him by the hand into the city of Damascus.

Saul remained sightless for three days as he stayed in Damascus. He was also either fasting in repentance and meditation or was simply uninterested in food and drink in light of the dramatic changes in his life.

KEY DOCTRINE

Election

Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners.

THE COMMISSION (*Acts 9:15-20*)

¹⁵The Lord said to [Ananias], “Go! For this man is My chosen instrument to take My name to Gentiles, kings, and the Israelites. ¹⁶I will show him how much he must suffer for My name!” ¹⁷So Ananias left and entered the house. Then he placed his hands on him and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road you were traveling, has sent me so that you can regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Many Christians quietly but effectively serve the Lord behind the scenes. Their names seldom appear in the news or in history books, but their obedience to God in crucial situations often shapes the future in remarkable ways. Such a believer was Ananias of Damascus, whom the Lord sent to instruct and baptize Saul. Ananias had heard about Saul's hostile activities against believers in Jerusalem and knew that Saul had come to Damascus with the same intent. He was hesitant to go and find Saul (see vv. 13-14), but the Lord explained that Saul was His chosen instrument to carry His message to “Gentiles, kings, and the Israelites” (v. 15).

Saul was well suited for the lifework God chose for him. He could communicate in Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. He was trained in the Old Testament Scriptures, was a citizen of the Roman Empire, and was able to support himself as a tent maker. But most significant of all, he had encountered the risen Lord and had been transformed.

BIBLE SKILL

Compare Bible verses to understand the writer's thoughts.

Compare Romans 1:1-5; 9:23-24; Galatians 1:15-16; and Ephesians 3:7-13. What do these passages reveal about Saul's (Paul's) understanding of his calling from God? What do these passages reveal about God and His work in the world? Summarize what you think Saul (Paul) understood that it meant for him to be a chosen instrument.

Saul's selection and suitability for the gospel mission also meant that Saul must suffer on behalf of Jesus. Those who walk closely in Jesus' steps can't avoid the burden of the cross or the pain of sacrifice. The verb "must suffer" (v 16) indicates a divine necessity. Saul would experience the agony and affliction of discipleship, yet he would never grow ashamed of his devotion to Christ (see 2 Tim. 1:12).

Ananias arrived at the place where Saul was staying. The Lord had previously given Ananias the exact house and address (see Acts 9:11). Moreover, in a vision Saul had already learned of the man's name who would come and restore his sight (see v. 12). How wonderful it must have felt when both men realized the Lord had been working in them to bring about His holy purpose!

Notice that Ananias addressed Saul tenderly as Brother Saul (see v. 17). Jews used the term *brother* as a word of courteous address; however, Christians came to use the term to indicate a spiritual relationship in the family of faith. Likewise, Ananias's placing his hands on Saul demonstrated the bond the Holy Spirit created in the family of God. Ananias had come to Saul in the Lord's authority to restore Saul's sight and to pray so that Saul could be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Bible students sometimes debate the precise time when Saul was saved. Some hold that it happened on the Damascus road. Others suggest that it occurred during the three-day period in Damascus (see vv. 9-11). Still others propose that Saul's conversion happened during Ananias's visit. What we can know with absolute certainty is that Jesus saved and changed Saul, forgiving him of his sin. The Holy Spirit filled Saul and began to prepare him for the great work of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth.

How important is it for a believer to be able to pinpoint the precise time of his or her conversion? Explain.

¹⁸At once something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. ¹⁹And after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul was with the disciples in Damascus for some days. ²⁰Immediately he began proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues: "He is the Son of God."

As Ananias conveyed Jesus' promise, Saul regained his sight. The Greek term for *scales* was used to refer to anything from an onion peel to fish scales to snowflakes. The text simply says that what fell off Saul's eyes resembled scales.

Next Saul got up and was baptized. Saul's baptism was an act of obedience and Saul's public profession of being a follower of Jesus Christ. Saul's baptism signaled the end of his fasting. He regained his strength to go along with his restored eyesight. Equally important, he gained spiritual strength by meeting for several days with the disciples in Damascus.

