theGOSPELPROJECT
FOR STUDENTS

THE GOSPEL PROJECT FOR STUDENTS
DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE

VOLUME 10

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

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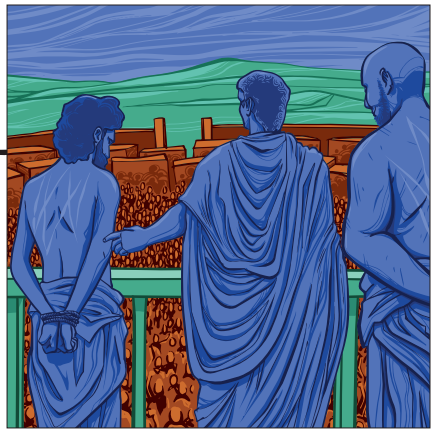
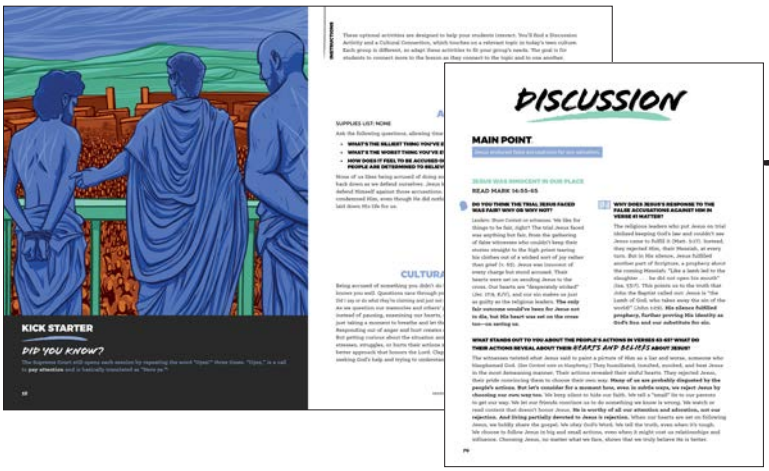
INTRO



The opening page of each session contains the focal passages of Scripture for that lesson. Take a moment to read through these passages, as well as the surrounding passages, before your group discussion begins.



DISCUSSION

Intended for group and personal use, this section contains the main point of the session, questions to interact with as a group, and the key components found in the Leader Guide—Christ Connection, Theology Connection, and Cultural Connection.

The **Christ Connection** specifically points out how the Scripture passage for that session points to Jesus, connecting the dots and helping you understand how the books of the Bible fit together.

The **Theology Connection** contains an important biblical doctrine for each lesson. Each of these doctrines directly relates to the Bible study material. Knowing these doctrines will help you be more grounded in what Christianity teaches and celebrates and better equipped to explain to others what you actually believe.

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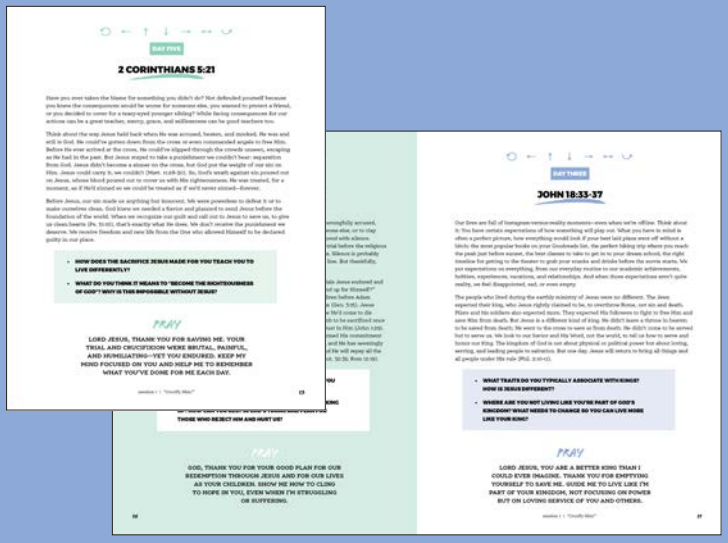
DAILY DEVOTIONS

In addition to the group portions of this study, the **Daily Discipleship Guide** also includes five days of devotions following each session. As we journey through the storyline of Scripture over the course of three years, we won't have time to cover some sections of the Bible. These devotions will help with that, filling in the gaps in the biblical storyline and allowing more opportunities to cover biblical themes and insights not discussed during group time. These devotions help you know how to read and interpret the Bible for yourself. Symbols for the Seven Arrows reading method are provided at the beginning of each week's devotions as a reminder of common questions to ask about Scripture as you read each day. The devotion pages are perforated so that you can take them home with you.



SEVEN ARROWS

OF BIBLE READING

What does this passage say?

What did this passage mean to its original audience?

What does this passage tell us about God?

What does this passage tell us about man?

What does this passage demand of me?

How does this passage change the way I relate to people?

How does this passage prompt me to pray?

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VOLUME 10 | ESV

THE SON HAS RISEN



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28.1 "CRUCIFY HIM!"

28.2 HE BREATHED HIS LAST

28.3 GO AND TELL

28.4 PEACE BE WITH YOU

29.1 I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS

29.2 A VIOLENT RUSHING WIND

29.3 HIS NAME

29.4 AT DAYBREAK

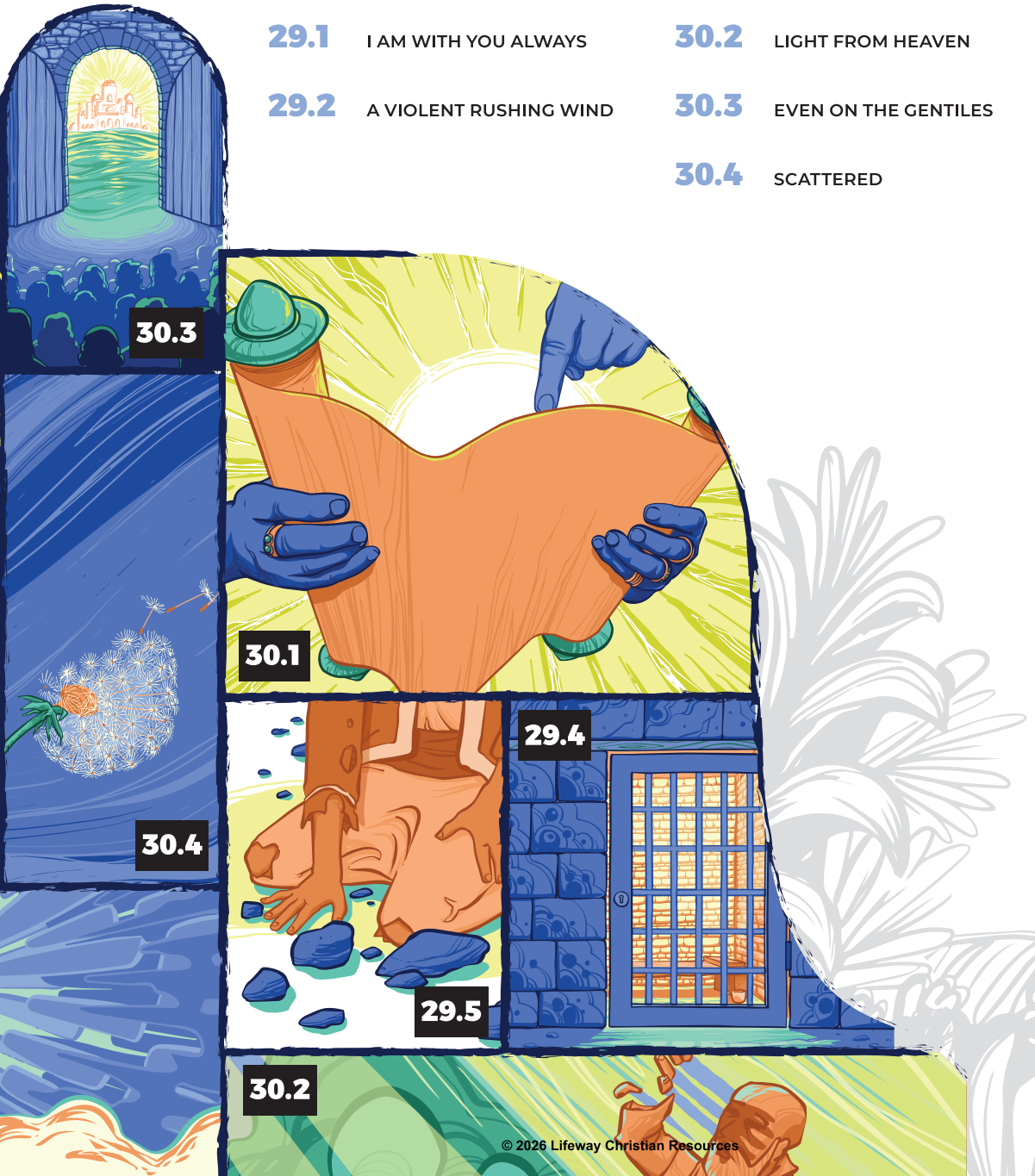
29.5 THE FACE OF AN ANGEL

30.1 UNLESS SOMEONE GUIDES ME

30.2 LIGHT FROM HEAVEN

30.3 EVEN ON THE GENTILES

30.4 SCATTERED



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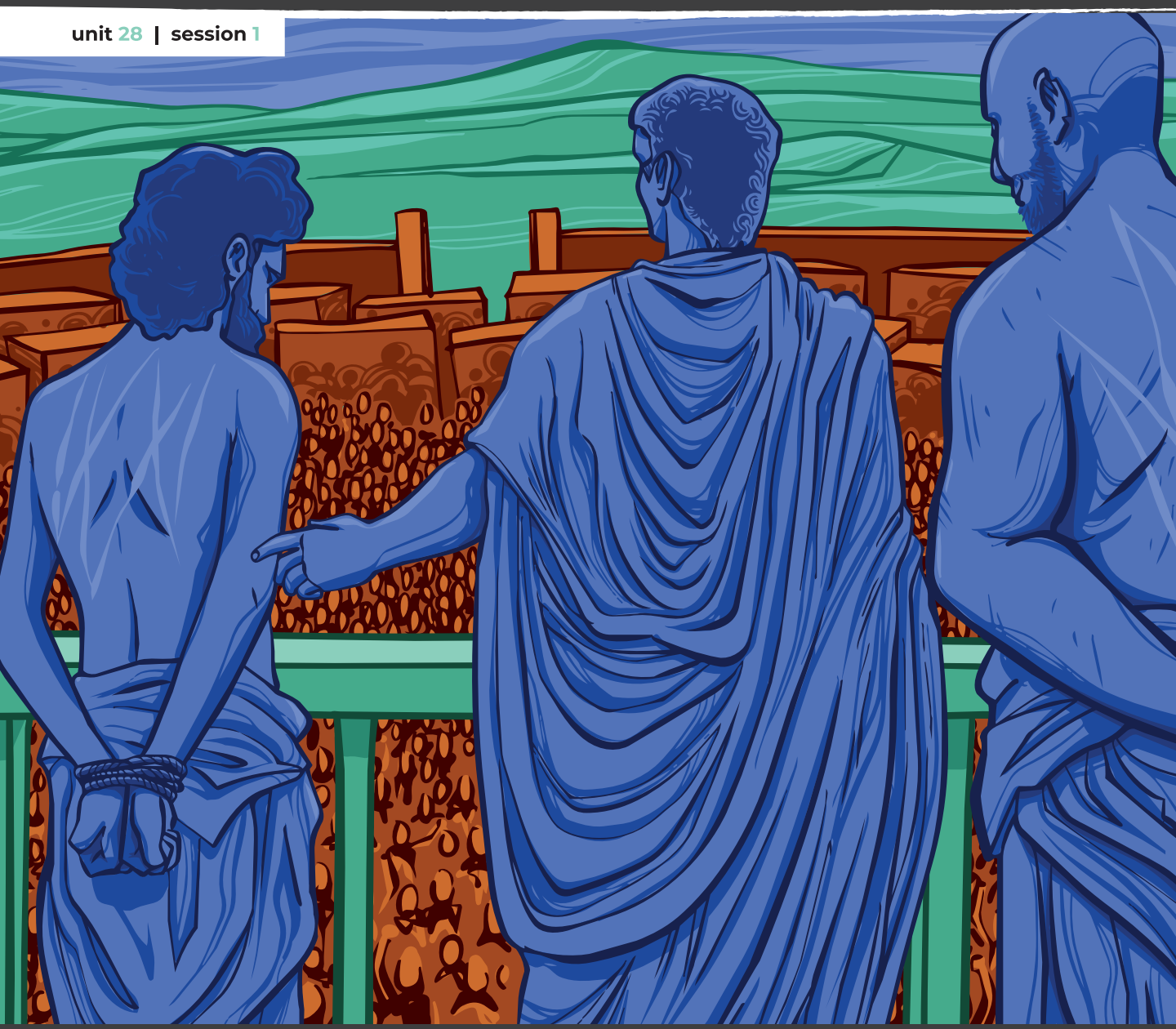
"CRUCIFY *HIM!*"

unit 28 | session 1



CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus was condemned to die although He did no wrong. He became the perfect substitute for us, bearing our sins on the cross to provide forgiveness. All who have trusted in Christ are no longer condemned but have been declared righteous by God.

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TRADING PLACES

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

Mark 14–15

JESUS WAS INNOCENT IN OUR PLACE

MARK 14:55-65

55 Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put
him to death, but they found none. 56 For many bore false witness against him, but their
testimony did not agree. 57 And some stood up and bore false witness against him, saying, 58
"We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will
build another, not made with hands.'" 59 Yet even about this their testimony did not agree.
60 And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer to make?
What is it that these men testify against you?" 61 But he remained silent and made no answer.
Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" 62 And Jesus
said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming
with the clouds of heaven." 63 And the high priest tore his garments and said, "What further
witnesses do we need? 64 You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?" And they all
condemned him as deserving death. 65 And some began to spit on him and to cover his face
and to strike him, saying to him, "Prophesy!" And the guards received him with blows..

JESUS WAS CONDEMNED IN OUR PLACE

MARK 15:6-15

6 Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked. 7 And among
the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called
Barabbas. 8 And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them.
9 And he answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?"
10 For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. 11 But
the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. 12 And
Pilate again said to them, "Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?"
13 And they cried out again, "Crucify him." 14 And Pilate said to them, "Why? What evil has he
done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him." 15 So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd,
released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

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MAIN POINT.

Jesus endured false accusations for our salvation.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

CHRIST AS SUBSTITUTE

At the heart of the atonement is Jesus Christ substituting Himself for sinners as He died on the cross. This truth is seen against the backdrop of the Old Testament sacrificial system, which provided a picture of humanity's need for an innocent sacrifice to cover sin and remove guilt. Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself human nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with humankind yet without sin. He honored God's law with His personal obedience, and in His substitutionary death on the cross, He made a way for humans to be redeemed from sin.

DISCUSSION

JESUS WAS INNOCENT IN OUR PLACE

MARK 14:55-65

- **Do you think the trial Jesus faced was fair? Why or why not?**
- **Why does Jesus's response to the false accusations against Him in verse 61 matter?**
- **What stands out to you about the people's actions in verses 63-65? What do their actions reveal about their hearts and beliefs about Jesus?**

JESUS WAS CONDEMNED IN OUR PLACE

MARK 15:6-15

- **Why would Pilate try to set Jesus free? Does the crowd's choice surprise you? Why or why not?**
- **What do you think was the motive behind the chief priests' desire to condemn Jesus? How does that same motive show up in our lives?**
- **How does Jesus taking the place of Barabbas help us understand substitutionary atonement?**

HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND TO JESUS TAKING OUR PLACE? WHAT KEEPS YOU FROM RESPONDING THIS WAY?

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Being accused of something you didn't do hurts, especially when it comes from someone who knows you well. Questions race through your mind: *What did I do to make them want to lie about me? Did I say or do what they're claiming and just not remember? Why didn't they come to me first to talk things out?* As we question our memories and others' perception of us, we easily get defensive or clap back instead of pausing, examining our hearts, and seeing if there's any truth to the accusation—or just taking a moment to breathe and let the peace of Jesus calm our hearts before we respond. Responding out of anger and hurt creates a cycle of anger, hurt, unforgiveness, and bitterness. But getting curious about the situation and trying to really see the other person—wondering what stresses, struggles, or hurts their actions might come from—rather than being offended, is a better approach that honors the Lord. Clapping back to defend ourselves is the way of the world; seeking God's help and trying to understand others is the way of Jesus.

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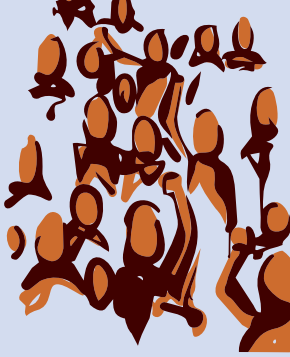

DAY ONE

MARK 14:66-72

Even when we promise ourselves—or others—that we'll show up or won't be hurtful in the same way again, we still mess up. Our best intentions can't erase this one difficult truth: We are human. We aren't perfect, and we're likely to do exactly what we don't want to do again and again (Rom. 7:15-20). Peter knew this better than anyone. On the way to the garden of Gethsemane, Peter boldly promised Jesus that he'd never abandon Him (Mark 14:29). Peter even said he was willing to die with Jesus (v. 31). But Peter made the same mistake we often make: He misplaced his confidence. He was confident in his own ability to stand strong when he faced persecution and feared for his life. Sometimes we're too confident in ourselves too—and this is when we fall (Prov. 16:18).

Thankfully, God was merciful to Peter, and He's merciful to us. Through Peter's story, we can see three important truths to help us when we get caught up in ourselves and betray the God we love: (1) We can't follow God without God's help; (2) Jesus meets us in our weakness (Luke 22:61), helping us to see ourselves clearly and to be merciful to others when they mess up; (3) Our fall is not final. We can choose to repent, trust Jesus to forgive us, and be restored to ministry—just as Peter did (John 21:15-19). Our sin might feel like too much, but nothing is too much for God to handle. His mercy is always greater than our sin.

- **WHEN ARE YOU TEMPTED TO ACT LIKE YOU DON'T KNOW JESUS OR KEEP SILENT ABOUT YOUR FAITH INSTEAD OF SPEAKING UP? WHY?**
- **JESUS SAW PETER IN HIS WEAKNESS (LUKE 22:61-62). HOW DOES THIS ENCOURAGE YOU TO REPENT, EVEN WHEN YOU'VE BETRAYED JESUS?**

PRAY

LORD JESUS, FORGIVE ME FOR THE TIMES WHEN I'VE PRETENDED NOT TO KNOW YOU. GIVE ME THE COURAGE TO FOLLOW YOU NO MATTER WHERE I AM, WHO I'M WITH, OR WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE WORLD. THANK YOU FOR YOUR ABUNDANT COMPASSION AND MERCY.

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DAY TWO

MARK 15:1-5; ISAIAH 53:7

Most of us don't like being accused of something we didn't do. If we're wrongfully accused, we're quick to speak up, to defend ourselves, to point the finger at someone else, or to clap back at the person who made the accusation. Rarely, if ever, do we respond with silence. Seeing Jesus respond this way on two separate occasions—once at His trial before the religious leaders (Mark 14:53-65) and once after meeting Pilate (15:1-5)—shocks us. Silence is probably not the way any of us would choose to respond if our lives were on the line. But thankfully, Jesus is different, and when He chose silence, He chose us.

Like with our own struggles, we might look at the ridiculously unfair trials Jesus endured and think, "How could this be part of God's plan?" or "Why didn't Jesus stand up for Himself?" The truth is that God's plan is beyond our understanding (Isa. 55:8-9). Even before Adam and Eve fell into sin, God had a plan to set all things right through Jesus (Gen. 3:15). Jesus knew His purpose when God sent Him to earth in human form; He knew He'd come to die (Mark 10:45). He was silent because He was meant to be the perfect Lamb to be sacrificed once for the forgiveness of all sins past, present, and future for those who trust in Him (John 1:29). By responding with silence, Jesus didn't just fulfill prophecy—He confirmed His commitment to His Father's will and to us (Isa. 53:7). While this is God's mercy to us, and He has seemingly endless patience (2 Pet. 3:9), He also promises that vengeance is His and He will repay all the wrongs done by those who reject His Son and persecute His people (Deut. 32:35; Rom 12:19).

- **NOTHING SURPRISES GOD. HOW CAN THIS ENCOURAGE YOU WHEN LIFE ISN'T TURNING OUT HOW YOU'D HOPED?**
- **WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO BALANCE SILENCE WITH SPEAKING UP? HOW CAN YOU REST IN GOD'S TIMING AND PLAN FOR THOSE WHO REJECT HIM AND HURT US?**

PRAY

GOD, THANK YOU FOR YOUR GOOD PLAN FOR OUR REDEMPTION THROUGH JESUS AND FOR OUR LIVES AS YOUR CHILDREN. SHOW ME HOW TO CLING TO HOPE IN YOU, EVEN WHEN I'M STRUGGLING OR SUFFERING.

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DAY THREE

JOHN 18:33-37

Our lives are full of Instagram-versus-reality moments—even when we're offline. Think about it: You have certain expectations of how something will play out. What you have in mind is often a perfect picture, how everything would look if your best laid plans went off without a hitch: the most popular books on your Goodreads list, the perfect hiking trip where you reach the peak just before sunset, the best classes to take to get in to your dream school, the right timeline for getting to the theater to grab your snacks and drinks before the movie starts. We put expectations on everything, from our everyday routine to our academic achievements, hobbies, experiences, vacations, and relationships. And when those expectations aren't quite reality, we feel disappointed, sad, or even empty.

The people who lived during the earthly ministry of Jesus were no different. The Jews expected their king, who Jesus rightly claimed to be, to overthrow Rome, not sin and death. Pilate and his soldiers also expected more. They expected His followers to fight to free Him and save Him from death. But Jesus is a different kind of king. He didn't leave a throne in heaven to be saved from death; He went to the cross to save us from death. He didn't come to be served but to serve us. We look to our Savior and His Word, not the world, to tell us how to serve and honor our King. The kingdom of God is not about physical or political power but about loving, serving, and leading people to salvation. But one day, Jesus will return to bring all things and all people under His rule (Phil. 2:10-11).

- **WHAT TRAITS DO YOU TYPICALLY ASSOCIATE WITH KINGS? HOW IS JESUS DIFFERENT?**
- **WHERE ARE YOU NOT LIVING LIKE YOU'RE PART OF GOD'S KINGDOM? WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE SO YOU CAN LIVE MORE LIKE YOUR KING?**

PRAY

LORD JESUS, YOU ARE A BETTER KING THAN I COULD EVER IMAGINE. THANK YOU FOR EMPTYING YOURSELF TO SAVE ME. GUIDE ME TO LIVE LIKE I'M PART OF YOUR KINGDOM, NOT FOCUSING ON POWER BUT ON LOVING SERVICE OF YOU AND OTHERS.

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DAY FOUR

MATTHEW 5:43-48

Showing kindness to people who've hurt us or been mean to us isn't easy. Honestly, most of the time, we mentally assign these people as our enemies. We treat people in this category differently. Maybe we ignore them, gossip about them, or exclude them from our lives. To be clear, it's okay to set boundaries if someone continually harms you. But you are still responsible for the words *you* say and the actions *you* take toward that person. Instead, we often justify our actions based on other people's behaviors. For example, if someone gossips about us, then we justify gossiping about that person. But here's the problem with that: That person isn't the standard—Jesus is. Whatever we do should be based on what He has done.

Jesus responded with restraint, not revenge or even rejection. Every single person who has ever lived has been an enemy of Jesus at some point. Sin sets us up as His enemies; only His grace can free us. Thankfully, Jesus responded with obedience to the Father and with love that led Him to the cross. The actions of those who accused and crucified Him couldn't change His mind or God's plan—and neither can ours. God invites all people to follow Him, not just those you approve of or befriend. Loving people who love you is easy. So, do the difficult thing: Treat your enemies as Jesus treated His. Stand out, not for getting revenge but for giving grace and love just like Jesus.

- **WHO ARE YOUR ENEMIES? WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE FOR YOU TO LOVE AND PRAY FOR THEM, TO TREAT THEM WITH COMPASSION RATHER THAN REVENGE?**
- **HOW DOES SEEING THE LOVE JESUS HAS FOR US ENCOURAGE US TO LOVE OTHERS–ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO DON'T LOVE OR CARE FOR US?**

PRAY

HEAVENLY FATHER, THANK YOU FOR SENDING JESUS EVEN WHEN I WAS YOUR ENEMY. HELP ME TO LOVE, FORGIVE, AND PRAY FOR MY ENEMIES, NO MATTER WHAT THEY'VE DONE. WHEN I'M HESITANT TO SHOW RESTRAINT, REMIND ME OF THE RESTRAINT YOU SHOWED IN FORGIVING MY SIN.

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DAY FIVE

2 CORINTHIANS 5:21

Have you ever taken the blame for something you didn't do? Not defended yourself because you knew the consequences would be worse for someone else, you wanted to protect a friend, or you decided to cover for a teary-eyed younger sibling? While facing consequences for our actions can be a great teacher, mercy, grace, and selflessness can be good teachers too.

Think about the way Jesus held back when He was accused, beaten, and mocked. He was and still is God. He could've gotten down from the cross or even commanded angels to free Him. Before He ever arrived at the cross, He could've slipped through the crowds unseen, escaping as He had in the past. But Jesus stayed to take a punishment we couldn't bear: separation from God. Jesus didn't become a sinner on the cross, but God put the weight of our sin on Him. Jesus could carry it; we couldn't (Matt. 11:28-30). So, God's wrath against sin poured out on Jesus, whose blood poured out to cover us with His righteousness. He was treated, for a moment, as if He'd sinned so we could be treated as if we'd never sinned—forever.

Before Jesus, our sin made us anything but innocent. We were powerless to defeat it or to make ourselves clean. God knew we needed a Savior and planned to send Jesus before the foundation of the world. When we recognize our guilt and call out to Jesus to save us, to give us clean hearts (Ps. 51:10), that's exactly what He does. We don't receive the punishment we deserve. We receive freedom and new life from the One who allowed Himself to be declared guilty in our place.

- **HOW DOES THE SACRIFICE JESUS MADE FOR YOU TEACH YOU TO LIVE DIFFERENTLY?**
- **WHAT DO YOU THINK IT MEANS TO "BECOME THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD"? WHY IS THIS IMPOSSIBLE WITHOUT JESUS?**

PRAY

LORD JESUS, THANK YOU FOR SAVING ME. YOUR TRIAL AND CRUCIFIXION WERE BRUTAL, PAINFUL, AND HUMILIATING—YET YOU ENDURED. KEEP MY MIND FOCUSED ON YOU AND HELP ME TO REMEMBER WHAT YOU'VE DONE FOR ME EACH DAY.

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HE BREATHED *HIS LAST*

unit 28 | session 2



CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus willingly took up His cross and suffered the judgment our sins deserve. At the moment He died, the curtain in the temple sanctuary was torn in two, signifying that sinners have access to God through the blood of Christ. The crucifixion of Jesus is the center of history, revealing God's holiness and justice, our sinfulness and unrighteousness, and Christ's humility and love.

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SHOULDERING WRATH

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

Mark 15

JESUS WILLINGLY SUFFERED HUMILIATION

MARK 15:16-20,29-32

16 And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion. 17 And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him. 18 And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 19 And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him. 20 And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him. . . . 29 And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, 30 save yourself, and come down from the cross!" 31 So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. 32 Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

JESUS WILLINGLY GAVE HIS LIFE

MARK 15:33-47

33 And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. 34 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" 35 And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, he is calling Elijah." 36 And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." 37 And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. 38 And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. 39 And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" 40 There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. 41 When he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him, and there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem. 42 And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, 43 Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 44 Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. 45 And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph. 46 And Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. 47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid.

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MAIN POINT.

Jesus endured torture and death for our salvation.



THEOLOGY *CONNECTION*

CHRIST'S HUMILIATION

Although God the Son was equal with God the Father and worthy of all the glory God receives, He chose to humble Himself by taking on human flesh. He left His glorious state and came in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom. 8:3). He experienced a humiliating death on a cross (Phil. 2:6-8) by becoming sin for us so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21).

DISCUSSION

JESUS WILLINGLY SUFFERED HUMILIATION

MARK 15:16-20,29-32

- **Why do you think the soldiers mocked Jesus? How does it affect you to imagine the scene?**
- **How did the religious leaders miss the point when they mocked Jesus? In what ways do we do this too?**
- **Why do our words about Jesus matter, even when we don't understand what God is doing or we're surrounded by others who don't believe?**

JESUS WILLINGLY GAVE HIS LIFE

MARK 15:33-47

- **What words did Jesus cry out in verse 34? Why should these words matter to us?**
- **What does the curtain tearing at the moment Jesus died mean for us? What do you notice?**
- **What did Joseph risk by asking for the body of Jesus? Why do you think he did it anyway?**

JESUS WILLINGLY GAVE EVERYTHING FOR US. WHAT HAVE YOU RISKED TO FOLLOW HIM? WHAT ARE YOU WILLING TO RISK TO FOLLOW HIM?

CULTURAL *CONNECTION*

Are you easily embarrassed? Do you avoid it at all costs? Some of us want to avoid it so much that we keep quiet when we should speak; we blend in instead of standing for our faith, for what's right, or for other people. We can't risk being laughed at by our friends, family members, or teammates. In the moment, we feel like we'd never recover from the embarrassment. Humiliation is different—personal and intentional, cutting much deeper. Humiliation takes place publicly, stripping away someone's dignity and self-worth using mockery—not just for a laugh but to degrade and dehumanize. Notice that humiliation and humility share a root, the Latin adjective, *humilis*, meaning "lowly," or literally, "on the ground." We *choose* humility—lowering ourselves to put others first, choosing gentleness and meekness instead of pride and selfishness. Humiliation is *forced*, designed to reduce someone's worth as a human. If given the choice, we'd never choose humiliation. But our Savior did. Jesus endured humiliation at its very worst, and He did so with love, grace, compassion, and mercy—for us.

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DAY ONE

ROMANS 8:1-4

Most of us don't live every second of every day thinking about why we have certain freedoms. If you live in a free country, someone paved the way for you—with blood, sweat, and tears. If you have an older sibling, your parents might not be as strict with you about certain rules. If you have an experienced teacher, the teacher might not get upset about small stuff. Someone else had to go first for you to be free.

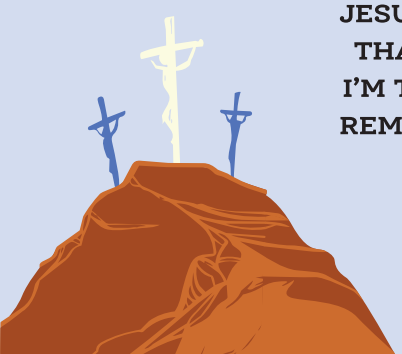
Reading about what Jesus experienced on His way to the cross and as He died for us can make us feel uncomfortable—not just because what He endured was brutal but because of the hard truth that He didn't go to the cross *only* out of obedience to the Father (Phil. 2:8) but also out of love for us. Still, maybe you're wondering, *Since God could do anything, why not just forgive us? Why did Jesus have to die?* And that's because God is holy (Isa. 6:3; 1 Pet. 1:16), meaning He is totally set apart from us; He is our unique Creator. We are not holy; we are sinners. So, we could only enter God's presence if our sin was wiped away.

God's first answer to the problem of sin was the sacrifice of an unblemished animal, along with the people's confession of their sin and its consequences before God. The blood of the animal was symbolic, temporarily atoning for—covering—the people's sin (See Lev. 1–7). But animal sacrifice wasn't His final answer: Jesus is. Jesus, the Lamb of God (John 1:29), was the final, perfect sacrifice, whose blood covered the sins of all who choose to trust Him as their Savior. Because of Jesus, we are cleansed, not condemned. We are free.

- **WHAT FREEDOMS DO YOU TAKE FOR GRANTED? WHEN ARE YOU TEMPTED TO TAKE FOR GRANTED YOUR FREEDOM IN JESUS?**
- **HOW WILL YOU LIVE DIFFERENTLY KNOWING THAT JESUS IS THE ONLY REASON YOU CAN BE FORGIVEN AND FREE?**

PRAY

JESUS, THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE PRESSURE OFF, THAT MY SALVATION DOESN'T REST ON ME. WHEN I'M TEMPTED TO FORGET ALL YOU'VE DONE FOR ME, REMIND ME OF THE CROSS, OF YOUR BLOOD SPILLED FOR MY FREEDOM FROM SIN AND DEATH.



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DAY TWO

GENESIS 22:1-18

Every good story uses foreshadowing—elements that point toward an important event. Foreshadowing shows up directly, through things like prophecy or warnings, and indirectly, through things like setting, props, recurring actions, or even the weather. Foreshadowing gives clues for what's ahead. Though the Bible is no fictional tale, God used certain events to foreshadow others, from having a prophet act out Jerusalem's suffering (Ezek. 4:1-6) to direct statements like the prophecy that Jezebel would be eaten by dogs (1 Kings 21:23; 2 Kings 9:30-37). But we also see God's foreshadowing of the sacrifice of Jesus in Isaac.

Before you feel completely horrified about God asking Abraham to sacrifice his son, let's be clear: This was a test of Abraham's faith; God never planned for Isaac to die (Gen. 22:1; Heb. 11:17). Like us, Abraham didn't know what God was doing, but he'd learned to trust God and His plan. So, when Abraham and Issac arrived at the foot of the mountain to make the sacrifice, Abraham confidently told his servants, "*I and the boy* will . . . come again to you" (Gen. 22:5, emphasis added).

While the story in Genesis doesn't give us much insight into Abraham's thought process during those final moments walking up the mountain with his son, the author of Hebrews does: Abraham "considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead" (11:19). Thankfully, Abraham never had to experience the pain of losing his son; God provided a ram for him to sacrifice instead. The pain God never placed on Abraham's shoulders, He took on Himself. God gave His *only* Son, not just as *an* offering but as *the* offering to end all offerings for God's people. And God did raise Him from the dead, securing His victory over death and eternal life for all who put their trust in Jesus.

- **WHAT'S DIFFICULT TO ACCEPT ABOUT THIS TEXT? WHY? HOW DOES KNOWING GOD NEVER PLANNED FOR ISAAC TO DIE HELP?**
- **HOW DOES SEEING ALL THE WAYS GOD HAS PROTECTED AND PROVIDED FOR YOU AFFECT YOUR VIEW OF HIM?**

PRAY

GOD, YOU ARE MY GOOD AND LOVING FATHER. THANK YOU FOR PROTECTING ME FROM MY SIN AND OFFERING ME ETERNAL LIFE THROUGH JESUS. OPEN MY EYES TO SEE ALL THE WAYS YOU'VE PROTECTED AND PROVIDED FOR ME.

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DAY THREE

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8

None of us want to feel embarrassed in the moment, no matter how silly our embarrassment might seem to others. Eventually, though, we can look at many of those moments and laugh, some even making great stories to help us connect with new people—and maybe make some of them feel less alone. But some moments tip over the edge of embarrassing into something more, like shame or humiliation because of something we did, something someone else did to us, or circumstances beyond our control. We'd choose to avoid those moments if we could.

Right there, in the middle of those shame-filled feelings from the pieces of our lives that we didn't choose and couldn't avoid, Jesus meets us with understanding. Because He's God the Son, we don't always think of Jesus enduring shame and humiliation. But He did. Not only did He come into our world as a helpless baby, but He also "emptied himself" (v. 7). He didn't become less God to be fully human, but He set aside some of His divine privileges and submitted completely to God as He lived among us. He was King. He is King. And yet, He came to serve. He showed us what it means to seek God's will and obey Him—even when it's hard. Even when, for Him, it led to being accused, arrested, beaten, mocked, and crucified on the cross. Every step of His life, from His birth to His death, shows us what it means to submit to the Father. We don't know exactly where God will call us, but Jesus shows us how to follow, even when the destination isn't one we'd choose.

- **HOW DOES THE HUMILIATION JESUS ENDURED HELP US CONNECT WITH HIM? HOW DOES HIS EXAMPLE ENCOURAGE US WHEN WE EXPERIENCE EMBARRASSMENT OR HUMILIATION?**
- **WHERE IS GOD LEADING YOU RIGHT NOW? IS IT A DESTINATION YOU WOULD'VE CHOSEN? HOW CAN YOU COMMIT TO FOLLOWING HIM ANYWAY?**

PRAY

JESUS, THANK YOU FOR HUMBLING YOURSELF IN SO MANY WAYS TO SAVE ME AND SHOW ME THE WAY TO SUBMIT TO THE FATHER. TEACH ME HOW TO HUMBLE MYSELF SO THAT I CAN FOLLOW YOU WITH ALL THAT I AM.

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DAY FOUR

PSALM 22:1-18

Our lives are filled with temporary cycles: your grade level at school, the styles you wear, what you and your friends do for fun. Eventually, you get your braces removed, you make varsity, and you graduate from high school. Looking back on important moments in our past helps us see just how temporary our lives really are—a truth God's Word echoes (James 4:14). This is good news on bad days and bittersweet news in happy moments.

Psalm 22, which moves through pain, sorrow, and lament (mourning) and then on to praise and thankfulness, reminds us of the cycle of temporary seasons. Many psalms follow this pattern, but Psalm 22 stands out because it's a messianic psalm, meaning it points to Jesus. In fact, Jesus actually quoted the words from verse 1 on the cross, right before He died (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34). These words carry deep sadness, and that makes sense, right? When Jesus cried out to God, He was taking on the full weight of our sin. For a moment, He endured God's wrath so we would never have to. This would've been excruciating in every way, but Jesus knew the joy that would come on the other side of God's wrath—for Him and for us (Heb. 12:2). When Jesus quoted the first verse of Psalm 22, He did so with the rest of the psalm in mind, which ended in victory. His sorrow was only temporary—and so is ours. Our pain, our grief, and even death is temporary. His death wasn't the end but only the beginning. Because Jesus rose from the dead, one day He will return, and all bad things will come to an end in Him (Rev. 21:4-5). Until then and forever after, may we end our days, hard seasons, good seasons, and everything in between with praise because of all He's done for us.

- **WHAT DOES JESUS QUOTING THIS PSALM TELL US ABOUT HIS UNDERSTANDING OF OUR SORROW WHEN LIFE IS HARD, GRIEF HITS US UNEXPECTEDLY, OR PAIN OVERWHELMS US?**
- **WHY DOES MOVING TOWARD JOY AFTER PAIN AND MOURNING MATTER? HOW DOES JESUS MODEL THIS FOR US?**

PRAY

HEAVENLY FATHER, I KNOW YOU LISTEN WHEN I CRY FOR HELP. THANK YOU FOR BRINGING JOY THROUGH JESUS IN THE MIDDLE OF MY PAIN AND GRIEF. LEAD ME TO PRAISE YOU FOR YOUR GOODNESS, EVEN WHEN I STRUGGLE TO SEE IT.

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DAY FIVE

JOHN 19:25-27

Every family is different. We all have unique personalities, traditions, and home lives. Some families get along well, and others struggle. No family is perfect. This is why so many books, TV shows, and movies focus on the idea of "found family"—the family you choose for yourself. The Bible teaches us to honor our parents, to treat them in a God-honoring way (this is something you can do even if your biological family doesn't live in line with God's good design for families), and it also teaches the importance of our spiritual family—no matter what our biological family is like.

It's easy to think of Jesus as God and forget that He lived as a human. It's also easy to forget that Jesus was Mary and Joseph's oldest son. By the point of Jesus's death, scholars believe Joseph had likely already died. According to the customs of that time, Mary's care would've passed to her oldest son: Jesus. Living obediently to God's will even with His dying breath, Jesus chose to honor His mother just as God had commanded (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16), making sure she would be cared for once He returned to heaven. Because His siblings hadn't yet believed in Him, Jesus lovingly and compassionately entrusted her care to someone else. John—"the disciple whom he loved" (John 19:26)—had chosen to follow the Lord. Jesus trusted John's heart and that He wouldn't just care for Mary physically but spiritually. Here, Jesus shows us that both our earthly and spiritual families have their place—and both deserve His compassion, love, and care.

- **IS IT EASY FOR YOU TO PICTURE JESUS DOING NORMAL HUMAN THINGS, LIKE PROVIDING FOR HIS MOTHER? WHY OR WHY NOT?**
- **HOW DOES THE COMPASSION, LOVE, AND CARE JESUS SHOWED HIS MOTHER—EVEN DURING HIS INCREDIBLE PAIN—TEACH US TO TREAT OUR FAMILIES, NO MATTER WHAT THEY'RE LIKE?**

PRAY

JESUS, THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR YOUR EXAMPLE IN EVERY AREA OF LIFE, INCLUDING LOVING MY FAMILY. WHETHER THEY'RE FOLLOWING YOU OR NOT, SHOW ME HOW TO LOVE MY FAMILY WELL. THANK YOU FOR SURROUNDING ME WITH A SPIRITUAL FAMILY THAT SUPPORTS AND LOVES ME.

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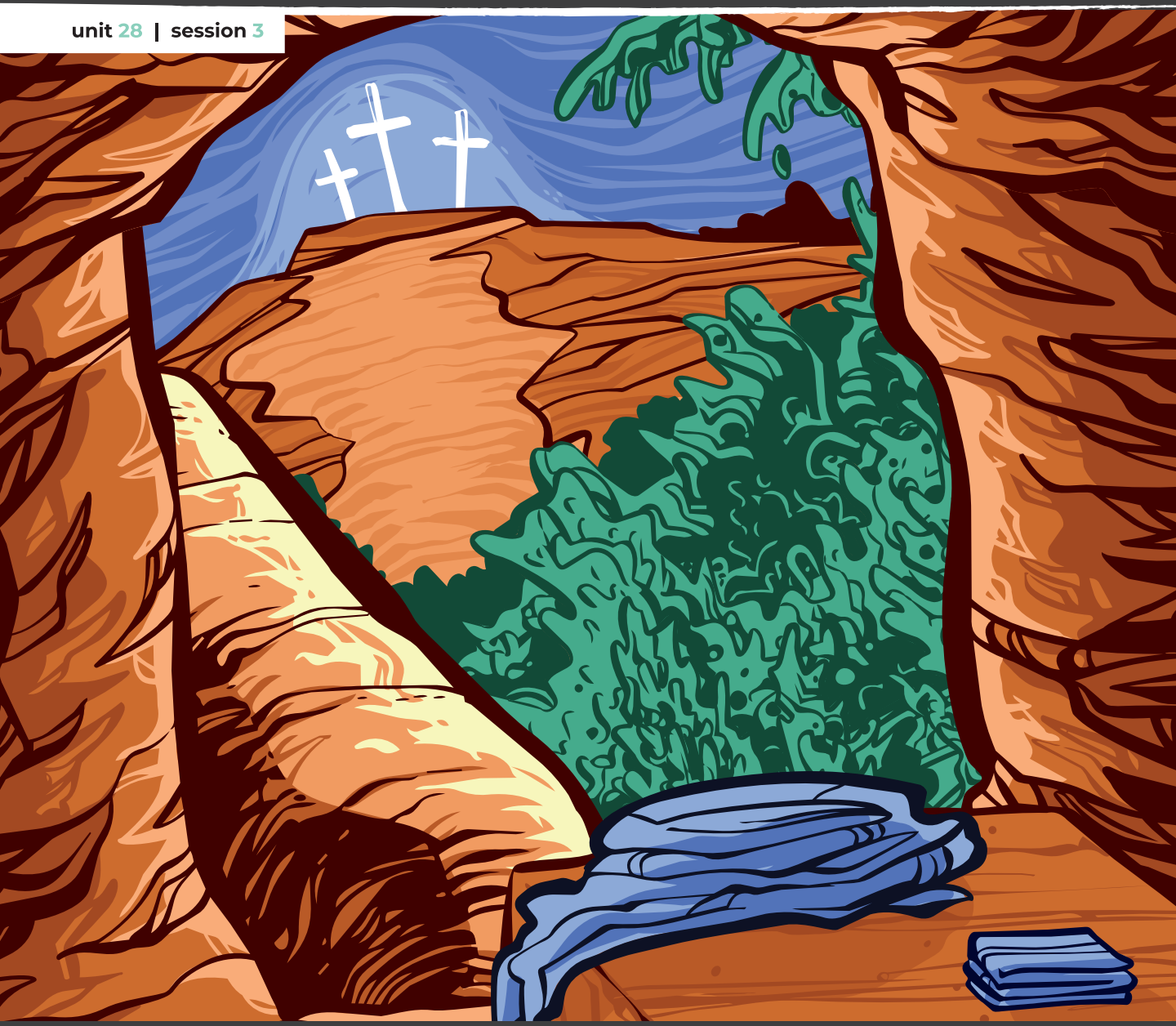

CHRIST CONNECTION

After His death and resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples to confirm that He was alive and had defeated sin and death. All that the Scriptures taught about the Messiah was, or will be, fulfilled in Jesus.

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DEATH IS DEFEATED

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

Matthew 28

JESUS'S RESURRECTION GIVES US HOPE

MATTHEW 28:1-7

1 Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and
the other Mary went to see the tomb. 2 And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel
of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His
appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4 And for fear of him the guards
trembled and became like dead men. 5 But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for
I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here, for he has risen, as he said.
Come, see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen
from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have
told you."

JESUS'S RESURRECTION IS REALITY

MATTHEW 28:8-15

8 So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.
9 And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his
feet and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers
to go to Galilee, and there they will see me." 11 While they were going, behold, some of the
guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. 12 And when they
had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the
soldiers 13 and said, "Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we
were asleep.' 14 And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out
of trouble." 15 So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been
spread among the Jews to this day.

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MAIN POINT.

Because Jesus defeated death, we will too.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

RESURRECTION

Both the Old and New Testaments teach that one day believers will 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 Jesus, and it will take place at His future return. Because Jesus was raised from death, Christians can be assured that their resurrection will be similar in nature, meaning it will be both bodily and glorious (Phil. 3:20-21; Rom. 8:22-23). The hope of the future resurrection gives Christians confidence that death has been defeated because of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

DISCUSSION

JESUS'S RESURRECTION GIVES US HOPE
MATTHEW 28:1-7

- **Who first knew Jesus had risen? What does this say about how Jesus views those culture ignores?**
- **What part of the angel's news do you think was most shocking? Why is the message good news for us?**
- **Consider that the disciples fled when Jesus was arrested. What message did Jesus ask the women to deliver? What does this tell us about His heart for us when we mess up?**

JESUS'S RESURRECTION IS REALITY
MATTHEW 28:8-15

- **Why did Jesus meet the women on the road? How does He meet us now when we need Him?**
- **How do the women respond to seeing Jesus? What does this show us about how we should respond?**
- **What excuses do people use to dismiss the truth about Jesus?**

WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICAL WAYS YOU WILL RESPOND TO THE TRUTH THAT JESUS IS ALIVE?