No doubt many of the Jews who heard Saul proclaim Jesus wondered how a fervent-hearted Pharisee's message could change so radically. Saul preached Jesus as the Son of God, a title that affirmed Jesus as Deity and as the long-awaited Messiah of Israel.

Why was it significant that Saul immediately began to proclaim Jesus? Why do new believers often display passion for telling others about Jesus?



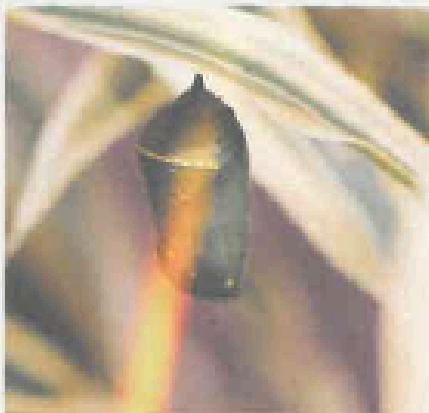
➤ OBEY THE TEXT

God uses all kinds of people in kingdom work and does so in different ways. God calls specific individuals to focus on mission work. All believers can share with others who Jesus is.

Share your conversion experience with someone in your group. In what ways did your conversion differ from Saul's conversion? In what ways was it similar?

Ask God to help you understand your role in His mission. Thank Him for ways He has used you in the past. Commit to be available to Him in the future. Ask God to call people in your group to share the gospel with people who have yet to hear His truth.

Record your understanding of who Jesus is. Name one person with whom you can share what you have recorded. Ask God to help you share with this person in the next week.



MEMORIZE

"Immediately he began proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues: 'He is the Son of God.'" Acts 9:20

USE THE SPACE PROVIDED TO MAKE OBSERVATIONS AND RECORD PRAYER REQUESTS DURING THE GROUP EXPERIENCE FOR THIS SESSION.

MY THOUGHTS

Record insights and questions from the group experience.

MY RESPONSE

Note specific ways you'll put into practice the truth explored this week.

MY PRAYERS

List specific prayer needs and answers to remember this week.



**"THE CHURCH ROOTS AND
REACH -**

LESSONS FROM ACTS"

PRINCIPLES FOR TODAY'S CHURCH

WEEK 6

**OCTOBER 14TH
AND OCTOBER 22ND**





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SALVATION IS FOR EVERYONE

The gospel message is meant for every person
of every background, life experience, and heritage.



➤ UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

USE THE FOLLOWING PAGES TO PREPARE FOR YOUR GROUP TIME.

Luke continued to follow the apostle Peter's evangelistic work. Having seen widespread response to the gospel in Joppa following the raising of Tabitha from the dead, Peter remained there. Peter would soon receive a visit from three men of a nearby city; their urgent request would bring about a transformation in Peter's attitude toward Gentiles.

Luke first described the situation of Cornelius, a devoutly religious Gentile centurion living in Caesarea. In a time of prayer, Cornelius had a vision in which an angel of God instructed him to send to Joppa for Peter. Cornelius sent two servants and a soldier to ask the apostle to come to Caesarea (see Acts 10:1-8).

Meanwhile, Peter also received a vision during a time of prayer. The meaning of his vision became clear to Peter as he met the three visitors from Caesarea, went with them to Cornelius's house, and heard Cornelius's testimony about the angel's instructions to send for the apostle. Peter was to explain the gospel to them (see vv. 17-43). As Peter preached, the Holy Spirit came on Cornelius and the others gathered in his house. Peter then instructed the new believers to be baptized (see vv. 44-48).

Luke then reported Peter's return to Jerusalem. There Peter was confronted by some Jewish Christians who were offended that he had not only visited but had also eaten with Gentiles. Peter explained everything that had led to his stay with Cornelius and emphasized that the Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit just as Jewish converts had. This was a breakthrough revelation for the early church (11:1-18).

In 11:19-12:25 Luke described how despite opposition, the gospel spread from Jerusalem into places such as Antioch of Syria. The church in Antioch would play a key role both in the life of Saul of Tarsus and in the spread of the gospel to all nations. It was also in Antioch that followers of Jesus first came to be known as Christians.