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Have you ever learned the truth about something or someone and wished you hadn't? Or maybe you learned new information and found out you were wrong about something you passionately defended. Maybe you treated someone unkindly or accidentally said or did something offensive to another culture. This can feel overwhelming, embarrassing, and even painful. We all say we want the truth, but sometimes we don't—not when it reveals something we don't want to see. Instead, we search for what makes us comfortable, for what makes us feel better about ourselves, or for what fits into our views, avoiding what's really true. Here's a reality check: Living this way can cost you everything. Our faith hinges on the truth that Jesus really did rise from the grave. Through His death, He frees us from sin, and through His resurrection, He gives us eternal life with Him. The "live your own truth" mentality directly opposes what Jesus claimed about Himself. We must remember that God is truth, His Word is true, and He has given believers the gift of His Holy Spirit to help us know the truth.

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DAY ONE

JOHN 19:31-37

Details matter to us, even if we prefer to focus on the big picture and don't love super detailed work. Think about the feeling you get when people remember your birthday and do something nice for you, know your favorite drink at the local coffee shop and bring you one randomly just to be kind, listen to your favorite band so they can talk to you about music you love, or even pay attention to and show up for anniversaries of really tough days, like the loss of a loved one. To us, these little moments offer proof that these people know and love us.

God is the Creator of all things and sees the big picture of our lives and how we fit into His grand plan. But God is a God of order and details too. Over and over, we see that details matter to God, especially when we see Scripture fulfilled in very specific ways (John 19:36). God often uses prophecy to help His people verify the truth of important biblical events—like the death and resurrection of Jesus. Here, two prophecies offer proof of Jesus as Messiah: (1) Exodus 12:46 and Numbers 9:12 tell God's people that none of the bones of the sacrificial Passover lamb could be broken. And Jesus, the final Passover Lamb, died long before the soldiers came around to break the legs of those crucified. (2) Zechariah 12:10 explains that when Jesus returns, the people would recognize they'd rejected their true King, that they'd pierced God Himself when they speared Jesus in the side. These details remind us that all of God's Word is true, and we can trust Him to fulfill every promise He has made to His people.

- **WHEN DO DETAILS MATTER MOST TO YOU IN YOUR OWN LIFE? WHERE DO THE DETAILS MATTER MOST TO YOU IN SCRIPTURE?**
- **HOW DOES SEEING PROPHECY FULFILLED HELP YOU TRUST GOD WITH YOUR LIFE NOW AND FOR ETERNITY?**

PRAY

GOD, YOU ARE LORD OVER THE GRAND PLAN AND THE DETAILS. SHOW ME HOW EVERY PART OF YOUR STORY AND PLAN MATTERS. HELP ME TRUST YOU MORE AS I'M REMINDED OF THE PROOF OF WHO YOU ARE AND WHAT YOU HAVE DONE.

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DAY TWO

ROMANS 10:14-15,17

People love a good story, and a lot of us love being the first ones in the know—and the first ones to share news with people who don't know. When the news is good, we feel the thrill and excitement of getting to share it. Sharing good news feels good. But we can also feel a sense of fear when sharing good news, whether it's news that lines up with our beliefs but isn't popular or news so good we're afraid others won't believe us. Both types of fear can help us understand what the women experienced after visiting the tomb and finding Jesus gone (Matt. 28:3). Can you imagine the startling fear of seeing the angel and hearing the good news—and the fear that the disciples wouldn't believe them? But mingled with all that fear was a deeper feeling: joy. Because they had seen Jesus! Their Savior had risen; He was alive, and so was their hope for the future He'd promised.

Maybe their mix of fear and joy feels just as familiar to you as the call Jesus gave them: Go, share the gospel. Amid our fear, doubt, and even joy over Jesus and our desire to get everything just right, sharing the gospel can feel intimidating. So, we convince ourselves that our lives can speak the gospel message all on their own. But the process of sharing the gospel is amazingly simple: Jesus calls us to tell people about Him and what He has done for us, so we do. Jesus did all the work to save us, and the greatest and best work we can ever do is exactly what He asked the women to do in Matthew 28: Go and tell others the good news that He is risen and offers us eternal life with Him.

- **WHEN HAVE YOU SHARED THE GOSPEL RECENTLY? WHO IS GOD CALLING YOU TO SHARE THE GOSPEL WITH NOW?**
- **WHAT'S YOUR BIGGEST FEAR ABOUT SHARING THE GOSPEL? HOW CAN JESUS HELP YOU OVERCOME THAT FEAR, JUST AS HE DID FOR THE WOMEN?**

PRAY

LORD JESUS, THANK YOU FOR SENDING PEOPLE TO SHARE THE GOSPEL SO THAT I CAN KNOW YOU. GIVE ME THE COURAGE AND THE WORDS TO TELL OTHERS ABOUT YOU, NO MATTER WHERE I AM. EASE MY FEAR SO THAT I CAN LIVE COMPLETELY FOR YOU.

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DAY THREE

LUKE 24:13-35

Going somewhere new—like a new friend's house, an away game, or even prom—can be intimidating. Before you agree to the invitation, you'd probably check with all your friends to see who else plans to attend. As soon as you arrive, you'd probably scan the crowd for a familiar face. The moment you saw someone familiar, you'd feel calmer and more confident.

After His crucifixion, Jesus met two disciples who were heading home from Jerusalem. They no longer held on to hope that Jesus was their Messiah; they even referred to Him as "Jesus of Nazareth" and "a prophet" (Luke 24:19). Jesus called them out for their disbelief (v. 25), but He also met them with grace and compassion. He took them back to the beginning and led them through passages about people like Adam, Abraham, Moses, David, and the prophets and clearly explained how He had fulfilled all the Old Testament Scriptures that pointed to the Messiah. He traced the path of His story throughout their history and the Word of God to reveal Himself to them once again.

Here's the thing about Jesus: He is always with us. He is everywhere in Scripture because He is the Word of God: the physical and forever image of God among us (John 1:1-5). So, when we read Scripture, whether a well-known passage or one that's new to us, we should always scan the pages for Jesus—even in the Old Testament. The good news for us is that Jesus wants us to see Him. He wants us to understand how He fills the pages of Scripture from the beginning to the end. So, with His Spirit's guidance, let's trace the lines of His Word, looking for His presence on every page.

- **WHAT OLD TESTAMENT PASSAGES CAN YOU THINK OF THAT POINTED TO THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS? HOW?**
- **WHAT STEPS CAN YOU TAKE TO CHANGE THE WAY YOU READ THE BIBLE SO THAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR JESUS IN EVERYTHING YOU READ, EVEN IF HIS NAME ISN'T MENTIONED?**

PRAY

JESUS, THANK YOU FOR COMPASSIONATELY AND PATIENTLY SHOWING ME THE WAY TO YOU. OPEN MY EYES TO SEE YOU IN ALL OF YOUR WORD, EVEN WHEN IT ISN'T OBVIOUS.

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DAY FOUR

EPHESIANS 1:20-23

Attributes are character traits or qualities that help people understand the heart of who we are; these are the words people who really know us use to describe us. Schools, sports, and clubs often recognize and reward people who show good character, like kindness, honesty, flexibility, responsibility, and self-discipline. Because we're not perfect, we can let ourselves be influenced and defined by negative attributes too, like rudeness, selfishness, dishonesty, laziness, and arrogance. But our natural desire is to be defined by the character traits we believe are the best. As people made in God's image, this makes sense: We're created to want to be like Him. And He holds all the best attributes: He is good, gracious, merciful, loving, sovereign, and all-powerful—just to name a few.

We see so many of God's amazing attributes in the death and resurrection of Jesus, but one we often skim over is His omnipotence, meaning His all-powerful nature. God has power over everything, including death, proven in the resurrection of Jesus. The apostle Paul explains that God raised Jesus from the dead, exalted (lifted up) Jesus over all things after Jesus had humbled Himself, and gave Jesus complete authority over everything and everyone in the whole world (Eph. 1:20; Phil. 2:5-11). Jesus sits in the highest place of honor, on the right side of God the Father. The best part is that Jesus shares this place of honor with God's other sons and daughters—those who trust in Jesus for salvation, "the church . . . his body" (Eph. 1:22-23). Because we are His, God leads us and helps us with the very same power that raised Jesus from the dead. He is more than enough, helping us face anything that comes our way.

- **WHAT DOES YOUR LIFE SHOW YOU BELIEVE IS MORE POWERFUL THAN GOD? HOW DOES THAT BELIEF SHOW UP?**
- **WHY IS THE FACT THAT GOD IS ALL-POWERFUL REALLY GOOD NEWS FOR US?**

PRAY

HEAVENLY FATHER, THANK YOU FOR USING YOUR POWER TO SAVE ME RATHER THAN CRUSH ME BENEATH THE WEIGHT OF MY SIN. GIVE ME THE COURAGE TO LIVE LIKE I BELIEVE YOU HAVE POWER OVER ALL THINGS AND CARE WHAT HAPPENS TO ME.



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DAY FIVE

COLOSSIANS 2:13-14

Before and afters are mesmerizing—no matter if it's making an old car run, changing up your style, cleaning your room, or looking back on your days in the community soccer league as you sign a letter of commitment to play in college. The evidence of change highlights the gap between where something started and how it has transformed or been made new. Big changes in objects, our environment, or external circumstances can inspire us to believe that big changes can happen in us too. In fact, God is all about making big changes in us.

To really understand what the resurrection of Jesus means for us, we have to look at where we started—and it's probably not where you think. We'd like to believe we were pretty good people and that Jesus only made us better. But that's not what God's Word tells us: He says we started out spiritually dead because of our sin. Since we weren't living our lives devoted to God, this means we were living our lives devoted to the enemy of our soul—Satan (Eph. 2:2). Basically, we did whatever we wanted, however we wanted, without thinking about how it would reflect on God or affect others (Eph. 2:3). But the good news is that Jesus didn't just make us *better*; He made us completely *new*. Through His death, Jesus paid for the sin that condemned us to death. Through His resurrection, He gave us eternal life in Him. As part of this new life, we receive God's mercy, grace, kindness, and His Holy Spirit, who helps us live our lives fully devoted to Him. We're no longer doomed to death and unable to overcome our sin; we are raised to life and guaranteed victory in Jesus, who has already won.

- **WHAT ARE SPECIFIC WAYS JESUS MADE YOU NEW? HOW DOES KNOWING YOU HAVE THE HELP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT ENCOURAGE YOU WHEN YOU STRUGGLE WITH THOSE SAME SINS?**
- **HOW DOES YOUR SALVATION GLORIFY GOD? WHY DOES THE WAY YOU LIVE AFTER YOU'RE SAVED MATTER?**

PRAY

JESUS, THANK YOU FOR SAVING ME, FOR GIVING ME NEW LIFE. SHOW ME HOW TO LIVE DIFFERENTLY BECAUSE OF WHAT YOU'VE DONE FOR ME, EVEN WHEN IT'S TOUGH.

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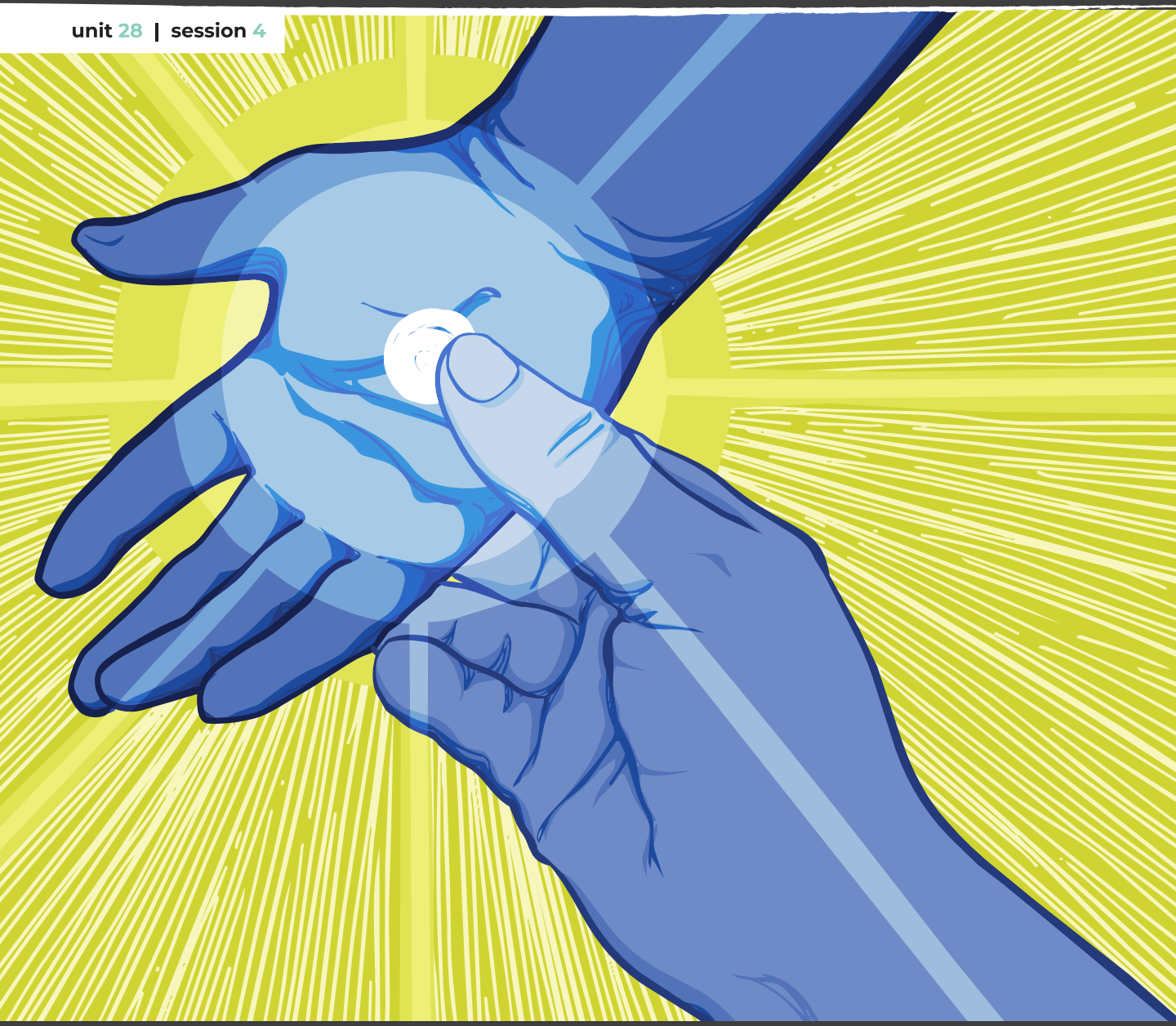
PEACE BE *WITH YOU*

unit 28 | session 4



CHRIST CONNECTION

God vindicated His Son's perfect sacrifice by raising Him from the dead, fulfilling His promise to save us from sin. Through faith, we are united with Jesus and share in the promise of being resurrected in His likeness. Jesus's sacrifice removed sin's curse, defeated death, and assured everlasting life for all who believe.

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PEACE AND PRESENCE

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

John 20

PEACE OVER FEAR

JOHN 20:19-23

19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

FAITH OVER DOUBT

JOHN 20:24-31

24 Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." 26 Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." 30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

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MAIN POINT.

Jesus offers us peace through faith.



THEOLOGY CONNECTION

FAITH

Biblical faith is resting, or trusting, in Jesus alone for salvation (John 3:16-21). More than mentally agreeing with historical facts, genuine faith begins with recognizing and confessing the truth of the gospel (1 John 4:13-16), followed by receiving Jesus as both Lord and Savior (John 1:10-13). Biblical faith is not blind faith, for it rests on the historical life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

DISCUSSION

PEACE OVER FEAR

JOHN 20:19-23

- **When might we experience fear like the disciples felt after Jesus was crucified?**
- **How did Jesus meet the disciples in their fear? Why would He do this?**
- **How can having a purpose shift our focus away from our fear and toward something better?**

FAITH OVER DOUBT

JOHN 20:24-31

- **Why did Jesus meet Thomas? How has He met you when you were doubting, weak, or struggling?**
- **What does it mean to confess Jesus as Lord? What does it look like to have faith in Him?**
- **According to Jesus, how is our belief different from the disciples' belief?**

WHERE DO YOU STRUGGLE TO FOLLOW JESUS WHOLEHEARTEDLY AS YOUR LORD AND YOUR GOD?

CULTURAL CONNECTION

We live in a high-pressure, performance-based culture. So, we often feel anxiety that we aren't doing enough or just aren't enough—period. This anxiety tricks us into feeling insecure in our relationships, academic performance, appearance, and about our future. Under intense pressure, we pull away, lash out, try to be perfect, or hide. We hide our fear of failure by withdrawing. If we never put ourselves out there, we can't mess up, right? We hide behind attitude, sarcasm, and cutting words. If we attack first, they can't hurt us. We hide behind our "gold stars" as the best friend, the best son, daughter, or sibling, or the best student. If we do everything right, no one can say anything bad about us. These kinds of fears aren't new. Just think about all the times you've read some variation of "Don't be afraid" or "Be courageous" in the Bible. Even the disciples hid because of their fear. But just as Jesus met them where they were, hiding behind a locked door, He sees us hiding in our withdrawal, hostility, and pursuit of perfection. And He meets us right there with grace for our imperfections and peace for our fears.

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DAY ONE

JOHN 21:1-14

Because we're constantly learning and growing, we're always changing. Of course, some of our core characteristics likely stay the same, but we can become unrecognizable as we grow, for better or worse. The people around us change too, and maybe we wonder if anything will be the same. Will they look for more popular friends? Will they start saying words we know aren't God-honoring? Will their words and actions have a positive or negative influence on us? Will the power of being chosen to lead at school or at work go to their head? Change in people we know and love is scary. We crave what's familiar; it settles our anxiety and helps us trust everything will be okay.

The disciples were no different. John doesn't tell us why the disciples didn't recognize Jesus. It's possible that they were too far from shore, the sky was too dark since it was so early in the morning, or that they were supernaturally prevented from recognizing Jesus. Make no mistake: Jesus was physically different. But His resurrected body still bore the scars of His death and resurrection; He *was* recognizable. And yet, even though the disciples had already seen the resurrected Jesus twice, they still needed reassurance. Through the fire and the fish, Jesus reassured His disciples once again that He was the same One who had provided for them as they walked together, and He would keep providing for them. Jesus's identity didn't change; He changed ours. Like Peter, who "threw himself into the sea" (v. 7), may we be all-in as we follow Jesus, trusting Him to accomplish in us and for us all that He has promised.

- **WHAT DO PETER'S ACTIONS SHOW ABOUT HIS DESIRE TO BE NEAR JESUS? HOW DO THEY TEACH US TO PURSUE JESUS?**
- **WHY DOES THE REMINDER THAT JESUS IS ALWAYS THE SAME HELP US TRUST HIM AS OUR SAVIOR AND PROVIDER?**

PRAY

LORD JESUS, THANK YOU FOR SHOWING UP FOR ME IN THE EXACT WAY I NEED AND REVEALING YOURSELF TO ME IN WAYS I CAN UNDERSTAND. SHAPE MY HEART TO BE ALL-IN AS I FOLLOW YOU AND LIVE LIFE GOD'S WAY.

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DAY TWO

JOHN 21:15-19

Mistakes come from choices made out of confusion, hesitation, or fear. Mistakes arise when we allow something to distract us from our present, our purpose, or our plans. Mistakes are messy, not just for those who make them but for those caught up in the consequences. And mistakes can make us feel scared to try again—especially when people respond poorly if we mess up. Here's the good news: We aren't perfect; Jesus knows it; and He meets us with all the gentleness and grace we've come to expect from Him.

Like us, Peter made lots of mistakes. He was impulsive with his words and actions. He was quick to deny Jesus when the pressure turned up. And he probably felt both heartbroken over his mistakes and a little afraid to claim he was all-in for Jesus after failing so spectacularly. Peter's response to the question Jesus asked shows his hesitation, even if we don't pick up on it at first. All we see is Jesus asking about love and Peter responding with love. But their words for love are different. The word Jesus used pointed to wholehearted, complete commitment. The word Peter used showed his love for Jesus but didn't necessarily communicate that he was all-in. But Jesus didn't call Peter out for his mistakes or fear; Jesus stepped right into the middle of the mess Peter made and gently invited him to try again—and again. The way Jesus approached Peter tells us how He'll approach us when we mess up too: He'll take care of our needs just as He provided for Peter's physical hunger. He won't ignore our mistakes, but He will restore those who turn from their sin and disbelief. And He shows us that our mistakes don't define us—He does, and He calls us His, mess and all.

- **WHEN HAVE YOU CLAIMED TO BE ALL IN FOR SOMETHING AND THEN BACKED OUT BECAUSE YOU FELT TOO MUCH PRESSURE AND STRESS? HOW HAVE YOU DONE THIS IN YOUR FAITH?**
- **WHY DOES JESUS CONFRONTING PETER WITH GENTLENESS GIVE US HOPE WHEN WE FEEL HEARTBROKEN OVER OUR MISTAKES?**

PRAY

JESUS, THANK YOU FOR STEPPING INTO MY MESSES AND HELPING ME SEE YOU AND YOUR PLAN FOR ME. WHERE I'VE MESSED UP, FORGIVE ME, RESTORE ME, AND SHOW ME HOW TO WALK FORWARD WITH YOU.

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DAY THREE

2 CORINTHIANS 7:6-11

Messing up hurts. Honestly, we might not be prepared for all the ways our mistakes hurt us and others. We've all messed up, and most of us probably know the pain of broken trust, broken relationships, and even broken dreams as results of our mistakes. All this pain comes from living in a world broken by sin; our mistakes can either send us into an unhealthy spiral or lead us to run toward Jesus. One path leads to more brokenness and pain, and the other leads to forgiveness and healing.

Paul offers two phrases that can help us understand how to respond to our sin: godly grief and worldly grief (v. 10). Worldly grief comes from external sources and focuses on justifying our actions or making us feel better. It isn't so much about feeling sad because you've sinned against God as it is about the bitter feeling of getting caught doing something wrong. Worldly grief leads us to all kinds of negative emotions: anger, shame, self-pity, anxiety, depression, and hatred of ourselves and others. Godly grief comes from the Holy Spirit and happens because God wants us to grow. Godly grief, while still painful, leads us to feel brokenhearted over our sin—the fact that we disobeyed God and grieved His heart—and to give our sin to God in repentance (turning away from our sin and toward God). Being convicted of our sin by the Holy Spirit still hurts, but the pain is temporary; it leads to God rather than spiraling deeper into sin and shame. Here's the thing: When you do something wrong and repent, you're forgiven immediately. Though you may still face consequences, you don't need to hang onto shame or distance yourself from God. Instead, you can let go, trusting that Jesus has already paid the price for every sin and freed us from our shame.

- **WHAT GOOD CAME FROM THE CORINTHIAN CHRISTIANS' GODLY GRIEF OVER THEIR SIN? WHAT GOOD HAS COME FROM YOURS?**
- **WHERE ARE YOU EXPERIENCING WORLDLY GRIEF? HOW CAN YOU SHIFT YOUR PERSPECTIVE SO THAT YOU EXPERIENCE GODLY GRIEF INSTEAD?**

PRAY

FATHER, THANK YOU FOR SENDING YOUR HOLY SPIRIT TO CONVICT ME OF MY SIN, EVEN WHEN IT'S PAINFUL. LET THE CONVICTION SINK IN, CLEANSE MY HEART, AND HELP ME TO FOLLOW YOU WITH A FRESH PERSPECTIVE AND RENEWED COMMITMENT.

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DAY FOUR

PSALM 51

Hearing the words, "I'm disappointed in you," can almost break us and feel worse than "I'm mad at you." Disappointment can make us feel small, like we're kids again. Plus, while an emotion like anger might feel temporary, disappointment somehow feels like more, like we need to restore our image in the eyes of the person we've hurt. Like most feelings, the fear of letting down someone we love isn't new. If we look back at yesterday's devotion and Peter's story, we see that sometimes we can feel like we've let God down. King David understood this feeling too.

Let's recap the basics: In 2 Samuel 11, David saw a beautiful woman bathing, took her even though she was married to another man, and then had her husband killed so he could marry her and cover up his awful actions. Yet, David is called a man after God's own heart. How? Well, even people who love God deeply get a little (or a lot) sideways sometimes. Psalm 51 shows us David's raw, repentant prayer after being called out for his sin. Seeing the way David approached God can help us know how to come before Him when we feel like we've disappointed Him so badly that we're beyond forgiving: (1) We come before Him with humility, recognizing we're sinners and He's holy. (2) We acknowledge the specific sin we need to confess and that, although it may have hurt someone else, the sin was ultimately against God. (3) We ask for His grace and forgiveness. (4) We praise Him. God doesn't want us to make empty promises, try to change our behaviors on our own, or use fancy words; He wants our broken, humbled hearts poured out honestly before Him. And He meets us there with grace.

- **WHICH OF DAVID'S CONFESSIONS AND REQUESTS STAND OUT TO YOU? WHY?**
- **WHERE DO YOU STRUGGLE WITH FEELING LIKE YOU'VE DISAPPOINTED GOD? HOW WILL YOU CONFESS YOUR SIN TO HIM, KNOWING HE PROMISES FORGIVENESS (1 JOHN 1:9)?**

PRAY

GOD, AS DAVID SAID, "HAVE MERCY ON ME. . . . WASH ME THOROUGHLY FROM MY INIQUITY, AND CLEANSE ME FROM MY SIN!" (VV. 1-2). COMFORT ME WITH THE KNOWLEDGE THAT YOU WANT MY HONEST PRAYERS. THANK YOU FOR YOUR MERCY AND FORGIVENESS.

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DAY FIVE

JOHN 21:20-25

Maybe you're tired of hearing the phrase "Don't compare your life to someone else's highlight reel," but comparing ourselves to others can damage our hearts and wreck our lives. Comparison focuses on our differences and can make us feel discontented because of what others have, not grateful for who we are and what we have. Comparison fails to recognize that God created each of us in His image but with unique physical attributes, personalities, emotions, and desires. Holding us up to a standard other than His will always leave us feeling like we're falling short. Unfortunately for us, our constant digital connectedness makes it easy to compare our everyday, unglamorous, and messy behind-the-scenes moments to the cool or important moments others choose to share.

Before social media, people still struggled to focus on the life God had given them. After Jesus restored Peter to ministry post-denial, Peter saw John following and asked a question many of us have often asked, "What about [him]?" (v. 21). The answer Jesus gave is telling: "What is that to you?" (v. 22). It's hard to tell whether Peter was concerned about his friend's well-being after being told about his own death or if Peter was jealous of John and wanted to know God's plan for him. No matter Peter's motives for asking, the response Jesus gave carries the same weight: Follow Me. Jesus wants us to care about others, but we can't measure ourselves by His specific plan for them any more than we can measure them by His plan for us. Although He calls us all to love Him, love others, share the gospel, and make disciples, He has created each one of us to answer that call in unique ways—and that is a really beautiful thing.

- **WHEN HAVE YOU ASKED GOD, "WHAT ABOUT THEM?" WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO DO INSTEAD?**
- **WHERE HAS GOD PLACED YOU RIGHT NOW? HOW CAN YOU SERVE AND GLORIFY HIM THERE?**

PRAY

GOD, FORGIVE ME FOR COMPARING THE WAY YOU'VE MADE ME AND THE LIFE YOU'VE GIVEN ME TO THE LIFE AND PLAN YOU'VE GIVEN TO SOMEONE ELSE. SOFTEN MY HEART TO BE CONTENT WHERE I AM, AS YOU CREATED ME.

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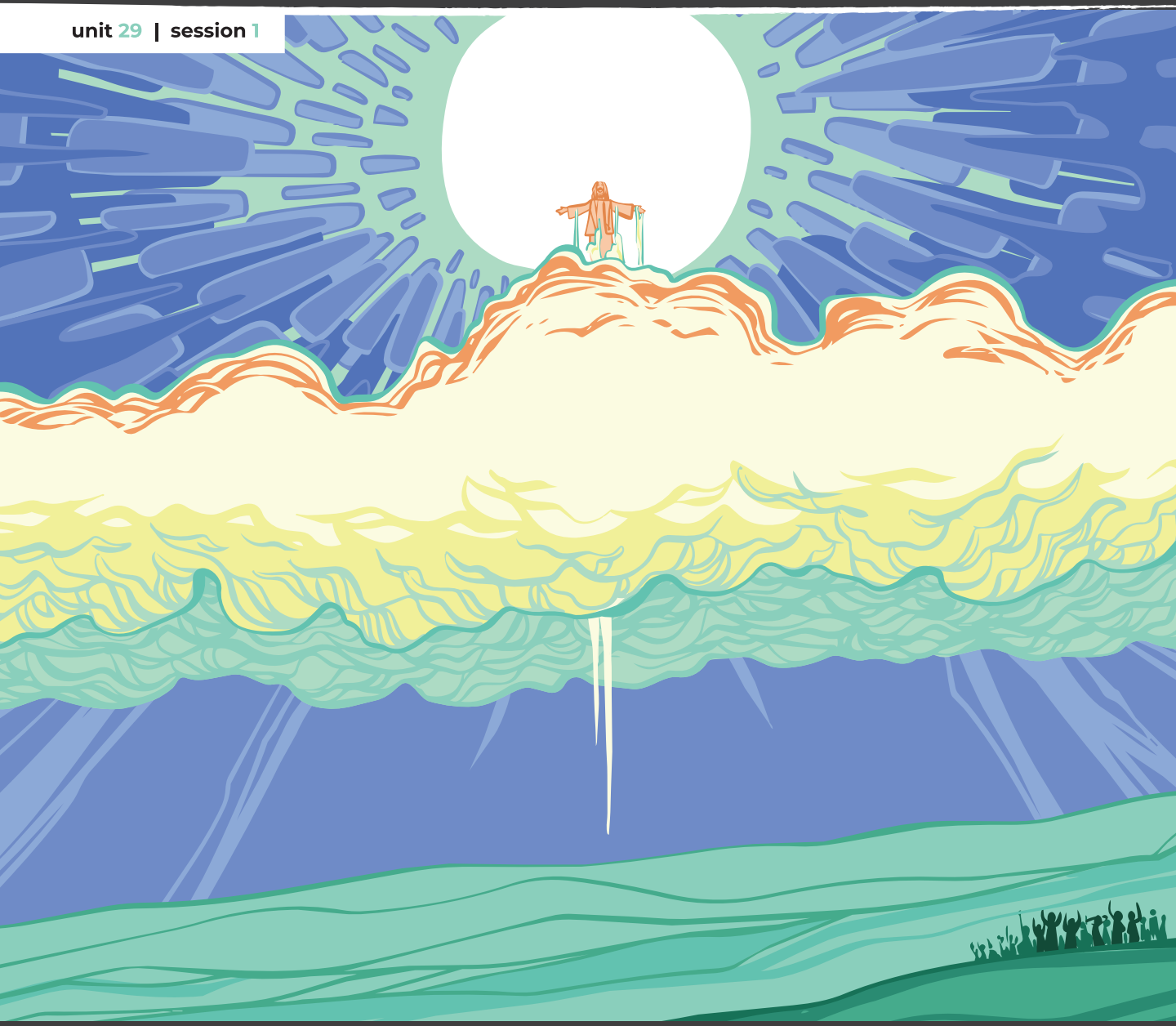
I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS

unit 29 | session 1



CHRIST CONNECTION

Before Jesus ascended to the Father, He commissioned His disciples to go into the world and make disciples of all nations. Under the authority of Jesus, and with the power of the Holy Spirit, we share the gospel and make disciples, as we wait for Jesus to return.

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FOLLOWING THE SPIRIT

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

Matthew 28; Acts 1

JESUS COMMANDS US TO GO

MATTHEW 28:16-20

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.
17 And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

JESUS PREPARES US TO GO

ACTS 1:4-11

4 And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." 6 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"
7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."
9 And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, 11 and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

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MAIN POINT.

Jesus prepares us to share the gospel.



THEOLOGY CONNECTION

MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The church represents the kingdom of God, a people united by faith in the gospel announcement of the crucified and risen King Jesus. The church's mission is to go into the world in the power of the Spirit and make disciples by sharing the gospel, calling people to respond in ongoing repentance and faith, and demonstrating the truth and power of the gospel by living in obedience to the Lord for the glory of God and the good of the world.

DISCUSSION

JESUS COMMANDS US TO GO

MATTHEW 28:16-20



- **Why does sharing the gospel with our words matter? Why isn't living a godly lifestyle enough?**
- **What does it look like for us to go and make disciples today?**
- **How does Jesus having all authority affect the way we go, teach, make disciples, and baptize?**

JESUS PREPARES US TO GO

ACTS 1:4-11



- **Why do Christians sometimes still struggle to wait on God's promises? What helps us to wait well?**



- **Why do we resist letting the Holy Spirit guide our lives? What does this reveal about our hearts?**



- **Where did Jesus tell the disciples to go with the gospel? How does this help us know where to go?**



WHAT ARE REAL WAYS YOU CAN SHARE THE GOSPEL WITH THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU? HOW CAN YOU BE A PART OF SHARING WITH OTHERS FAR AWAY?

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Have you ever felt that tension building in your chest when you know you have to tackle a difficult topic, speak in front of people, or talk to a friend about something serious? When you think about sharing the gospel with someone else, maybe you feel that tension or fear building. Many of us fear being rejected, gossiped about, or laughed at for sharing our faith, so we shy away from telling others the good news about Jesus. This fear easily overwhelms us to the point that we say nothing at all, believing—or justifying—that maybe our actions will say enough. But what we say to people matters, and people need to hear the gospel (Rom. 10:14). Maybe you have struggled to put your testimony—your personal story of how you came to know Jesus as Savior— into words so you can share the gospel with others. But you don't need the perfect words; you just have to lean into the Holy Spirit, allowing Him to lead you where God wants you to share and to fill you with the boldness to share the truth in love.

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DAY ONE

EPHESIANS 2:1-5

We're all probably familiar with the typical fairy tale. The opening to the story usually begins with "Once upon a time" and then continues into the details and the setting of the story. Usually, a young princess in distress needs saving, and a prince arrives at just the right time. Then, they live "happily ever after." Have you ever thought about how you'd start your story? Who were you before surrendering to Jesus? How would you describe your attitude toward others, actions toward your parents, or the way you manage your temper? God is writing your story, one so much better than a fairy tale because it's real—it's your testimony. Your testimony is powerful and can help lead others to Christ.

Today's passage is a great template to use if you need help in preparing to share the gospel. Your testimony doesn't have to be radical to be effective. Like those predictable fairy tale plots, we all share a similar story: We were dead in our sin. God sent Jesus. Because we repented (turned from sin and to God) and confessed faith in Jesus as Lord, we now live free from the bondage of sin. The gospel really is that simple.

When sharing their testimony, people either soften their sin to avoid shame or embarrassment or they exaggerate their sin to create a more dramatic story. The truth is that we don't need to do either of these things when sharing about life before we met Jesus. The focus isn't on the sin but on the sacrifice Jesus made to cover us. Whether we steal a piece of gum or lie every time we speak, we face sin's penalty of death; both sins reveal the same need for Jesus. When preparing your testimony, instead of glorifying or downplaying your sin, glorify what Jesus did to free you. This is the best story, ending with a greater promise than any fairy tale.

- **START WRITING YOUR TESTIMONY. HOW HAS KNOWING JESUS GIVEN YOU FREEDOM?**
- **HOW DOES YOUR DAILY LIFE REFLECT YOUR ETERNAL FREEDOM?**

PRAY

GOD, YOU COULD HAVE MADE ME PAY FOR MY OWN SINS, BUT INSTEAD YOU SENT JESUS TO DIE THE DEATH THAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN MINE. THANK YOU FOR FREEDOM NOW AND FOR ALL ETERNITY.

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DAY TWO

EPHESIANS 2:6-10

Have you seen the reels that show "before" and "after" transformations? Some feature a health transformation or a glow up or a room makeover. The point is that with a little bit of effort and intentionality, anything can change from bad to good, from mediocre to amazing. Your life before meeting Jesus is the "before" stage of your transformation. But through the Holy Spirit's work, you realized your sin and saw yourself for what you really were, a person in need of help.

What was that moment like for you? What was the event or situation that opened your eyes to your need for salvation? These details of your testimony are part of your turning point, the moment you turned away from sin and toward life in Christ. These moments are unique for each person too. God uses hard moments, pain, disappointment, blessings, and so on to reveal your deep need for a Savior. The best part about this turning point in your testimony is that unlike a transformation reel of someone's efforts to change, you didn't work for your salvation. Jesus freely offered it. Today's passage is clear: We are saved by faith and grace alone. The moment you recognized the need for a Savior and surrendered to Him, you transformed—the ultimate glow up! Your story doesn't stop there. When God saves you from your brokenness, He doesn't leave you with broken pieces to fix on your own; He has good plans for you and uses those broken pieces in ways you couldn't think or imagine (Eph. 3:20). Your entire life hinges on this one transformative act of God: You didn't know Him and now you do. You went from death to life in Christ, and this transformation changes everything.

- **WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES HELPED YOU REALIZE YOUR NEED FOR A SAVIOR?**
- **HOW HAVE YOU SEEN JESUS USE YOUR BROKEN PIECES OR SOMEONE ELSE'S BROKEN PIECES?**

PRAY

GOD, THANK YOU FOR THE GIFT OF TRANSFORMATION AND SALVATION. HELP ME TO SHARE MY TESTIMONY TODAY SO THAT OTHERS WILL COME TO KNOW YOU.

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DAY THREE

ROMANS 10:9-13

When we're young, we depend on our parents and guardians for almost everything. Until we're old enough to care for ourselves, we depend on them to care for us, to provide for our basic needs, to teach us. But we can never depend on their decision to follow Christ. They're incapable of saving your soul. Scripture is clear: You must confess with *your* mouth that Jesus is Lord; you must believe in *your* heart that He rose from the grave (v. 9).

When you make this declaration, the Holy Spirit comes to live within you. The Lord transforms your heart and makes you new, and this inner change brings outer change. Your words and actions are different and point people to Jesus. Rather than changing to be saved, you are transformed by God because you are saved. The Spirit does the work within you as you seek the Lord and walk in relationship with Him, changing your desires and helping you live in a way that glorifies Him.

Perhaps Paul had Proverbs 27:19 in mind when he wrote the words in today's passage because he expressed the truth that our actions reflect what's in our heart. If you post a verse on social media before school and then gossip about the new girl at lunch, then your actions aren't in line with what you claim to believe. Your love for Jesus is reflected in the words you speak, the posts you share, the jokes you laugh at, and the way you treat people. When your daily life reflects your changed heart, others will notice. Think of it this way: When you live in a way that reveals God's power to change us, you show unbelievers what it means to be saved and made new. They see the possibility that God can change them too. People are watching. When you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, will they see He is Lord of your life?

- **IN WHAT WAYS HAVE YOUR WORDS AND ACTIONS NOT REFLECTED A CHANGED HEART?**
- **WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE SO THAT YOUR COMMITMENT TO CHRIST IS NOTICEABLE TO A LOST WORLD?**

PRAY

THANK YOU GOD FOR YOUR LOVE AND GRACE. I WANT TO WALK CONFIDENTLY IN YOUR STRENGTH. WHEN SOCIAL SETTINGS START TO LEAD ME ASTRAY, PLEASE PULL ME BACK INTO AN AWARENESS THAT MY ACTIONS AFFECT OTHERS WHO NEED YOU.

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DAY FOUR

EPHESIANS 4:17-24

How do you know when someone is a part of a team? They wear the team's jersey and spend time with their teammates. How do you know when someone is making healthier choices? They choose lean protein and vegetables for lunch instead of pizza and ice cream. How do you know when someone has surrendered their life to Christ? There is something different about them compared to the world: They have peace that can't be explained; they radiate joy; they're kind when others are uncaring. What is the evidence of your relationship with Jesus? Do others know you're different, or do you live like the world, as if the Holy Spirit isn't dwelling inside of you?

Today's passage points out that when we desire to glorify God with our lives, we must intentionally "put off" our old sinful ways and "put on" righteousness. The evidence of your salvation should be as apparent as fruit growing on a tree. The fruit of the Spirit comes from knowing Jesus and looks like "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control" (Gal. 5:22). Can your friends and family describe you with these words? Do they see you actively growing and producing this fruit? Sure, you won't do this perfectly; you live in a world broken by sin, where going with the flow of culture is easier than going against it and living for Christ. But if you continue to walk with Jesus, if you continue to read God's Word and spend time in prayer, He will do the heavy lifting. The evidence of His work will show up for others to see. And when they ask what's different, you can tell them the good news—that Jesus saved you and changed you, and He wants to save them as well.

- **WHAT FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS THE MOST EVIDENT IN YOUR WORDS AND ACTIONS? WHAT FRUIT IS THE LEAST EVIDENT?**
- **HOW CAN YOU TAKE STEPS TO CONTINUE GROWING IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS? WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO CONTINUE GROWING SPIRITUALLY?**

PRAY

GOD, I WANT MY LIFE TO REFLECT SPIRITUAL GROWTH. REVEAL TO ME THE WAYS THAT I HAVE BEEN LIVING IN BROKENNESS. GIVE ME WISDOM TO TURN FROM SIN AND HELP ME TO GROW SPIRITUAL FRUIT FOR YOUR GLORY. I WANT THE FRUIT OF MY LIFE TO POINT OTHERS TO YOU!

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DAY FIVE

1 THESSALONIANS 2:8

This week you have traced your life before Christ, how God revealed your need for salvation, your decision to follow Jesus, and the evidence of faith in your life. Together, this forms your testimony, or your story of faith. Your testimony is believable when people see legitimate change and authentic faith—in other words, when you live out what you say. John 13:35 says that unbelievers will know believers by their love. How are you going to love the unlovable so that they can experience the love of God? How will you love your enemies? Proverbs 4:24 challenges Christians to live in a way that our actions match our words. When we don't live like this—when we fake it at church and live differently around our friends or in the locker room—we not only risk ruining our character but we discredit God's life-changing power. The bottom line: Our words, our actions, our treatment of others will either draw people to the love of God or turn them away.

In Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, he said they had become very dear to him. Are people dear to you? Do they matter? Do you want others to go to heaven? Beyond just sharing the gospel with the lost, are you willing to walk with them? Are you willing to share life with them and express continued care, compassion, and love? Christians are called to love others like Jesus loves them. Love is often the necessary missing piece that softens someone's heart to the gospel. When people feel like they matter to us, we can then share how much they matter to God. This week, look for ways to show people they matter—not simply to check off a box on a list of good works but because they really do matter and because you love them.

- **DO PEOPLE, NOT JUST YOUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY, MATTER TO YOU? IF NOT, WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PRACTICE LOVE FOR THEM?**
- **HOW CAN YOU EXPRESS GENUINE LOVE FOR PEOPLE?**

PRAY

GOD, I WANT YOUR LOVE FOR EVERYONE TO RADIATE THROUGH ME SO THAT THEY WILL COME TO KNOW YOU. PLEASE GIVE ME CONFIDENCE TO SHARE THE GOSPEL THROUGH MY WORDS, MY ACTIONS, AND MY LOVE FOR PEOPLE.

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A VIOLENT *RUSHING WIND*

unit 29 | session 2



CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus had instructed His disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit because He would empower them to be His witnesses on earth. Just as Jesus had promised, the Holy Spirit fell on the disciples, filling and empowering them to carry the gospel message to the world. God gives the Holy Spirit to those who trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior, and the Spirit changes us to be more like Jesus.

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FIRE AND WIND

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

Acts 2

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS WITH US

ACTS 2:1-6

1 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there
came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where
they were sitting. 3 And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of
them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the
Spirit gave them utterance. 5 Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from
every nation under heaven. 6 And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were
bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language.

THE HOLY SPIRIT HELPS US SHARE

ACTS 2:7-21

7 And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?
8 And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? 9 Parthians and Medes
and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,
10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors
from Rome, 11 both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our
own tongues the mighty works of God." 12 And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one
another, "What does this mean?" 13 But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine."
14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea
and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. 15 For these
people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. 16 But this is
what was uttered through the prophet Joel: 17 'And in the last days it shall be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; 18 even on
my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall
prophesy. 19 And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; 20 the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to
blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. 21 And it shall come to
pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'"

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MAIN POINT.

We have everything we need to tell others about Jesus.



THEOLOGY *CONNECTION*

GOD IS ONE IN THREE PERSONS

While the Bible affirms that God is one (Mark 12:29; 1 Cor. 8:4-6), it also affirms that God exists as three Persons, also called the Trinity—Father, Son, and Spirit. Each Person of the Trinity is fully divine—the Father is God (John 6:27), the Son is God (Phil. 2), the Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4)—and each Person is distinct from the others (Matt. 11:27; John 10:30; 14:16). This perfect unity within the three Persons of the Trinity is a core doctrine; straying from it is to drift away from foundational, biblical truth.

DISCUSSION

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS WITH US

ACTS 2:1-6

- **Why do you think God chose this moment to send the Holy Spirit? What drew crowds to the disciples?**
- **How did the disciples know the Holy Spirit was with them? How can we know He is with us?**
- **Should others be able to tell that the Holy Spirit lives within you? Explain. Why isn't there always evidence of God's presence within you?**

THE HOLY SPIRIT HELPS US SHARE

ACTS 2:7-21

- **Why did Peter speak to the crowd? How are we called to do the same?**
- **Why do you think Peter quoted the prophet Joel (vv. 17-21)? How does this connection help us?**
- **Why was believing God sent His Spirit to all people important for the crowd? For us?**

WHAT INTIMIDATES YOU OR KEEPS YOU FROM SHARING GOD'S WORD WITH OTHERS? WHAT WOULD HELP YOU SHARE ANYWAY, LIKE THE APOSTLE PETER?

CULTURAL *CONNECTION*

We put our lives on display on social media or through the way we act and speak. And when we look at others, we can easily feel like they have more and we don't have enough. Comparison builds. Jealousy grows. Insecurity deepens. Stress overwhelms. Confidence fades or feels forced. We weren't meant to live this way. The truth: You can't compare your real life to someone else's carefully chosen social media posts. Even people who share vulnerable moments probably don't share *everything* they're going through. Here's what we do know: God has given His people everything they need to live a godly life and to tell others about Jesus (2 Pet. 1:3). Beyond that, He also promises to provide for our daily needs so that our focus is to pursue a relationship with Him and grow His kingdom above all else (Matt. 6:25-34). But God's love for us goes even further: He gives us the Spirit, who lives within us and empowers us to share the gospel wherever He has us and wherever He sends us.