"IF YOU TAKE MISSIONS
OUT OF THE BIBLE, YOU
WON'T HAVE ANYTHING
LEFT BUT THE COVERS."

—Nina Gunter



EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE VISIONS (Acts 10:9-16)

⁹The next day, as they were traveling and nearing the city, Peter went up to pray on the housetop about noon. ¹⁰Then he became hungry and wanted to eat, but while they were preparing something, he went into a visionary state.

The phrase “the next day” (v. 9) refers to the day after Cornelius, the Roman governor, had his vision in Caesarea and sent three representatives to Joppa to find Peter (see vv. 3-8). Caesarea, located on the Mediterranean coast about 35 miles north of Joppa, served as the capital of Judea. Its population was a mix of Jews and Gentiles, but the two groups didn’t always live together peacefully. Cornelius, however, maintained a good relationship with the Jewish population and may have been recognized by the Jews as a God fearer (see v. 2).

Meanwhile, Peter was still a guest in the home of Simon the tanner in Joppa (see 9:43). Around noontime Peter went up to the roof of the house to pray. Thus, God prepared the hearts of both Cornelius and Peter while they were praying.

The fact that Peter became hungry prepares readers for the vision to come. Peter was about to learn that Jews were not the only people who hungered to know God. More important, he was about to learn that the gospel is life-giving “food” bestowed by God on Jews and Gentiles alike.

➤ ACTS 10:9-16,43-48

Think About It

Notice Peter's reaction to the vision. How would you characterize his reaction?

What does the question Peter asked in verse 47 indicate about his further response to the vision?

9 The next day, as they were traveling and nearing the city, Peter went up to pray on the housetop about noon. **10** Then he became hungry and wanted to eat, but while they were preparing something, he went into a visionary state. **11** He saw heaven opened and an object that resembled a large sheet coming down, being lowered by its four corners to the earth. **12** In it were all the four-footed animals and reptiles of the earth, and the birds of the sky. **13** Then a voice said to him, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat!" **14** "No, Lord!" Peter said. "For I have never eaten anything common and ritually unclean!" **15** Again, a second time, a voice said to him, "What God has made clean, you must not call common." **16** This happened three times, and then the object was taken up into heaven.

43 "All the prophets testify about Him that through His name everyone who believes in Him will receive forgiveness of sins." **44** While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came down on all those who heard the message. **45** The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. **46** For they heard them speaking in other languages and declaring the greatness of God. Then Peter responded, **47** "Can anyone withhold water and prevent these people from being baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" **48** And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay for a few days.

Think of other examples in Scripture when people said no to God. How do those examples compare with Peter's response?

Repetition is a valuable teaching-learning method. Peter experienced either part or all of the vision three times (see v. 16). After the second time, the voice delivered the gospel principle that would shatter Peter's "wall" of tradition: "What God has made clean, you must not call common" (v. 15). Peter would soon apply the principle in real life, proclaiming at Cornelius's house that Jesus' atoning death on the cross makes clean (saves) anyone who repents and believes in Him, whether Jew or Gentile.

In what way could the early church have been affected if God had allowed Peter to dismiss the heavenly vision?

KEY DOCTRINE *Salvation*

Salvation is freely offered to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

THE DECLARATION (Acts 10:43)

"All the prophets testify about Him that through His name everyone who believes in Him will receive forgiveness of sins."

At this point we have fast-forwarded through the narrative that describes the arrival of Cornelius's messengers in Joppa (see v. 17), their urgent invitation for Peter to come to Caesarea and preach the gospel at Cornelius's house (see v. 22), Peter's agreement to go (see v. 23), and the apostle's message to the people gathered at Cornelius's house (see vv. 34-43). Verse 43 is a key statement in Peter's message; it prompted a movement of the Holy Spirit among the hearers.

With the phrase "all the prophets" (v. 43) Peter declared that the prior testimony of the Old Testament foretold the truth about Jesus. The prophet Isaiah declared that the Messiah would bear the sin of humanity and "justify many" (Isa. 53:11). The prophet Zechariah asserted that the Messiah would release a cleansing spiritual fountain to wash away impurities (see Zech. 13:1). The prophet Malachi predicted that the Messiah would bring healing in His wings to all who revered His name (see Mal. 4:2).