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DAY ONE

1 CORINTHIANS 6:19

Have you ever played a game of darts? Your goal is to earn the highest point value by throwing the dart and hitting the center of the bullseye. The farther away darts land from the middle, the more the points decrease. If you had lived in the Old Testament period, the proximity of the Holy Spirit was a little like this. God was with His people, but because Jesus hadn't come to earth yet, He could only be close—for their protection, not because He was incapable. God gave the people laws and regulations to purify their environments and their hearts so that His Spirit would live among them—in the temple instead of inside each person. Sort of like a dart that hits the target but not the bullseye.

The Old Testament records striking details about the temple, the dwelling place of God's Spirit: Expensive materials and detailed artistry are reflected in every piece. This dwelling place for God's Spirit wasn't cheap, and it wasn't easy to build. In the same moment of Jesus's death, the heavy curtain hanging in the temple to separate God's Spirit from the people was torn (Matt. 27:50-51). When Jesus ascended to heaven, He promised to send His people a gift, something better than His physical body—the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's dwelling place transferred from a beautiful, expensive, intricate building to our beautiful, costly (paid for by Jesus's sacrifice), broken (imperfect because of sin) bodies. Let that sink in: Of all places God could've chosen for His Spirit, He chose your heart for His home, like the bullseye of God's love and affection. This gift should change our desires, helping us to run from sin and pursue godliness. Your heart is a home for the King of creation: beautiful, worthy, and restored because of Jesus.

- **HOW DO YOU FEEL KNOWING YOUR HEART IS THE DWELLING PLACE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT? DOES GOD'S NEARNESS SCARE YOU OR EXCITE YOU? EXPLAIN.**
- **WHAT'S THE CONDITION OF YOUR HEART: CAN THE HOLY SPIRIT FLOURISH OR DO YOUR CHOICES STIFLE HIS POWER IN YOUR LIFE? HOW CAN YOU HONOR HIS PRESENCE WITHIN YOU?**

PRAY

GOD, THANK YOU FOR CHOOSING MY HEART FOR YOUR SPIRIT'S HOME. HELP ME LIVE IN A MANNER WORTHY OF THE CALLING YOU HAVE PLACED ON MY LIFE. DO KINGDOM WORK THROUGH ME.

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DAY TWO

JOHN 16:8-13

Have you ever been riding in the car when the driver lost focus, causing them to veer off the road and onto those lines that makes the car vibrate? Those lines are designed to jolt drivers back to awareness, warning them that they're close to danger. When this happens, drivers either respond and get back on course or they ignore the warning and end up in a tough situation.

The conviction of the Holy Spirit is a lot like those bumpy lines. When we ignore Him, we end up on the wrong path. When we respond to His voice, we move in the right direction, leading to righteousness, wisdom, and closeness with God. But it's tough, right? We are broken people living in a broken world, and we don't always handle temptation to sin very well. To make matters more difficult, the growing presence of artificial intelligence (AI) floods us with false realities, making what we see and hear difficult to trust. We need a filter in place to discern what's real from what's fake. The good news is that believers have the strongest, most trustworthy filter in the Holy Spirit, and He literally lives within us. The Spirit clears up the blurry world view in front of us and leads us to truth. He shows us what is godly and what is worldly; He points out our sin; He comforts us with truth. Isn't this reassuring? We can live with a godly worldview and trust the Spirit's conviction to show us how to live. He warns us, helping us to stay in the boundaries of truth and righteousness. So, when you hear His voice, much like those bumpy lines on the road, respond. Your good God loves you enough to warn you when you get off course.

- **HOW HAS AI AFFECTED YOUR PERCEPTION OF REALITY? WHEN HAS IT MADE YOU QUESTION WHAT'S TRUE?**
- **WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT'S ROLE IN YOUR LIFE? HOW CAN KNOWING THE WORD HELP YOU DETECT THE SPIRIT'S VOICE MORE EASILY?**

PRAY

GOD, I WANT A BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW. CONSTANTLY TRYING TO DISCERN WHAT IS TRUE AND WHAT IS FALSE IS EXHAUSTING. I NEED YOUR WISDOM AND DISCERNMENT TO KNOW HOW TO LIVE. HELP ME TO RESPOND TO YOUR VOICE.

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DAY THREE

GALATIANS 5:16-18,22-26

Have you ever heard someone say that being a Christian is boring? Maybe you've said it or at least thought it. What do we really mean? What exactly feels boring about the Christian life? Often, it is a misunderstanding. The guidelines of a Christian lifestyle people perceive as boring are actually what makes it amazing! But let's be honest: When we say living a godly life is boring, what we really mean is that sin is more fun. According to Paul, we should resist the desires of our flesh to walk by the Spirit. But the desires of our flesh *are* fun; sin is often appealing. If sin wasn't fun, appealing, or temporarily satisfying, we wouldn't do it. But what sin offers us is temporary, like an illusion. What sin really offers us is separation from God.

Being in relationship with God is gift. As we pursue relationship with Him, we become more like Jesus. The evidence is the fruit of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Is joy boring? Isn't peace what we all desire? Isn't unconditional love something we crave, sometimes driving us to take desperate measures just to feel it from others? As believers, we don't work to *earn* this fruit; it grows as a result of walking with God. What people mistake as a "boring" life—turning from sin and toward God—is *really* living. The Spirit works in our hearts and minds to convict us of sin and to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit. When you say "no" to what harms you spiritually, like an invite to a party you know will include alcohol and other substances, you're cultivating self-control, which will benefit you more than giving in and participating in the party. What feels like missing out is only a temporary sacrifice that leads to deeper joy and a life that is anything but boring.

- **WHAT TEMPORARY PLEASURES ARE YOU GIVING IN TO NOW?**
- **WHEN HAVE YOU FELT THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN GOD'S SPIRIT WITHIN YOU AND THE DESIRE TO BE LIKE THE WORLD? WHAT HAS HAPPENED WHEN YOU'VE GIVEN IN TO WORLDLY DESIRES?**

PRAY

GOD, I WANT TO BE ROOTED IN YOUR WORD SO THAT YOUR FRUIT WILL GROW IN MY LIFE. PLEASE FORGIVE ME FOR THE TEMPORARY PLEASURES I HAVE BEEN PURSUING AND HELP ME TO PURSUE YOU INSTEAD.

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DAY FOUR

1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-7

Who would you consider more important: the pastor of your church or the team that cleans the building when everyone has gone home? Would you believe that they are equally important and valued in the eyes of God? God has given your pastor the skills to break down Scripture in a way for people to understand and apply it to their life. That is important. God has given the cleaning team both the skills and the ability to clean even the toughest spaces—like the middle school boy's bathroom! They take care of God's house in a meaningful way. Both the pastor and the cleaning crew contribute to creating a warm, welcoming environment so that everyone can hear the sermon and not be distracted by filth. Both are equally important.

If this is true, and it is, then why do we treat one as more superior over the other? Today's passage points out many ways to serve the Lord, but each act of service equally honors the Lord. We often struggle to think this way; because of the way our culture operates, we're conditioned to rank certain gifts, jobs, or abilities above others. But every gift offered to God, whether big or small by worldly standards, glorifies Him the same. As you work out your gifts or your calling, the temptation to pursue fame and applause is very real, but if God has gifted you to work the lights on Sunday morning, to refill a coffee pot, to give a message to your small group, then do those things with your best effort—as worship and service to God. And if you aren't sure what you can offer, ask someone who knows you to share what they see. Pay attention to the compliments people give you. Take note of the things that give you the most joy and refuel you with energy. How can you use that gift to serve God?

- **WHAT ACTIVITY ARE YOU MOST PASSIONATE ABOUT?**
- **HOW ARE YOU USING THAT FOR GOD'S GLORY?**

PRAY

GOD, YOU HAVE GIVEN ME GIFTS AND PASSIONS FOR YOUR GLORY AND NOT MY OWN. FORGIVE ME FOR THE TIMES I PURSUED THEM WITH SELFISH AMBITION. I GIVE MY PASSIONS AND GIFTS BACK TO YOU. USE THEM FOR YOUR GLORY.



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DAY FIVE

JOHN 14:16-17,25-26; ROMANS 8:26

School cafeterias can be terrifying, right? And not just because the food is sometimes less than stellar. Have you ever had to walk into a cafeteria alone and had no one to sit with? That familiar pit formed in your stomach as you took a deep breath and made your way to an empty seat. In those moments, did you think to pray for peace or a place to belong? You may think this minor situation doesn't matter to God, and if so, you couldn't be more wrong. You matter to God, and He cares for the details in your life that may seem insignificant.

In today's passage, Jesus explained that the Holy Spirit is our Counselor, our Comforter, and our Helper in all things at all times. Even if a physical person doesn't show up for you, God will never leave you alone. Lonely lunches in the cafeteria can build a deeper reliance on God and are building blocks of your faith. Then, when you are in a tougher situation that requires you to call on God as Comforter and Counselor, you've developed an awareness of the Holy Spirit and a habit of calling on His help. The "minor" situations help us develop spiritual habits that will strengthen us for tougher seasons.

Sometimes, those hard seasons look like broken relationships that devastate us or broken homes that rob us of peace. Sometimes, we face seasons of feeling like the loneliest person in the world. God is your Comforter and Helper. He longs to walk with you through those seasons, to provide you with His strength and His faithfulness. Do you trust Him enough to look to Him for peace in your darkest days? That trust builds in the days beforehand, in the moments that seem small.

- **DO YOU TRUST GOD ENOUGH TO RELY ON HIM IN YOUR DARKEST DAYS? IF NOT, WHAT CAN YOU DO TODAY TO TURN TOWARD HIM WITH SMALLER SITUATIONS?**
- **HOW HAS GOD SHOWN HIS PRESENCE AND OVERWHELMED YOU WITH PEACE AND COMFORT IN YOUR LONELINESS?**

PRAY

GOD, THANK YOU FOR THE PEACE AND COMFORT THAT YOU SO FREELY GIVE TO ME. HELP ME TO LEAN ON YOU WHEN THE PROBLEMS I FACE ARE TOO HEAVY TO CARRY ON MY OWN.

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CHRIST CONNECTION

Once the disciples received the Holy Spirit, they began boldly proclaiming Jesus as Lord and Savior. The Holy Spirit displayed the power of God's kingdom through the miracles the disciples performed in Jesus's name for His glory and praise.

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SEEING THE NEED

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

Acts 3

THE HOLY SPIRIT DOES THE WORK

ACTS 3:1-10

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

WE POINT TO JESUS

ACTS 3:11-16

11 While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's. 12 And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? 13 The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. 14 But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, 15 and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. 16 And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all."

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MAIN POINT.

God's power transforms us and works through us.



THEOLOGY CONNECTION

WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Spirit's work in the life of a Christian begins in the work of salvation by drawing a person to faith in Christ; the Spirit's work continues through sanctification, or helping believers to become more like Christ as they walk with Him. He also empowers and indwells believers, intercedes on their behalf, and equips them with spiritual gifts to grow God's kingdom. He is the Comforter and Guide, who helps us properly interpret the Bible.

DISCUSSION

THE HOLY SPIRIT DOES THE WORK

ACTS 3:1-10

- **What was the lame man looking for? Why are only some people healed this side of heaven?**
- **How do you think the man felt when Peter couldn't give him money? What can this teach us?**
- **How did Peter and John treat this man? What does this tell us about the way we should treat those who are hurting?**

WE POINT TO JESUS

ACTS 3:11-16

- **Who did Peter say healed the man? Why is it good news that we can't do God's work on our own?**
- **Why does it matter that everything in our lives points to Jesus?**
- **Where do you see Peter's boldness? Why do we struggle to share our faith with boldness today?**

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS YOU CAN SEE AND CARE FOR THE HURTING PEOPLE AROUND YOU?

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Many of us experience learning differences or challenges, like ADHD, autism, dyslexia (reading), dysgraphia (grammar and handwriting), dyscalculia (understanding numbers)—just to name a few. Some of us have physical conditions that limit certain movements or zap our energy, like chronic migraines, fatigue, paralysis, or traumatic brain injuries. Even if we haven't experienced these differences or conditions, all of us know what it's like to feel different, left out, or disliked because of who we are, what we look like, limitations beyond our control, or our family's resources. Here's some really good news: (1) Your struggles and differences are not your identity, though God can use them for your good and His glory. (2) Jesus sees you—every part of you, including the parts you like and the parts you wish were different—and He loves you more than you can imagine. Although we're not perfect, this is the exact kind of love Jesus calls His people to have for others. We are to see, know, and love just as He has seen, known, and loved us.

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DAY ONE

ACTS 4:1-4

Today's Scripture tells of two men placed in jail for boldly proclaiming the gospel. According to worldly standards, their bold faith was too costly. But if we asked Peter and John if the discomfort of jail was worth it, they would tell you without hesitation that it was the right move. Why? Five thousand people were saved because Peter and John proclaimed the gospel without fear. Their obedience to God cost them worldly comfort but imagine the day they got to heaven and met the people saved because of their willingness to be uncomfortable.

What about you? When you are faced with an uncomfortable opportunity to share the gospel, do you take it? When sharing your faith comes with consequences like being made fun of, misunderstood, laughed at, or ignored, do you follow through anyway? Your obedience likely won't land you in jail, but it might require you to walk away from your group of friends during after-school pickup to sit with someone who is alone. Or to share the gospel with a stranger. Or to use all of your saved money to buy Christmas gifts for a family in need. How deep is your belief in the gospel? Do you believe so strongly in its power to change lives that you obey at the cost of your popularity? Jesus said we would face rejection for our faith, but really, this rejection is aimed at Jesus. Let that be your motivation to share even more. Paul says, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). Jesus is for you, even if you feel like others are against you. And your obedience could lead others to salvation.

- **RECALL A TIME WHEN YOU TOOK A STEP OF FAITH AND SHARED THE GOSPEL WITH SOMEONE. HOW DID IT ENCOURAGE YOU TO CONTINUE TO TELL THE GOOD NEWS?**
- **WHAT IS ONE WAY YOU'RE GIVING IN TO WORLDLY COMFORT AT THE EXPENSE OF BEING OBEDIENT TO GOD? WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DO INSTEAD?**

PRAY

GOD, I WANT TO HAVE BOLD FAITH. HELP ME TO IDENTIFY THE WORLDLY COMFORTS I CAN SACRIFICE TO SHARE YOUR GOOD NEWS.

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DAY TWO

ACTS 4:5-12

"Live your truth" is a popular phrase and mindset. Our culture tells us that challenging others to live according to any belief other than their own is offensive—that we should just let people believe what they want to believe and not worry about it. Why? First, this is the enemy's way of keeping believers silent and apathetic. This mindset infiltrates our churches, keeping us from being effective in reaching people with the gospel. Next, the world is broken, so living in sin is easier and more comfortable than pursuing holiness. By nature, we resist being told we're wrong and fight to protect our opinions, labeling them as truth. But here's the truth: Jesus never said to leave people alone, to let them live their truth while we live ours, to only share with people who already mostly agree with what the Bible says. Like Jesus came for the sick and for the sinner, He sends us to them as well. Peter didn't water down the truth: He explained that Jesus was the only way to salvation (v. 12). We can be sure that many people took offense to this claim. Today, this claim usually results in being called narrow-minded or judgmental. So, how do we respond to people we've offended with the truth of God's Word? Do we take back what we said in an effort to mend the broken relationship, or do we continue to show them Jesus's love by continuing to speak what's true? To do the latter is challenging because it's uncomfortable. But obeying God is worth our discomfort and rejection. Our best response is to be faithful to what God has asked of us: Love Him with our entire self and love others (Matt. 22:37-40). The best way for them to know God's Word is true is to see us live it; the best way for them to understand God's love is for us to share the love of Jesus through our words and actions—even when the truth is offensive. Here's the deal: God's Word is offensive to our sin. It must be to open our eyes to what sin costs. Often, those we offend become less offended when we lead with love and joy rather than judgment, with hope instead of rules, and with authenticity instead of half-hearted obedience.

- **HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO SOMEONE WHO RESISTS TRUTH? DO YOU SHUT DOWN AND GIVE UP?**
- **HOW IS SPEAKING TRUTH A FORM OF SHOWING LOVE?**

PRAY

GOD, THE WORLD IS BROKEN AND I OFTEN FEAR OFFENDING PEOPLE WITH TRUTH. PLEASE FORGIVE ME AND HELP ME TO LIVE IN YOUR TRUTH EVEN WHEN IT IS UNCOMFORTABLE.

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DAY THREE

ACTS 4:13-22

Have you ever been able to look at someone and know exactly where they've been? Maybe you ran into a friend at the store, and because of their bright red sunburn, you knew they had been at the beach. What you saw made it obvious.

In today's passage, the crowd recognized that Peter and John had spent time with Jesus. How was this possible? The men's boldness to share the gospel in the face of rejection showed people they had been given courage beyond their capabilities. Jesus's influence on Peter and John was obvious and undeniable. Do you live a life so deeply rooted in God that other people see Him when they look at you? When you are on the court and the referee makes a call you don't agree with, do your words and actions reflect Jesus's character? Does your speech build people up or tear them down? Is Jesus's influence evident in how you live? In the book of James, we read that unbelievers will know we follow God by our words and actions (2:18). We can live this out in the big and small moments. In fact, the small moments often reveal more of what's inside us. If your team wins a big race, shake hands with everyone who crossed the finish line after you; if someone approaches a door with full hands, open it for them. Show kindness any chance you can. Sure, the big moments matter—the times when we must stand strong and defend truth. But Jesus's influence is often most evident in the way we live out small moments. They open doors to share the gospel because you treat people the way Jesus treated people, and this isn't the norm. You create opportunities to show Jesus's character to a broken and hurting world. These small moments have great reward if you do them all to point others to Jesus.

- **HOW DO YOU USE YOUR WORDS TO BUILD UP OTHERS?**
- **WHAT IS ONE SMALL CHANGE YOU CAN MAKE IN YOUR DAILY ACTIONS TO OPEN THE DOOR TO SHARE THE GOSPEL?**

PRAY

GOD, I WANT OTHER PEOPLE TO SEE YOU WHEN THEY LOOK AT ME. HELP ME TO BECOME MORE DEEPLY ROOTED IN YOUR WORD SO THAT I CAN SHARE IT WITH THE LOST.

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DAY FOUR

ACTS 4:23-31

Imagine you are a team leader for an extracurricular event at school. As the leader, you set the culture and vibe for the team. It's a big job that requires a lot of wisdom and boldness. What things are you involved in that you can practice being a good leader?

As we continue in Acts 4 today, we see that the threat against Peter and John didn't end; they were released from prison, but their mission had not changed. Their first action was to pray for boldness to continue sharing the truth of the gospel. Notice what they *don't* ask for: a quick way out, safety, or the threat to go away. They continue to keep the main thing the main thing—telling the good news of Jesus. Can you relate to their boldness or are you confused by it? Peer pressure is real; from extracurriculars to social media, we feel a deep need to be relevant, and it is enough to make the strongest person crumble. What are you doing to boldly live out your faith? God has placed you on that team, in that position, in that class, or at that table for a reason. Your boldness to share the gospel is needed above everything else. If you are currently making choices that allow you to fit in rather than stand out, start by praying for boldness. God hasn't left you to figure things out on your own, and He will be with you when you do stand up for truth. Who knows—maybe your boldness will spark a revival like it did in today's passage. God can do more with your faithfulness than you can begin to imagine.

- **WHERE HAS GOD PLACED YOU? WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE TO SHARE THE GOSPEL WITH BOLDNESS IN THOSE PLACES?**
- **HOW BOLD ARE YOU? WHAT CAN YOU DO TODAY TO BE BOLDER THAN YOU WERE YESTERDAY?**

PRAY

GOD, THANK YOU THAT I HAVE GOOD NEWS TO SHARE. PLEASE GIVE ME THE WISDOM TO SEE AN OPEN DOOR AND THE BOLDNESS TO SHARE.

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DAY FIVE

ACTS 4:32-37

Today's passage details a type of generosity that is unheard of in our world, completely foreign to us. We're conditioned to save up, to hoard everything we can for ourselves. We're taught to do whatever it takes to have enough—or more than enough—even if that means taking from others. But in this passage, the people who had received the Holy Spirit lived in solid community. This community wasn't brought together by a shared street address but was communal in all ways possible. If someone needed food, others shared their crops. When someone's shoes wore out, a new pair was given to them without any strings attached. People gave out of what they had and expected nothing in return. And somehow, everyone had enough. Does that depth of generosity make sense to you? Does it make you uncomfortable to consider being that generous? If so, you're not alone. Though we know Jesus, we still struggle with trusting God to care for our needs, so we cling tightly to what we have just in case He doesn't come through. People who do not know Jesus have an even harder time making sense of sacrificial generosity.

How about you? Jesus gave generously of Himself so that you can live freely. If you struggle with generosity, let that truth motivate you. Give your monthly allowance to a friend who doesn't have lunch money. Your generosity can open a door to share the gospel. When you step up and fill a need, others will ask why, and you can tell them it's because of Jesus's generosity and love that you also give. We experience great joy when we fill in the gaps for someone else. If you haven't experienced this joy because you worry about giving away what you have, take a small step. Know that God cares for you and supplies for your needs (Phil. 4:19). You have every reason to give freely because the God of creation cares for you.

- **WHAT ENCOURAGES YOU ABOUT THE DEPTH OF GENEROSITY IN THE PASSAGE? WHAT CAUSES YOU TO RESIST GENEROSITY?**
- **HOW CAN YOU PRACTICE GENEROSITY TODAY?**

PRAY

THANK YOU GOD FOR PROVIDING FOR MY NEEDS. HELP ME TO BE A GENEROUS GIVER AND TO FILL THE NEEDS I SEE IN FRONT OF ME. I KNOW I CAN TRUST YOU TO CARE FOR ME EVEN IF YOU CALL ME TO GIVE ALL I HAVE TO OTHERS.

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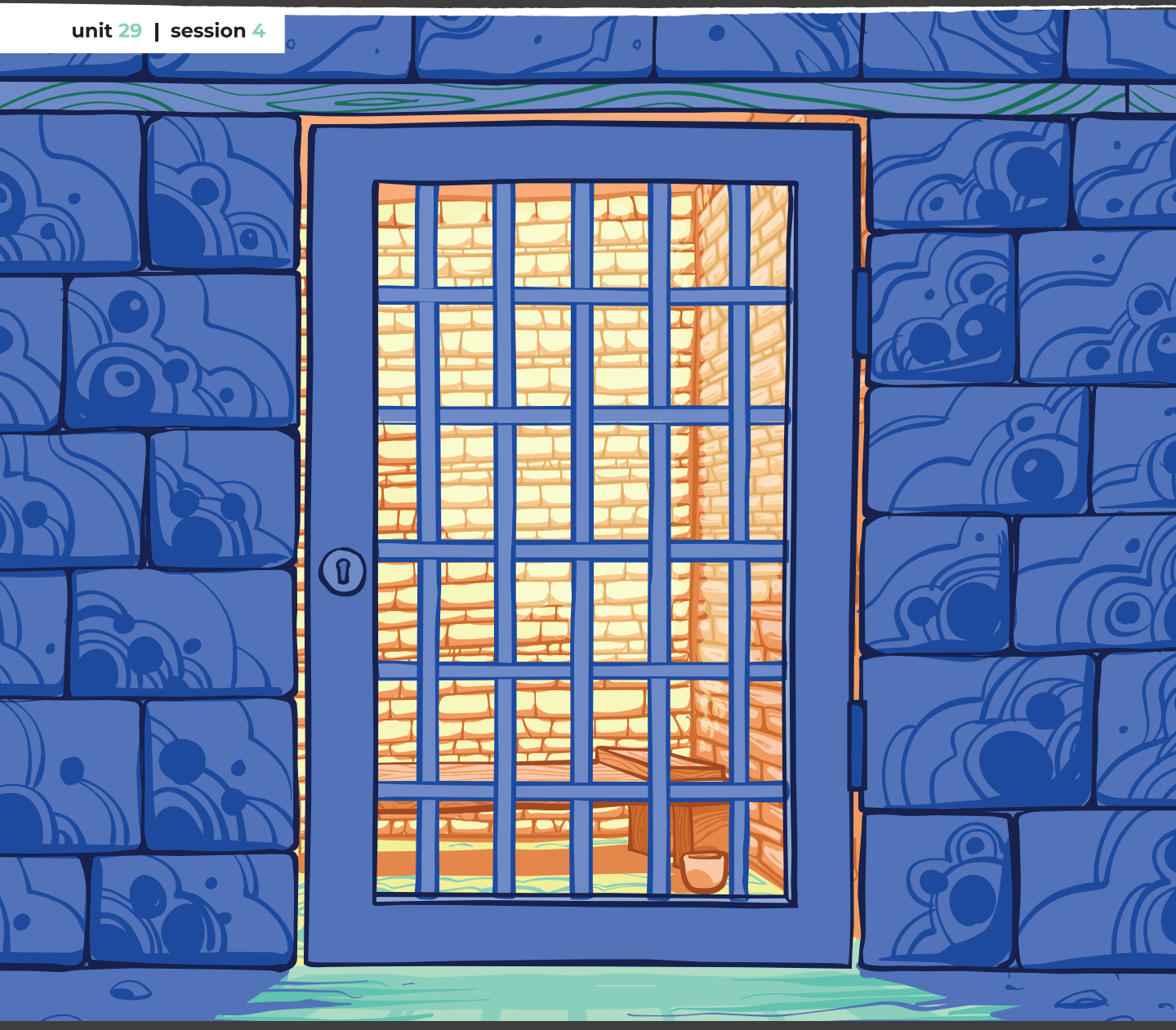

CHRIST CONNECTION

God calls His people to endure life's trials with hope, joy, and honor so that even those who wrong us might see Christ in us. When we live like this, we imitate Jesus, who endured the cross because of the joy that was coming (Heb. 12:2). Though we've sinned against God, we're saved because of Jesus's obedience to the Father.

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FAITHFUL IN ALL THINGS

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

Acts 4–5

WE ENDURE FAITHFULLY

ACTS 5:17-25

17 But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy 18 they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. 19 But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, 20 "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life." 21 And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach. Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. 22 But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, 23 "We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside." 24 Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. 25 And someone came and told them, "Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people."

WE SPEAK BOLDLY

ACTS 5:26-32

26 Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people. 27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, 28 saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." 29 But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. 30 The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

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MAIN POINT.

Our faithfulness to Jesus isn't circumstantial.



THEOLOGY CONNECTION

JUSTIFICATION AND WORKS

Justification, or being declared righteous before God, is not the result of human effort or good works but comes through faith in Jesus and His righteousness. Although good works do not earn justification, justification motivates believers to do good works (Eph. 2:10) because faith without works is dead (James 2:17). Good works reveal a genuine faith and make our justification evident to others.

DISCUSSION

WE ENDURE FAITHFULLY

ACTS 5:17-25

- **Read Acts 5:12-16. Why were the religious leaders jealous? How can we deal with our jealousy?**
- **How did the apostles respond to being freed? Why didn't they take this chance to go into hiding?**
- **Why is being faithful to God so hard for us? How does knowing our calling help us remain faithful to Jesus, even when we're rejected or persecuted?**

WE SPEAK BOLDLY

ACTS 5:26-32

- **Where do you see God's sovereignty (His control and power over all things) in these verses?**
- **Why does our bold faith matter? Why can't we just live quietly for Jesus?**
- **When have you struggled to say, "I must obey God rather than men"?**

HOW CAN YOU PREPARE YOUR HEART NOW TO STAND FIRM IN YOUR FAITH, EVEN IF YOU FACE PERSECUTION FOR IT?

CULTURAL CONNECTION

With the rise of influencers, sometimes it seems like everyone's an expert, whether they have the credentials to back up their opinions or not. Wherever you go online you can find advice and reviews on pretty much every topic to support almost any view. Rather than being helpful, this overload of information—which is mostly unverified—can cause us to feel confused or unable to make decisions. Basically, when we're overloaded with too much information, we can get stuck, so afraid of making the wrong choice that we don't make a choice at all. Here's the thing: Who we listen to and where we get our information matter. As Christians, this is especially important. All believers can share wisdom as God gives it to them, but getting as close to the source as possible is important. Since God is our source of wisdom, we can always go to His Word to make sure what we're hearing is true.

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DAY ONE

JOHN 15:18-20

Jesus didn't sugar coat it: We will be hated for following Him. Not everyone will receive the same level of hate or persecution, but we can be confident it will happen in some way. Now, we don't have to live with fear or anxiety wondering when or how we may suffer, but we can live in a way that prepares us. How are you preparing?

Look back at what Jesus said in verse 19. Oddly enough, the way you can prepare for persecution is by doing the very thing that may cause it: to guard yourself against becoming worldly. What does that mean? In this sense, we're talking about the worldly system that opposes God. When we commit to following Jesus, His Spirit lives within us, changing our desires and making us more like Him. We're citizens of God's kingdom and live in a way that honors Him. In other words, we don't live for this world; we don't chase the same pleasures or comforts. Instead of living for popularity and material possessions, we live with eternity in mind. When we do this, we realize that living for the Lord is worth it, even when we face the hate Jesus promised. When you make decisions that aren't worldly, your friends and family may feel confused or disagree. While you should honor and obey your parents (always within the boundaries of what is safe), you are not living *for* them; you aren't living for anyone else but your Creator (Gal. 1:10). If you are hated, laughed at, excluded, misunderstood, or even persecuted for your faith, find comfort in knowing the world sees Jesus in you. Ultimately, they're rejecting Him, not you. Remember, Jesus explained what would happen. You can be confident that He won't leave you to handle things on your own. Though He promised we'd experience trouble, He also promised us peace because He has overcome the world (John 16:33)!

- **WHAT ARE TEMPTATIONS OF THIS WORLD THAT YOU STRUGGLE TO OVERCOME?**
- **HOW HAVE YOU SEEN GOD AT WORK IN YOUR TROUBLES?**

PRAY

GOD, THANK YOU FOR YOUR PRESENCE IN MY TRIALS. PLEASE HELP ME TO LIVE WITH COURAGE, EVEN IF IT LEADS TO PERSECUTION.

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DAY TWO

PHILIPPIANS 3:7-11

Scripture warns us of the dangers of loving this world. But why is the world such a dangerous thing to love? The things of this world won't last. The new car you'd do almost anything to have, the designer bag you drool over every time it shows up in your feed, even the future home you want to own one day are temporary. Here's the thing: Not everything that's worldly is inherently sinful. That car and your dream home don't directly oppose God. But the danger is in our tendency to put our hope in these things; we elevate what isn't eternal to the highest place, turning worldly goals and possessions into idols. We're setting ourselves up for disappointment because these worldly treasures make very bad gods.

Paul considered everything he gained in the world as a loss compared to knowing Jesus. Can you say the same? Have you placed your hope in anything else—and if you lost that thing, would it take with it your hope? When knowing Jesus is your ultimate prize, the loss doesn't hit as hard because your hope wasn't misplaced. Paul, who knew what it meant to suffer, explained that suffering leads to godly character and endurance, so we can rejoice when we are in tough situations (Rom. 5:4). We often question God when we don't get what we want or when we suffer in some way, but what if God wants you to know Him more deeply and to value Him above anything else? What if He wants you to shift your hope from what's temporary to what lasts because He loves you that much? When your hope is in the Lord, you're free to hold loosely the things here; you're able to let all else go because you know your hope is rooted in the security of your salvation and eternity with Him.

- **HONESTLY ASSESS YOUR CURRENT GOALS: ARE THEY GODLY? WHAT DO THEY REVEAL ABOUT YOUR HOPE?**
- **WHAT IS SOMETHING WORLDLY YOU'VE STRUGGLED TO LET GO OF? WHAT DO YOU FEAR?**

PRAY

THANK YOU, GOD, FOR THE HOPE I HAVE IN YOU. THANK YOU FOR ALWAYS CARING FOR ME THROUGH DARK DAYS. HELP ME TO HAVE A GREATER AWARENESS OF YOUR PRESENCE AND TO PLACE MY HOPE IN YOU ALONE.

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DAY THREE

HEBREWS 11:32-38

Have you ever felt like something was a waste of your time or energy? Maybe an event took up several hours but wasn't worth it. But we're often willing to make sacrifices for what matters to us, even suffering in some way if necessary. Believers who lived during the period after Jesus returned to heaven suffered more than we can imagine. They knew the truth and fought to proclaim it, even when they risked death.

Today's passage highlights men and women who suffered for their faith. Their suffering puts our suffering into perspective. Not being included in Friday night activities is lonely, but living in the desert or being stoned because of your faith is a whole different level of suffering for the sake of the gospel. But look again at verse 38: This world wasn't worthy of them. Wow. The people listed in this section of Hebrews were so faithful, so willing to live with eternity in mind, that the world didn't deserve them. Some willingly faced persecution and were thrown into the lion's den; some called down fire from heaven; some scaled walls and defeated armies with no weapons. God's power was magnified because of their willingness to suffer. When you're willing to obey God in this way, He will show up for you and even use your life to magnify His power. Maybe you're suffering on a much smaller scale than they were, but God still sees and knows. God will use it for His glory and your good. When you are laughed at during cheer practice for not doing a specific dance move or mocked for praying before your big race, all of those "small" moments point others to Jesus, who is worthy of it all. Take a moment today to thank God for the difficulty of living out your faith because you know your faith is more valuable than gold (1 Pet. 1:7), worth every refining moment. His power is made perfect in our weakness, so let us be weak for His glory (2 Cor. 12:9).

- **WHY WASN'T THE WORLD WORTHY OF THOSE MENTIONED IN THIS PASSAGE? HOW CAN WE LIVE LIKE THIS?**
- **HOW ARE YOU TRYING TO PROVE YOUR OWN STRENGTH? WHAT CAN YOU DO TO LET GOD WORK THROUGH YOUR WEAKNESS?**

PRAY

GOD, THANK YOU FOR YOUR POWER IN MY WEAKNESS. THE SEASONS OF SUFFERING ARE PAINFUL, BUT I AM SO GRATEFUL THAT YOU CARRY ME THROUGH.

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DAY FOUR

HEBREWS 12:1-2

Have you ever run for an extended period of time or trained for a race? What typically happens during a long race is your muscles break down and become fatigued. An experienced runner knows that even though this process is unpleasant, the soreness of broken-down muscles is necessary. Why? Once the muscle repairs itself, the result is a stronger muscle that can endure longer, more challenging runs. If you've seen a race, you likely saw the crowds of people lining the streets to cheer on those running. Slowing down or walking in front of those people isn't an option; the runners endure and push even more to save their reputations.

The running scenario is a great visual of today's passage. One hard season in life makes you stronger for the next. You build spiritual strength every time you allow yourself to break and depend on the Lord. The stories of the Bible aren't just kids' stories; they're about real people who will meet you in heaven one day with their own race stories to share. And if they could speak to you now, they'd probably cheer and tell you to keep going, to push harder, to know the finish line is worth the struggle. You're not alone in this race; this great crowd of witnesses in heaven has gone before you. The next time you want to stop and give up, choose a name from Hebrews 11; read their story and keep moving forward in your faith. Even more than the men and women who went before us is the reality that the Son of God went for us. He suffered and endured the most unimaginable suffering. Picture Him waiting for you as you cross the ten-mile marker, handing you water at the fifteen-mile water station, picking you up when you trip at mile twenty, and then standing at the finish line, saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:23). For the joy set before Him, Jesus endured the cross. For the joy set before you (eternity with Jesus), endure and run with all your strength.

- **HOW IS IT ENCOURAGING TO KNOW THAT YOU ARE NOT ALONE IN YOUR FAITH RACE?**
- **WHAT HAPPENS IF WE RUN FOR ANY OTHER PRIZE BUT JESUS? HOW CAN YOU RUN FOR THE JOY OF ETERNITY WITH HIM?**

PRAY

THANK YOU, GOD, FOR BIBLICAL COMMUNITY AND THE ENCOURAGEMENT THAT I CAN DRAW FROM THEIR TESTIMONIES. HELP ME CONTINUE TO RUN THE RACE YOU HAVE FOR ME. WHEN I WANT TO STOP OR SLOW DOWN, REMIND ME THAT I AM NOT ALONE AND TO KEEP GOING.

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DAY FIVE

JAMES 1:2-4

We've talked about suffering a good bit over the last week because suffering was a reality for believers who began the early church. What are your thoughts on suffering? Your response is probably, "No thanks, please," which is understandable. Have you noticed the importance of suffering this week as we've studied enduring persecution? No one joyfully volunteers for suffering, but anyone can endure suffering with a joyful spirit. How? The answer is not found in "how" as much as "Who." Jesus is the "perfecter of," or the one who completes, your faith (Heb. 12:2); He went ahead of you, and keeping your eyes on Him helps you stay steadfast. Think about the running analogy again. If you've ever run on a track, then you know that where you look affects the path of your feet. If your eyes wander, your feet follow. In other words, as you're running, you fix your eyes on Jesus to keep from weaving off course. And when you do, your suffering leads to sanctification, or being made more like Jesus. Read that again: Suffering well makes us more like Jesus because He showed us how to suffer well. He suffered so that we can live eternally with Him, but this world is full of sin; while we wait for heaven, we must endure the effects of sin. When a classmate starts a rumor about you that leaves you isolated, keep your eyes on Jesus. If you're working to build your parents' trust after disobeying their rules, keep your eyes on Jesus. If your boyfriend or girlfriend breaks up with you because you value a pure heart and have godly standards, keep your eyes on Jesus. The answer to all our suffering is Jesus, the "founder and perfecter of our faith." Keep Him as your focus and you will run straight.

- **HOW HAS KEEPING YOUR EYES ON JESUS HELPED YOU ENDURE SOME TYPE OF PAIN OR SUFFERING?**
- **RECALL WHEN YOU'VE TRIED TO HANDLE A DIFFICULT SEASON ON YOUR OWN. WHAT COULD'VE BEEN DIFFERENT IF YOU HAD RELIED ON JESUS INSTEAD?**

PRAY

GOD, THANK YOU FOR GIVING PURPOSE TO MY SUFFERING AND A REWARD FOR MY ENDURANCE. PLEASE HELP ME TO CONTINUE TO SUFFER WELL WITH YOU.

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THE FACE OF *AN ANGEL*

unit 29 | session 5



CHRIST CONNECTION

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

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FAITHFUL IN SUFFERING

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

Acts 6–7

THE WORLD WILL OPPOSE US

ACTS 6:8-15

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

GOD'S PROMISES NEVER CHANGE

ACTS 7:51-60

51 "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. 52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, 53 you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it." 54 Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. 55 But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56 And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." 57 But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. 58 Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60 And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

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MAIN POINT.

Our suffering reveals where we've placed our hope.



THEOLOGY CONNECTION

GLORIFICATION

Glorification is the final stage in the process of salvation. It refers to the future time when a Christian reaches moral and spiritual perfection at the time of death or at Jesus's return (Phil. 1:9-11; Col. 1:22). Glorification also involves the physical perfection of our heavenly bodies. When we are glorified, we will have a fuller knowledge and understanding of God and His Word (Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Cor. 13:12).

DISCUSSION

THE WORLD WILL OPPOSE US

ACTS 6:8-15

- **Describe Stephen based on this passage. Why should we want to be known for the same qualities?**
- **What opposition did Stephen face? What does his response show us about facing opposition?**
- **What struggles or questions do you wrestle with when it comes to believers suffering for their faith?**

GOD'S PROMISES NEVER CHANGE

ACTS 7:51-60

- **Why did Stephen call his audience "stiff-necked"? What do you think he could call us? Explain.**
- **How do we walk through suffering with hope and joy? Who have you seen do this?**
- **In what ways do you see Stephen imitate Jesus?**

WHAT ARE WAYS YOU CAN SUPPORT PEOPLE WHO ARE SUFFERING FOR THEIR FAITH?

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Have you ever struggled to be honest with someone? Maybe you thought about their reaction and struggled to convince yourself that you'll be okay. Your mind knows the truth: You will be okay, even if a difficult truth causes someone you love to turn his or her back on you. But your heart still wonders, *Will this be the end of our friendship? Will they hate me? Will I get through this?* So, no matter how much you believe in what you're saying, no matter how much you've prayed for wisdom or asked for advice from wise people who love you and love God, staying quiet feels easier and safer than confronting someone. Our comfort in the familiar—a relationship, a habit, a thought pattern—can keep us stuck when God wants to lead us forward, deeper into our new life in Him (2 Cor. 5:17). Instead of being afraid of not being like or not having our needs met, we can cling to God, who gives us everything we need in Jesus, even if others don't agree or understand.

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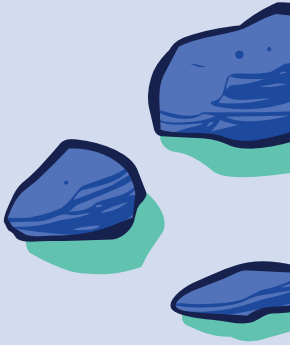

DAY ONE

DANIEL 3:8-18

Have you ever faced a lose-lose situation? You know, where no matter what choice you make, no one really wins? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were given a choice, and it seemed like a lose-lose situation for sure: turn from God and save themselves from the furnace or worship God and burn in the fire. Most of us want to say we'd choose the fire, but standing in front of the furnace, where the heat was enough to kill those nearby, many of us would falter. These three young men chose fire with God because they knew God was able to spare them. More than that, even if God did not save them from the fire, they knew that fire with God was better than perceived safety on earth without Him.

Have you experienced a furnace situation? What was your reaction to the heat of persecution? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into the fire, not sure they'd be rescued but confident God deserved their worship. In their case, God physically showed up for them as a fourth man in the fire and saved them from burning, even protecting their clothes and hair! Because of their decision to choose fire with God, others turned their hearts and lives toward God as well. God gives you the choice when you face similar circumstances: You can turn from the furnace in fear and bow to this world, or you can trust God is in control, even if your situation leads to suffering. When you choose to honor the Lord at a great cost, you choose more than temporary self-preservation and make yourself available for God to show up and receive glory through your weakness. God alone is worthy of our worship, honor, and praise. Do you believe that enough to remain faithful when betraying Him appears safer than worshiping Him? If you are facing a furnace today, fix your eyes on Jesus and stay faithful. He gives perfect peace to those who keep their eyes on Him (Isa. 26:3).

- **WHAT SITUATIONS HAVE YOU FACED THAT REQUIRE YOU TO CHOOSE FAITH OVER FEAR?**
- **IN WHAT WAYS HAS GOD BEEN WITH YOU IN THE FIRE?**

PRAY

GOD, THANK YOU FOR THE FIERY FURNACES THAT BRING ME CLOSER TO YOU. HELP ME TO CONTINUE TO WALK BOLDLY IN YOUR LOVE AND STRENGTH, EVEN IF DOING SO LEADS TO FLAMES.

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DAY TWO

DANIEL 6:1-18

Daniel had an extraordinary spirit, not because of his own strength but because of his devotion to God. Though he was brought to Babylon as a Jewish exile, the king elevated him to a great position because of his character. Other administrators were jealous of Daniel's reputation and influence. They wanted to take him out, but because Daniel had integrity and was trustworthy, they came up empty every time. They couldn't find any fault in him, so instead, the only way to touch him was to accuse his faith.

Can the same be said about you? If someone searched your DMs, snaps, or apps, would they find no fault in you? The easy thing to do is to give in and act the same way the world acts. The hard thing is to make choices that cause you to stand out from the norm—choices which, like Daniel, may place a target on your back for ridicule or rejection. But also like Daniel, you are not the one people reject when they target your faith. They are rejecting the one true God. As Daniel's story continued, the king had him thrown in a den of lions. When the king went to the den the next morning, he called out to see if God had saved Daniel, and Daniel responded, "O king, live forever!" (v. 21). God closed the mouth of the lions and spared Daniel's life. When he walked out of the den, the pagan king made a statement about God: He is the one true God and He is worthy to be praised! Daniel's trust in the Lord paved the way for God to reveal His power. The people heard about the greatness of God who reigns over all other thrones and dominions. But first, Daniel had to enter the lions' den. When you face tough situations, remember Daniel and stay strong in your faith. God is faithful to take care of you. Your faithfulness, even when it leads to a lions' den, will point to the one true God.

- **IF SOMEONE EXAMINED YOUR LIFE, WOULD THEY FIND NO FAULT IN YOU? WHAT WOULD THEY FIND?**
- **WHY CAN YOU TRUST GOD TO TAKE CARE OF YOU?**

PRAY

GOD, THANK YOU FOR THE TOUGH DAYS THAT LEAD ME INTO A DEEPER RELATIONSHIP WITH YOU. GIVE ME COURAGE TO WALK INTO THE LIONS' DEN.

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DAY THREE

ACTS 7:51-56

Stephen boldly shared the redemption story of the Israelites, who were rescued from slavery by God and then rebelled against Him. He told the story of their mistakes and God's grace to love them through it all. He wasn't afraid to proclaim that God is the one true King on His throne, as well as call out the hard hearts that rebelled against Him and refused to bow before Him. Stephen painted a picture of Israel's past to point to a cycle, one the Jews listening to him that day were repeating in real time. When they lashed out at Stephen, he didn't shrink back but looked to heaven and told them what he saw: God on His throne and Jesus standing at His right hand. During this time, the right side was reserved as a place of honor. Stephen's vision was a proclamation that Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah. This was enough to enrage the crowd and lead them to stone him.

Stephen's story is tense because he was face-to-face with the people as they rallied against him. When they raised their voices, he responded by recounting God's faithfulness to His people since the beginning of time, highlighting their unfaithfulness in the past but also in the moment. When they took him to the street to stone him, he looked to God. How does the outcome of this story move you? The end is different from what we looked at this week because God didn't rescue Stephen from the stones, like He did Daniel from the lion's mouth and the three men from the furnace. Earthly rescue didn't come. How was Stephen able to remain committed to God as he faced an angry crowd? Because he saw Jesus—not just in the vision. He knew His love; he understood Jesus's sacrifice; he felt the calming presence of the Holy Spirit within him as his body braced for the impact of stones. Can you say the same? Do you see Jesus? Do you trust His perfect love and understand His perfect sacrifice? Is Jesus real enough to you that you'd stay with Him in the face of an angry crowd?

- **HAVE YOU SPENT ENOUGH TIME WITH JESUS TO KNOW AND TRUST HIS CHARACTER? WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT HIM?**
- **HOW DOES STEPHEN ENCOURAGE YOU IN YOUR FAITH?**

PRAY

GOD, EVEN OUR HARDEST STORIES HAVE A HAPPY ENDING BECAUSE OF YOUR LOVE AND GRACE. THANK YOU FOR LOVING US SO DEEPLY AND FOR REDEEMING EVEN OUR SUFFERING FOR YOUR GLORY AND OUR GOOD.