BIBLE SKILL

Read related passages that reinforce one another.

Peter continued to learn the significance of his vision. Read Galatians 2:11-16. What does this event reveal about the difficulty of overcoming social barriers? How did God use Paul to reinforce to Peter (Cephas) the truth of Peter's vision in Acts 10:9-16? What does this exchange between Paul and Peter teach us about the need to be reminded of truths that God has revealed to us in the past?

What other Bible passages can you identify that support Peter's declaration of salvation for all who repent and believe in Jesus?

THE SIGN (Acts 10:44-46a)

“While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came down on all those who heard the message. ⁴⁵The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. ⁴⁶For they heard them speaking in other languages and declaring the greatness of God.

The Holy Spirit's ability to break through to listeners is always greater than a gospel witness's ability to communicate. Still, the Spirit used Peter's words as fuel to ignite a fire in the hearers' hearts. The Spirit descended on Cornelius and the others while Peter was still speaking. Their hearts were ready and open to believe in Jesus. The phrase “circumcised believers” (v. 45) refers to the Jewish Christians from Joppa who went with Peter to Caesarea (see v. 23). They were astounded when they saw the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Gentiles. They witnessed clear evidence that the gospel welcomes all people into God's family by faith in Jesus Christ.

There are similarities between this event in Caesarea and the outpouring of the Spirit in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. Both events were solely initiated by the Holy Spirit to magnify Jesus as God's Son. At both events the Spirit came down on all who believed. Likewise, at both events the Spirit gave believers the ability to speak in other languages than their own in order to declare the greatness of God. God confirmed the Gentiles' salvation by faith in Christ in the same way that He confirmed the salvation of Jewish believers on the Day of Pentecost (see 2:1-4). This was a pivotal event in the movement of the gospel toward global impact as the Holy Spirit opened the door of hope for every tribe, race, and nation.

THE ACCEPTANCE (Acts 10:46b-48)

⁴⁶Then Peter responded, ⁴⁷“Can anyone withhold water and prevent these people from being baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” ⁴⁸And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay for a few days.

If the Holy Spirit gave to the Gentiles the same indwelling blessing that He gave to the Jews, then it meant God in Christ had purified Cornelius and his household and had made them pleasing in His sight. For Peter, therefore, the next step for these new believers was clear. Peter thus directed Cornelius and the other Gentiles to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Baptism is a public demonstration of submission to Jesus as Savior and Lord. Immersion into water has no saving power in and of itself. That's why the new converts were to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. He is the One who saves and cleanses His followers from their sins.

Peter's command was met by an enthusiastic reception. Moreover, these new believers displayed a spiritual hunger to hear even more about Jesus and their new life in Him. Perhaps they also thought about other friends and neighbors who needed to hear the gospel. In any case they urged Peter to stay in Caesarea for a few days.

How would you describe the significance of the Gentile believers' baptism to the Jewish believers present? To other Gentiles present?



➤ OBEY THE TEXT

Salvation is offered to all, regardless of heritage or race. Salvation comes through faith in Jesus alone. Believers can be advocates in the local church for new believers from different backgrounds.

What social barriers cause you the greatest difficulties? How do those barriers affect your ability or willingness to witness to people in those groups? What actions can you take to remove those barriers?

Consider your salvation. What evidence could you point to that demonstrates that you're trusting Christ alone for your salvation?

What activities will you and your Bible-study group initiate to be more inclusive of people outside your church? Identify barriers that need to be torn down and initiate a plan for addressing those barriers.



MEMORIZE

"Peter began to speak: 'Now I really understand that God doesn't show favoritism.'" Acts 10:34

USE THE SPACE PROVIDED TO MAKE OBSERVATIONS AND RECORD PRAYER REQUESTS DURING THE GROUP EXPERIENCE FOR THIS SESSION.

MY THOUGHTS

Record insights and questions from the group experience.

MY RESPONSE

Note specific ways you'll put into practice the truth explored this week.

MY PRAYERS

List specific prayer needs and answers to remember this week.