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DAY FOUR

ACTS 7:58

You know how some movies have what we call "Easter eggs," or small details that only some people will notice? Luke, the author of Acts, gives one small detail in the stoning of Stephen that is both heartbreaking and encouraging. And it's easy to pass over without pausing to consider why Luke included it. Verse 58 says that Saul was at the stoning of Stephen. Saul is the guy you probably know as Paul. So, the same Paul, who is the author of most of the New Testament, stood nearby in approval of Stephen's death. Before God got his attention and Saul surrendered his life to the Lord (Acts 9), he was a persecutor of Christians. Stephen is acknowledged as the first Christian martyr, but he was not the last person Saul persecuted. Many followed Stephen in martyrdom, choosing faithfulness to God over their own lives. While this detail is heartbreaking and the deaths of those people probably haunted Saul (Paul) for the rest of his life, there is good news for us in the detail. If even persecutors of Jesus can surrender to Him, then hope exists for every single person—for even the very worst of us. And as long as we have breath, there is time to turn to Him. This should change the way we love and pray for the people who persecute us. The truth is that they're not *your* enemies—they are enemies of God. But He wants them to come to Him in repentance and faith. Commit to pray for those who oppose Him; pray they experience the love and peace that you have in Christ. And when their words are loud against yours, press into the love and power of Christ through the Holy Spirit within you. You never know who is watching your faithfulness from the distance, drawing their own courage from yours and preparing to run the race by your side.

- **WHAT THOUGHTS DO YOU HAVE FOR YOUR ENEMIES? HOW CAN YOU CHANGE THEM INTO PRAYERS THAT REFLECT JESUS'S HEART FOR THEM?**
- **WHO IS A LITTLE FURTHER AHEAD IN THEIR FAITH JOURNEY THAT YOU CAN LOOK TO AS A ROLE MODEL FOR COURAGE?**

PRAY

THANK YOU GOD FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO PRAY FOR MY ENEMIES. WILL YOU PLEASE HELP ME TO SEE THEM THE WAY YOU SEE THEM? MAY THEY SEE YOU IN ME, EVEN WHEN THEY PERSECUTE ME.

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DAY FIVE

ACTS 7:59-60

Stephen dies for his faith. God doesn't perform a miracle to save him from destruction on earth. Stephen's last words are stunning: a prayer of forgiveness for the people killing him. Though Stephen didn't receive a physical miracle, his act of forgiveness and prayer was a different kind of miracle. Stephen's faith was only possible because of the time that he had spent with Jesus. The Holy Spirit was his source of strength to say those words of forgiveness—words many of us couldn't imagine saying in that position. But that's the thing about surrender: It enables us to step aside and allow God's power to work in our weakness. If Stephen had not kept his focus on the love of Christ, his faith would've faltered. In the eyes of the people there that day, they had won, but Stephen's faith in the face of death became a detail in Saul's mind and heart. After he surrendered his life to God, he remembered Stephen's death (Acts 22:20). Stephen's prayer to God made a lasting impression on a man who celebrated his death.

You see, when our focus is on Christ, what the enemy intends to use for evil, God turns for good. Do you want that to be said of your life? One day when you are older, do you want to look back and see a lifetime of shrinking back or do you want to be able to retell the greatness of God through your testimony? Here's the deal: You get to choose which life you want to live. One is spent striving to fit in and avoiding tough situations; the other is spent living the wildest, most incredible adventure with God leading the way. What will you choose?

- **WHAT BOLD ACTION OF FAITH IS GOD CALLING YOU TO THAT YOU'VE PUT OFF BECAUSE OF FEAR?**
- **WHAT IS THE COST OF IGNORING THAT CALL?**

PRAY

GOD, I WANT TO LIVE BOLDLY FOR YOU. IF OTHERS ARE WATCHING ME, THEN I PRAY THEY SEE YOU IN ME. IF THEY MAKE FUN OF ME, GIVE ME THE FAITH TO PRAY FOR THEIR GOOD ANYWAY.

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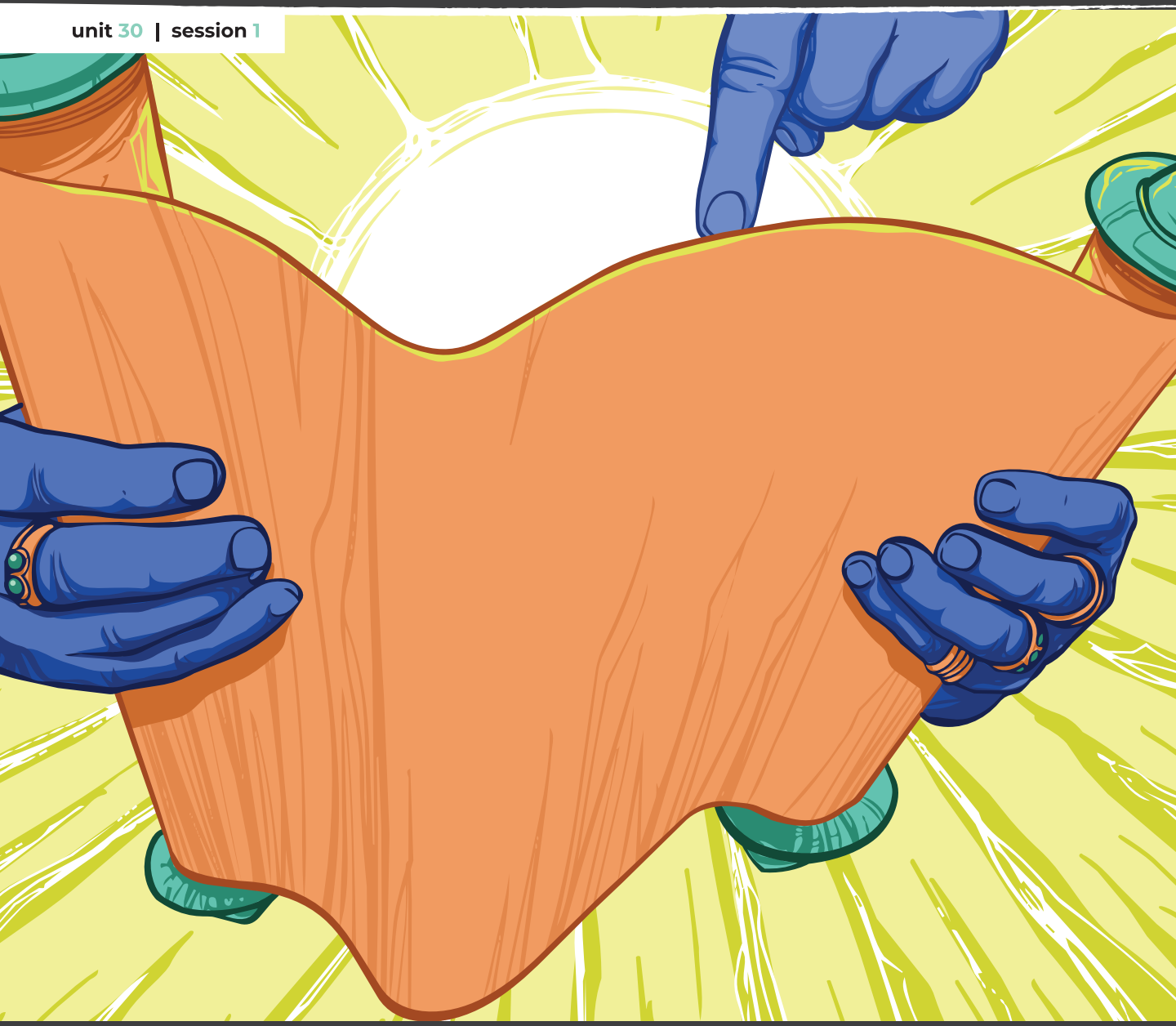
UNLESS SOMEONE *GUIDES ME*

unit 30 | session 1



CHRIST CONNECTION

The Ethiopian official was familiar with the Old Testament prophets but was unable to understand how their message was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Philip was led by the Holy Spirit to help the official understand how Jesus's death and resurrection fulfilled ancient prophecies.

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OBEYING WITHOUT SEEING

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

Acts 8

GOD POSITIONS US

ACTS 8:26-29

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

GOD USES OUR OBEDIENCE

ACTS 8:30-40

30 So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" 31 And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. 33 In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth." 34 And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. 36 And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" 38 And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. 39 And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. 40 But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

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MAIN POINT.

God prepares us to share the gospel and others to receive it.



THEOLOGY *CONNECTION*

PRESERVATION OF SCRIPTURE

God has chosen to reveal Himself to humanity through Scripture, having inspired it and directed it to be free from error. God has also acted providentially throughout the course of history to ensure the biblical text is faithfully preserved for future generations. Our belief in the preservation of Scripture is supported by investigation into how the canon of Scripture—the standardized books of the Bible—was formed and how manuscripts were faithfully transmitted throughout the centuries.

DISCUSSION

GOD POSITIONS US

ACTS 8:26-29

- **Philip heard the Lord give him directions. How can we position ourselves to know God's voice?**
- **How do we know the Bible is reliable and reveals God correctly?**
- **What is surprising about the Ethiopian eunuch reading the Scriptures? What assumptions about others keep us from sharing God's Word with them?**

GOD USES OUR OBEDIENCE

ACTS 8:30-40

- **What excuses could Philip have made to avoid approaching the chariot? What excuses do we make in situations like this?**
- **What confused the Ethiopian about this passage in Isaiah? How would you explain that this passage points to Jesus?**
- **If God has the power to reach anyone with the gospel, then why does He need us?**

WHAT KEEPS YOU FROM LISTENING TO GOD'S VOICE WHEN YOU CAN'T SEE WHAT HE'S DOING? HOW IS GOD ASKING YOU TO OBEY HIM RIGHT NOW?

CULTURAL *CONNECTION*

Our devices give us instant access to information, including misconceptions, or wrong ideas, about faith and what it means to be a Christian. Many people haven't heard or don't understand the gospel, even though more information about Christianity is available than ever before. Leaders, influencers, and advertisements constantly target us with their opinions, and figuring out what is true and worth our time can feel overwhelming. People are hungry for hope, peace, and purpose in a culture that feels chaotic and confusing. Thankfully, God gives us the hope, peace, and purpose that we desperately crave. And Christians are called to answer anyone who asks us why we have hope (1 Pet. 3:15). Knowing what the Bible says about who we are, who God is, and how we can be saved through Jesus is the foundation for having conversations with people who are curious about what we believe. We must know what we believe if we want to help others understand it.

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DAY ONE

1 SAMUEL 3:1-10

Trying to learn how to hear from God can feel really intimidating thing as a new believer! Sometimes, it can be difficult to know if we are hearing from God, from our own desires, or from the world, especially when our minds are busy. In this passage, we see that even the prophet, Samuel, struggled at first to recognize when God was speaking to him. However, as Eli instructed him, Samuel asked God to speak and listened carefully for His response. This moment in Samuel's life sparked a lifetime of service to God.

Maybe you struggle to recognize when God is speaking to you or to know what He is asking you to do, like Samuel. One truth we can learn from this story, though, is that asking the Lord to speak to us is more than just okay—it's good. God desires to for us to know Him more and to speak to us, and Scripture tells us we can approach the Lord with confidence, yet always with respect (Heb. 4:16). When we ask the Lord to speak to us, we need to make sure we're creating space in our lives to hear Him! If we are constantly busy and filling our mind with everything going on around us, we will struggle to hear from God. One way to help ensure we are making space to hear from God is by practicing silence. This can look a little different for each person, but the goal is to set aside time with the Lord with all distractions removed so that we can hear His still, small voice. What a good God, who desires for us to know Him and wants us to hear Him, if we will only make intentional space for Him!

- **WHAT DISTRACTIONS MIGHT MAKE HEARING FROM GOD MORE DIFFICULT? HOW CAN YOU REMOVE THOSE DISTRACTIONS?**
- **HOW CAN YOU START A HABIT OF SPENDING TIME IN SILENCE WITH THE LORD? HOW DO YOU THINK THIS TIME WILL GROW YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS?**

PRAY

LORD, HELP ME TO KNOW YOU MORE AND TO SEEK YOUR VOICE. PLEASE SPEAK TO ME AND HELP ME TO BE SILENT AS I LISTEN TO WHAT YOU HAVE FOR ME.

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DAY TWO

1 KINGS 19:11-13

In today's passage we get a glimpse of Elijah's story, and we catch him at an interesting time in his journey. Elijah had destroyed the false prophets of Israel who served the unrighteous king and queen and lead the people away from Yahweh. The queen, Jezebel, was out for blood and vowed she would have Elijah's life. Elijah ran out of fear, and ended up in a cave—exhausted and discouraged. While Elijah hid, the presence of God passed by, but He wasn't in an earthquake, a wind that shatters cliffs, or a fire. Instead, the Lord was in the soft voice that Elijah heard after all the spectacular events ended. It would have been understandable for Elijah to pay more attention to these natural phenomena happening around him, but he heard and responded to the soft voice of God—the voice he knew so well.

When the world wants answers from God, they often look for big, flashy signs or try to hear God's voice in their own gut feelings or even claim a coincidence was a sign. Maybe you have tried to use some things like these for yourself as you seek answers to your questions or guidance from the Lord. However, if you are a believer, you have the Holy Spirit dwelling inside of you. The same soft voice that spoke to Elijah desires to speak to believers today, and we have direct access through the Spirit within us. Elijah recognized the voice of God because he had spent time with the Lord and sat in His presence. The same is true for us; as we spend time with God and are still before Him, we will learn to recognize His voice, which is infinitely better than any sign we can try to find for ourselves.

- **HOW DOES THE WORLD OR SOCIAL MEDIA SAY GOD SPEAKS TO PEOPLE? HOW DO WE SEE GOD SPEAK IN THIS STORY?**
- **WHY DO WE STRUGGLE TO MAKE TIME TO BE STILL BEFORE GOD AND LISTEN FOR HIS VOICE? HOW CAN YOU PRACTICE BEING STILL BEFORE HIM TODAY?**

PRAY

LORD, HELP ME TO KNOW YOUR VOICE AND TO BE STILL IN YOUR PRESENCE SO THAT I HEAR FROM YOU. THANK YOU FOR MAKING YOURSELF KNOWN TO ME AND FOR SPEAKING TO ME THROUGH THE SPIRIT AND YOUR WORD.

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DAY THREE

JOHN 10:27

In this passage in John, Jesus compared His relationship with His people to that of a shepherd with his sheep. Sheep need their shepherd for everything, completely reliant on him for food, safety, and rest. The shepherd spends all his time caring for the sheep and ensuring they are safe and provided for, and the sheep know him well! They know the voice of the one who keeps them from harm and leads them to the food and water. In a similar way, Jesus says that those who follow Him know His voice.

Just like we've already talked about this week, we can sometimes feel like hearing God's voice is impossible. But we can't buy this lie! This passage tells us how we get to know the voice of the Lord—by spending time with Him. Jesus said that we are like sheep, and He is our good shepherd. We rely on Him and follow Him because we have spent enough time with Him to know that He will always lead us to what is good and for His glory. How do we learn what God's voice sounds like? Spending time with Him in prayer and in His Word. If we look at John 10:3-5, we see that part of being a good sheep is following only the Lord's voice and not the voice of a stranger! In fact, Jesus explained that real sheep run from strange voices. Why? Because their shepherd keeps them safe. Like sheep, we know God keeps us safe, and we flee from any voice but His. Make a practice in your daily life of spending time with God, for Him to help you learn His voice.

- **HOW HAS SPENDING CONSISTENT TIME WITH GOD IMPACTED YOUR LIFE? HOW HAS IT HURT YOU SPIRITUALLY NOT TO SPEND TIME WITH HIM?**
- **WHY IS KNOWING GOD'S VOICE WELL ENOUGH TO FOLLOW IT AND NO ONE ELSE'S VOICE SO IMPORTANT?**

PRAY

LORD, HELP ME TO KNOW YOUR VOICE AND TO FOLLOW YOU LIKE SHEEP WITH THEIR SHEPHERD. HELP ME TO KEEP FROM FOLLOWING ANY OTHER VOICE BUT YOURS SO MY LIFE MAY GLORIFY YOU EVERY DAY.

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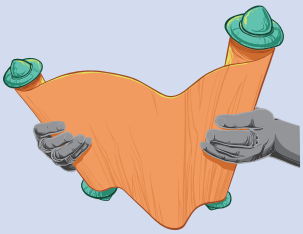

DAY FOUR

2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17

Our world is confusing, and even as believers, we struggle to understand what God says about difficult issues sometimes. In today's passage, Paul wrote to Timothy, encouraging him with the reminder that God's Word gave Timothy all he needed to live a godly life that honored God. The same is true for us! We may sometimes feel overwhelmed by the idea that God calls us to be holy. We may think it's impossible. But God's Word is enough to guide us and help us live a life that is glorifying to Him. All Scripture is inspired by God, which means it is completely true and never contradicts itself. Unlike the world, which presents us with contradicting ideas or false narratives, God's Word is trustworthy, teaching us His character and how to live as believers. Paul also explained that the Bible is profitable, or helpful, for teaching, training, rebuking, and correcting. This means that when we read Scripture, we aren't just learning more information, but the Holy Spirit uses it to transform us to become more like Christ. The Word corrects our sin by shining a light on truth. Though we can easily let other things get in the way of spending time in God's Word, doing so is important to our walk with Jesus! The more time we spend in our Bible, the more we will grow in our understanding of the character of God, and it is by knowing God's character, we are able to imitate Him in the way we live. This week, make spending time in the Word your priority, and pray for the Lord to make clear to you who He is and how you can follow Him more every day. He'll do it.

- **WHY IS IT IMPORTANT THAT THE BIBLE IS INSPIRED BY GOD? DOES THIS HELP YOU TO TRUST THE BIBLE MORE?**
- **HOW CAN SPENDING TIME IN THE BIBLE TRANSFORM YOU? HOW CAN YOU CONSISTENTLY MAKE THIS TIME A PRIORITY?**

PRAY

LORD, THANK YOU FOR YOUR INSPIRED WORD AND YOUR KINDNESS IN GIVING US A WAY TO KNOW YOU MORE. HELP US TO LOVE YOUR WORD AND SEEK TO BE TRANSFORMED THROUGH IT.

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DAY FIVE

JOHN 14:8-11

Take a second to consider how much information you *don't* know. Since we're finite (limited) people in a massive world, there's a lot we don't know! The Bible teaches us that God is all-knowing and infinite, which is mind blowing to think about. God knows everything, and He also exists outside all limits, including time and space. Right before this passage, Jesus told the disciples that no one can come to the Father except through Him (v. 6). Philip then asked to see the Father, but Jesus explained that they have already seen Him! Colossians 1:15 tells us that Jesus is "the image of the invisible God." One of the most beautiful, important parts of Jesus's time on earth is that He provided the way for us to know God more deeply. Without fully understanding it in the moment, the disciples had seen God the Father because they were living every day with God the Son. God exists in three Persons, though He is one; Philip had already experienced each of these three Persons because of his time with Jesus. Today, we don't physically live with Jesus in the same way the disciples did, but Jesus is still the image of the invisible God to us. We can look to Jesus's life in the Gospels to understand God's character and His heart. As you read about Jesus healing the sick and eating with sinners, you have the chance to see the Father! You can see His love and care for those He created and His desire for all people to hear the gospel and come to Him for salvation, rest, and peace. Make a practice in your own life of spending time reading the stories of Jesus's life so you can grow in your knowledge of the Father. Then, go show others what God is like by living as Jesus lived and loving others in the way Jesus has loved you.

- **DO YOU EVER WISH, LIKE PHILIP, THAT YOU COULD SEE GOD? HOW CAN WE KNOW WHAT GOD IS LIKE?**
- **HOW CAN READING THE GOSPELS HELP YOU TO KNOW GOD THE FATHER MORE?**

PRAY

LORD, THANK YOU FOR THE CHANCE TO KNOW YOU THROUGH THE LIFE OF YOUR SON. HELP US TO TURN TO YOU WITH OUR QUESTIONS AND TRUST YOUR GUIDANCE FOR OUR LIVES.

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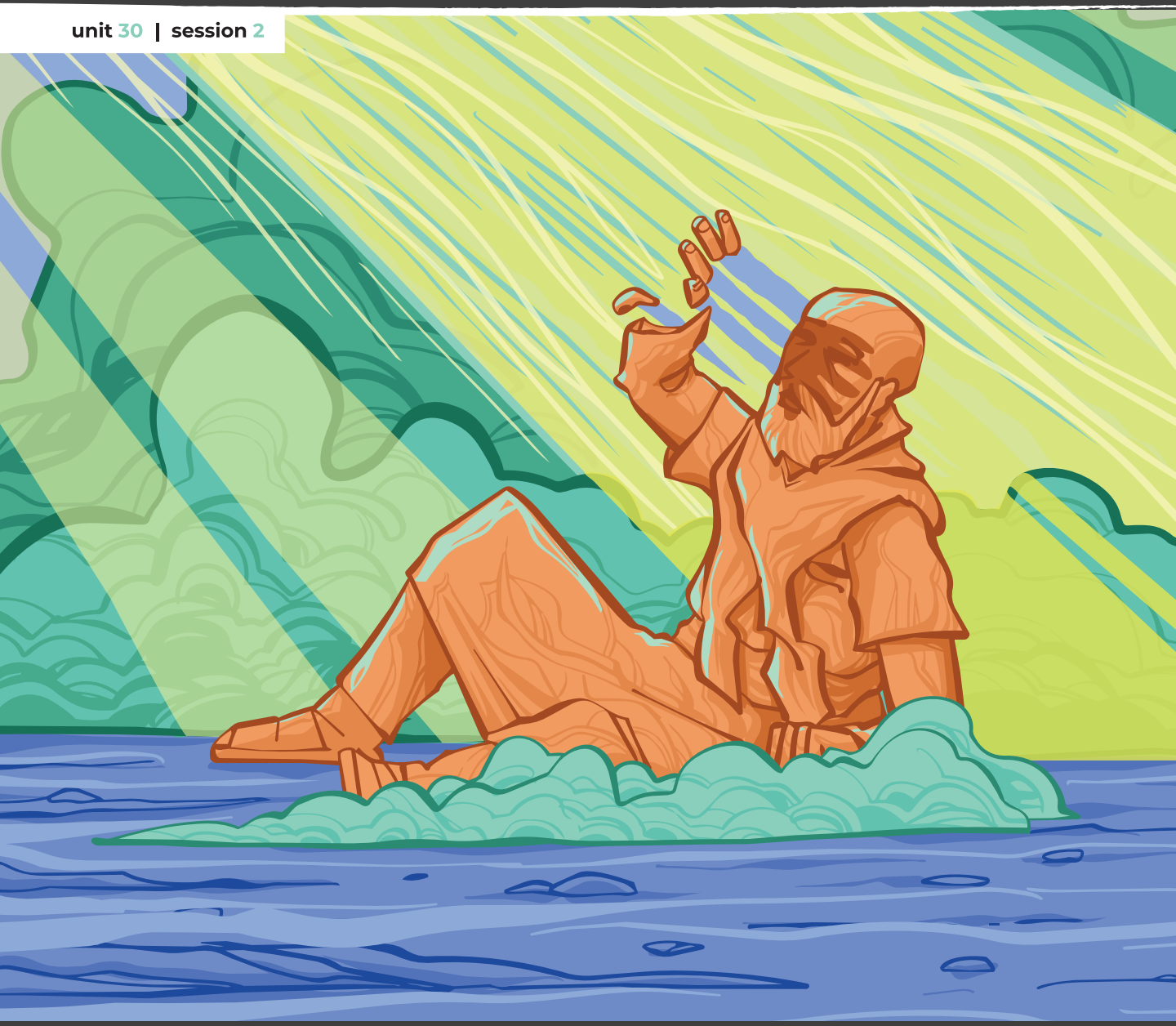
LIGHT FROM *HEAVEN*

unit 30 | session 2



CHRIST CONNECTION

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

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INNER TRANSFORMATION

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

Acts 9

JESUS CONFRONTS US IN OUR SIN

ACTS 9:1-9

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

JESUS CALLS US TO CHANGE

ACTS 9:10-20

10 Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." 11 And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, 12 and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." 13 But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. 14 And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." 15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. 16 For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." 17 So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; 19 and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. 20 And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God."

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MAIN POINT.

A genuine encounter with Jesus transforms us.



THEOLOGY CONNECTION

REGENERATION

Regeneration takes place at salvation and is the miraculous transformation, or the new birth, that takes place within a believer through the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit (John 3:3-8; Titus 3:5). It is the divine side of conversion (a person turning to Christ in repentance and faith)—God's work within a person's life that causes him or her to be born again, a work that human effort can't produce.

DISCUSSION

JESUS CONFRONTS US IN OUR SIN

ACTS 9:1-9

- **Why was Saul determined to put Christians in prison? Why are people today often hostile toward Christians?**
- **What do you think was going through Saul's head after this divine encounter with Jesus?**
- **How is Jesus confronting us in our sin proof of His kindness and love? Why doesn't it feel this way? Read Romans 8:1-4. What does this help you see?**

JESUS CALLS US TO CHANGE

ACTS 9:10-20

- **If you were in Ananias's shoes, how would you feel about the Lord's directions? Why?**
- **How does Saul's transformation challenge our idea of who can or can't be saved? How should this impact the way we view unbelievers?**
- **What is the evidence of salvation we can expect to see in a person's life?**

WHAT AREAS OF YOUR LIFE ARE YOU AFRAID TO SURRENDER TO GOD? WHAT ARE YOU AFRAID OF? WHAT STEPS CAN YOU TAKE TO OBEY THE LORD?

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Have you ever thought about what you want to be known for? Or what you're *already* known for? People watch what we say and do and form opinions about who we are. As believers, we should be known for what we do *and* what we don't do. Our lives should draw people to Jesus, not away from Him (Phil. 1:27). We should be led by the Holy Spirit and display the fruit of the Spirit, evidence of God living within us and changing us to be who we can't be on our own. We put to death the sin our flesh desires (Gal. 5:22-23). Wherever you find yourself—school, work, teams, or church—speak and act differently than the lost people there. Jesus has saved us and set us free from the power of sin, so our behavior should reflect this freedom. Our motivation isn't just to *appear* like we're godly—that's a symptom of pride and totally misses the point. Our motivation is to honor and worship the God who saved us and to share the freedom we've found with others.

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DAY ONE

GENESIS 3:8-13,21

Adam and Eve were the first humans God created, and as we know, the first humans to sin. That didn't take very long, did it? As we can see in the passage, their sin caused them to run from God out of shame and fear. For many of us, the feeling of shame over our sin causes us to respond just like Adam and Eve. You might feel stuck in your sin, like God can't truly transform you or that running from God is safer than facing your sin. But in the Word, God shows us a better way to respond—running to Him instead of away from Him.

First, we need to know that sin does have consequences and God calls us to repent, but He doesn't desire to leave us in our sin. God called out for Adam and Eve to draw them out of hiding to meet with them. As a result of sin and its effect on humanity, Adam and Eve had to leave Eden, but first, God clothed them so they would be covered. In Acts 9:4-5 we see another story of someone being called from the middle of his sin and provided for by God. Saul had been persecuting Christians and trying to turn people away from Christ, but God met him on the road to Damascus and drew Saul to Himself. Notice that He didn't cast Saul away as a hopeless cause. He didn't leave him there in the road, blinded and confused. He provided a way for Saul to be saved and transformed and then commissioned him to share the gospel for the rest of his life! We might not have a story quite as dramatic as Adam or Saul, but every person sins and needs the redemption Christ offers. Shame can prevent us from repenting and turning to the Lord because we fear what He might do or what He will think of us. The truth is that God loves us deeply, and He desires for us to repent from sin and turn to Him so He can make us new.

- **HAS SHAME EVER KEPT YOU FROM TURNING TO THE LORD? HOW IS CONFESSING YOUR SINS AND TURNING TO GOD BETTER?**
- **HOW DOES HEARING THE STORIES OF ADAM AND SAUL HELP YOU TO UNDERSTAND THE LORD BETTER? HOW WILL YOU LIVE DIFFERENTLY IN LIGHT OF THIS PASSAGE?**

PRAY

LORD, THANK YOU FOR NEVER LEAVING ME IN MY SIN AND MY SHAME. HELP ME TO TURN TO YOU SO I CAN BE TRANSFORMED AND LIVE MORE LIKE CHRIST EVERY DAY.

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DAY TWO

2 CORINTHIANS 5:16-19

After Saul was saved, the believers in the early church were shocked by the news that he was proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah! When we say that someone "did a 180," we mean that they made a complete change. Saul pulled a serious 180! Believers had heard of or encountered Saul before he was saved and transformed by Jesus. They struggled to believe in the possibility of him not only to stop persecuting them but to join them in becoming a disciple of Jesus.

We may not have someone actively trying to arrest us before they become a believer, but we may struggle to believe certain people when they say they have been transformed by Christ. Maybe you are someone others struggled to believe when you were saved and transformed by the Lord! In this passage, Paul explained that if we are in Christ, then our old self has passed away and we have been made new. Can you image those words coming from a man who once put Christians to death? He knew this truth so well. If you are a believer, you aren't just made better or nicer, but you have been made completely *new*. Paul called the gospel a "ministry of reconciliation" because when we are saved, we are reconciled to God, or made right with Him, and He doesn't count our sins against us. How? Because Jesus already paid the debt. We will still struggle with sin while we are in this world, but we can fight against our sin because we have been made a new. As we interact with others we knew before they were saved, we can trust fully in the Lord's ability to transform them; they can be reconciled to God regardless of their sin before they were saved. We know because He did this for us as well.

- **HAVE YOU EVER FOUND IT UNBELIEVABLE THAT SOMEONE WAS TRULY SAVED BECAUSE YOU KNEW THEM BEFORE? HOW DOES KNOWING SAUL'S STORY CHANGE YOUR PERSPECTIVE?**
- **WHAT IS THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION? HOW HAS CHRIST TRANSFORMED YOU BY RECONCILING YOU TO GOD? HOW DO YOU SHARE THIS GOOD NEWS WITH THOSE AROUND YOU?**

PRAY

LORD, THANK YOU FOR CREATING A WAY FOR US TO BE RECONCILED TO YOU AND TRANSFORMED INTO A NEW CREATION. HELP US TO SHARE THE GOOD NEWS WITH THOSE AROUND US, TRUSTING THAT YOU CAN TRANSFORM THEM TOO.

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DAY THREE

EPHESIANS 5:15-17

In the past few days, we've looked at what it means for our lives to be transformed by the Lord. When we become believers, the Lord completely transforms our hearts, and this should ultimately lead to transformation of our actions as well. In this passage, Paul reminded the believers in Ephesus that their actions mattered and that they should live as wise people who follow the will of God. Being wise has always been difficult for us, but it's especially hard as we navigate so much information in the world that gives us conflicting messages about what wisdom is. Earlier in chapter 5, Paul called the Ephesians to imitate God and to walk in love, which means their goal was to run from sin and to live as Christ did. As you strive to turn from sin and to follow the Lord, you can look to Christ as an example for how to live. Wisdom comes by knowing the Lord and growing in your relationship with Him, which both come by spending consistent time with God in His Word. Paul reminded the Ephesians that their time on this earth was limited, and God had called them to know His will and to live wisely. God wants us to live according to those words too. Our actions matter because as believers we have been given a purpose: to glorify God and to make Him known. If we live wisely, then God will be glorified and people will see Christ in us. Struggling with sin will continue to be reality until Jesus returns, but when we strive to know and love God, we grow in wisdom and learn what it means to live according to His will.

- **WHY DOES IT MATTER HOW WE ACT IF GOD FORGIVES OUR SINS THROUGH JESUS? HOW HAS GOD CALLED US TO LIVE?**
- **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE WISDOM? HOW DOES SPENDING TIME WITH GOD HELP US TO GROW IN WISDOM? HOW CAN YOU MAKE TIME WITH HIM A PRIORITY?**

PRAY

LORD, HELP ME TO SEEK YOU FOR WISDOM AND TO LIVE A LIFE THAT GLORIFIES YOU. THANK YOU FOR THE CHANCE TO GIVE YOU GLORY SO OTHERS MIGHT KNOW CHRIST.

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DAY FOUR

ACTS 9:21-25

Saul's transformation from someone who persecuted to someone who boldly proclaimed Jesus as the Son of God was hard for some people to believe, like we studied earlier this week. Christians in the early church remembered his life before he was saved and were astounded at how radically the Lord had changed him. Saul faced doubts from other believers, and even threats from the Jews because of his faith in Jesus and his dedication to sharing the gospel everywhere he went. You may not have people threatening you because of your faith, but you might have people around you who doubt the ways God has changed you. In those times, we can look to Saul as an example of how to handle others' doubts.

This passage says that Saul grew stronger and desired to show people that Jesus is the Messiah. Saul grew stronger because he continued to be sanctified, or made more like Jesus, through the Holy Spirit. As he learned more about Christ from the other disciples, he grew in boldness to share the gospel with others. Eventually, the other disciples in Damascus recognized that Saul was one of them, even helping to save him from those who were threatening his life! Saul's actions helped the believers around him to stop doubting the work God was doing in his life and convinced them to help him as he followed the will of God. You may not be able to convince those around you to believe the transformation in your life through words alone, but as you continue to seek God's will and your actions are transformed to be like Christ's, people will begin to notice. Whether or not some doubt your decision, continue to follow the will of God, share the gospel, and allow the Lord to use your life as an example of His power to save and make new.

- **WHY MIGHT THE OTHER BELIEVERS HAVE DOUBTED SAUL AT FIRST? HOW MIGHT HIS ACTIONS HAVE CHANGED THEIR MINDS?**
- **HOW CAN YOU KEEP YOUR EYES FOCUSED ON THE LORD INSTEAD OF FOCUSING ONLY ON THE OPINIONS OF OTHERS?**

PRAY

LORD THANK YOU FOR SANCTIFYING ME THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT AND HAVING A PURPOSE FOR MY LIFE. MAY MY LIFE BE A WITNESS FOR THE GOSPEL AND FOR YOUR GLORY ALONE.

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DAY FIVE

ACTS 9:26-30

When Saul arrived in Jerusalem, he met a new group of believers who only knew about his past of persecuting Christians, and reasonably so, they were afraid his change wasn't real. Barnabas took the time to hear from Saul about his experience with Christ and then took him to the disciples so they could hear Saul's story too. Saul was welcomed into the church and gifted with community. Maybe you can think of a certain person or a group of people that seem so far from the Lord that it feels almost impossible for them to become a Christian. What reaction would you have if people like that tried to join your church or come to your youth ministry? You might have a difficult time wanting to let them in or believing they had really accepted Christ. You might feel uncomfortable and find it easier not to welcome them into your group of friends, even avoiding them when they show up. Let's add another layer: Now imagine someone had been actively trying to hurt you or other Christians, and that person showed up at your church one Sunday morning. How would you respond? Most of us would probably respond like the disciples. We might be afraid or angry and not want to allow anyone like that into our group. However, this passage shows us that we should be like Barnabas. He had every reason not to trust Saul, but he trusted the Lord was able to transform anyone He chose; Barnabas saw how Saul's life could be a testimony for the gospel. When new people come to our churches, our goal should be to welcome them in and see how the Lord has moved in their lives. If they do not know Christ, then we have the opportunity to love them, to treat them with kindness, and to share the gospel! If they do know Christ, then we have the responsibility to welcome them as brothers and sisters into our family of faith.

- **HOW DID BARNABAS RESPOND TO SAUL? WAS IT BECAUSE HE TRUSTED SAUL OR BECAUSE HE TRUSTED THE LORD'S POWER?**
- **HOW SHOULD WE TREAT PEOPLE WHEN THEY COME TO OUR CHURCH? HOW CAN YOU ACT MORE LIKE BARNABAS?**

PRAY

LORD, THANK YOU FOR THE EXAMPLE WE SEE IN BARNABAS OF HOW TO LOVE FELLOW BELIEVERS WELL. HELP US TO SEE THE WORK YOU'VE DONE IN OTHER BELIEVERS' LIVES AND PRAISE YOU FOR IT!

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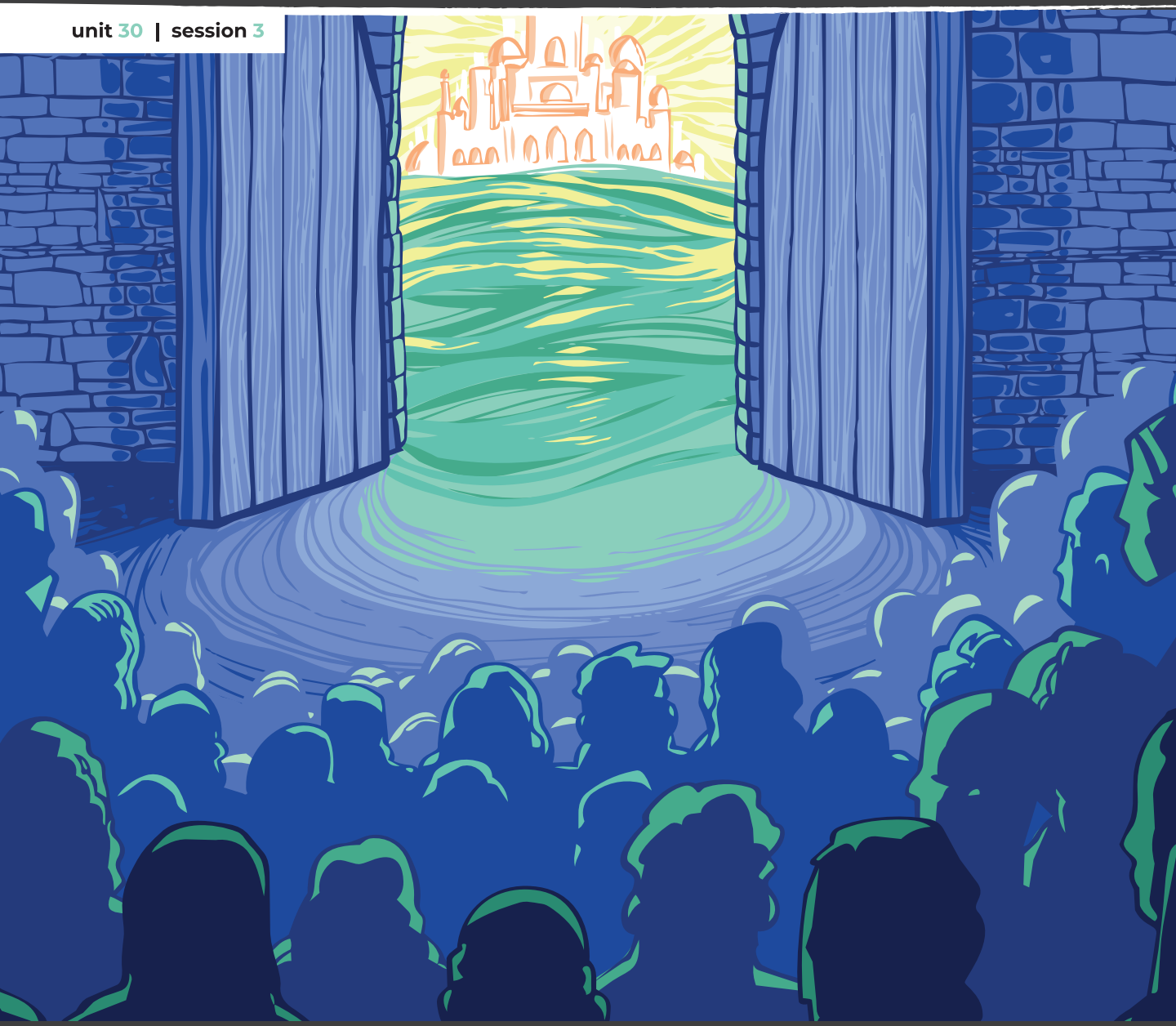
EVEN ON THE GENTILES

unit 30 | session 3



CHRIST CONNECTION

God challenged Peter's tradition of "clean" and "unclean" foods to further challenge his view of "clean" and "unclean" people. Peter learned that God doesn't show favoritism and calls His people to proclaim the message of Jesus's death and resurrection to all people, to celebrate His work in their lives, and to welcome believers into His family, regardless of their ethnicity.

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ADOPTED INTO FAMILY

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

Acts 10

THE GOSPEL ISN'T PREJUDICED

ACTS 10:9-16,19-23

9 The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. 10 And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance 11 and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. 12 In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. 13 And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." 14 But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." 15 And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common." 16 This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven. . . . 19 And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. 20 Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them." 21 And Peter went down to the men and said, "I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?" 22 And they said, "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say." 23 So he invited them in to be his guests. The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him.

WE'RE CALLED TO REFLECT GOD'S HEART

ACTS 10:25-35,44-45

25 When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. 26 But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am a man." 27 And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. 28 And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. 29 So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me." 30 And Cornelius said, "Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing 31 and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. 32 Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.' 33 So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord." 34 So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, 35 but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him." . . . 44 While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. 45 And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles.

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MAIN POINT.

Because Jesus offers salvation to everyone, the gospel isn't exclusive.



THEOLOGY CONNECTION

ADOPTION

Adoption into God's family is one of the gifts of justification. Not only are we released from the judgment against us through justification, but we also experience a change of identity—we become children of God (John 1:12; Gal. 4:5). Through adoption, our relationship with God, which was once broken in the fall of humanity, is now restored, resulting in the benefits that come with being an heir of God and a coheir with Christ (Rom. 8:16-17).

DISCUSSION

THE GOSPEL ISN'T PREJUDICED

ACTS 10:9-16,19-23

- **Why was Peter confused by the Lord's command to eat from the animals in his vision?**
- **How did God use Peter's vision of food to transform his thinking? How did the vision make more sense with the news of Cornelius?**
- **What does being prejudiced mean? What does this passage teach us about being exclusive? What keeps us from seeing people as God sees them?**

WE'RE CALLED TO REFLECT GOD'S HEART

ACTS 10:25-35,44-45

- **Why did Peter's ideas about unclean people need to change? Why is changing our ideas about others so hard?**
- **Based on this passage, what words would you use to describe God's heart for those who seek Him?**
- **How does adoption into God's family impact how we relate to each other as Christians?**

WE ARE CALLED TO HAVE THE SAME HEART FOR OTHERS THAT GOD HAS FOR US. HOW CAN YOU DEMONSTRATE GOD'S HEART FOR OTHERS IN YOUR STUDENT MINISTRY AND FOR OUTSIDERS?

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Who do you look like or act like? Maybe you could be your mom's twin or act just like an uncle. Actually, you were made in God's image. An important doctrine in Christianity is that all people are created in the image of God, or *imago Dei* in Latin (Gen. 1:26-27). God's image can't be removed from us and is the core of our identity, making all human life valuable and worth protecting. Regardless of age, gender, race, residence, level of intelligence, physical ability, or economic status, every person is made in God's image, worthy of dignity and respect. Prejudices have no place in the life of believers. We each have the same problem too: Our sin separates us from God. But Jesus died for the sins of all people, regardless of ethnicity or background, who are saved by placing faith in Him (John 3:16). In Christ, we're all adopted into the same family of God, and our identity in Christ unites us all.

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DAY ONE

GENESIS 12:1-3

Are you a planner, or do you live in a constant state of procrastination? If you're a planner, then you probably enjoy knowing what's ahead. You want to be prepared rather than be caught off guard. The Old Testament is primarily the story of God working through the nation of Israel as His chosen people. This passage in Genesis is the beginning of Abram's (later named Abraham) journey to becoming the patriarch, or father, of the nation; even here at the very beginning of Abram's journey, we see that God always intended to reach all peoples of the earth to restore them to Himself. God told Abram that He would make his family into a vast nation. Look closely at verse 3: Not only would Abram's family be blessed, but through them, all families of the earth would be blessed. So, what's the connection between them and us?

God used the nation of Israel to bring about our Savior, Jesus, who descended from Abraham. (You can see Abraham listed in Jesus's lineage in Matt. 1:1-17!) Jesus's purpose was to provide redemption for everyone who calls on His name. These three verses might not seem like a lot, but we can learn so much about God and His character through this short passage. First, God loves His creation and He desires for every person to be redeemed. Even before starting the nation of Israel with Abram, God the Father already planned how He would make redemption possible for us out of His great love for us. Second, God is sovereign over the entire universe and uses His power to save us. He knew before the beginning of time that Jesus would die for our sins and worked through human history to send His Son to us. Praise the Lord today for how He created a path for you to be redeemed!

- **HOW DOES BLESSING COME TO THE WORLD THROUGH ABRAM'S FAMILY? HOW DOES KNOWING THAT GOD ALWAYS PLANNED TO PROVIDE A WAY FOR US TO BE SAVED AFFECT YOU?**
- **WHAT DOES GOD'S PLAN OF REDEMPTION SHOW YOU ABOUT HIS CHARACTER?**

PRAY

LORD, THANK YOU FOR YOUR PERFECT PLAN TO PROVIDE A WAY FOR US TO BE SAVED. HELP ME TO REJOICE IN THIS AND TO SHARE THIS GOOD NEWS WITH EVERYONE AROUND ME.

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DAY TWO

LUKE 4:24-30

In Luke 4, Jesus went to the synagogue and stood to teach from the Scripture. He took that moment to remind the Jews listening of times when God helped those outside of Israel, or Gentiles. He even went a step further and recounted times when God healed non-Israelites but chose not to heal the Israelites. His Jewish listeners became so angry that they drove Jesus away and tried to kill him by throwing Him off the edge of a cliff. This seems a little extreme! Why were they so enraged? Well, it probably felt like rubbing salt in a wound when Jesus reminded them of Israel's habit of ignoring the prophets sent by God and hinted at God accepting Gentiles over unbelieving Israelites. You hopefully aren't responding to any sermons by trying to throw the pastor over a cliff, but in many situations, we do react like the Jews that heard Jesus teach. We don't like to face our own sin or admit when we're practicing religious works but not walking in *relationship* with God. We also get frustrated when God seems to be moving in and through people who are undeserving in our eyes. When someone who used to live in blatant sin is saved and God begins to move through that person, we should rejoice, but this isn't always our response. We put up walls and take offense when the people we push out are welcomed by God.

Consider your own heart and think about how you might respond (or have responded) to someone you dislike being saved. Consider the ways you're limiting God. Consider the words of Jesus: Could He say similar things about our churches today? Ask the Lord to reveal what's in your heart and to convict you of any prideful attitudes. Then ask Him to help you rejoice in His work to save all people from all nations!

- **WHAT WAS AT THE ROOT OF THE JEWS' ANGER? IN WHAT SITUATIONS DO WE RESPOND LIKE THEM?**
- **WHAT JUDGMENTS TOWARD OTHERS DO YOU NEED TO SET ASIDE? HOW CAN YOU REJOICE INSTEAD?**

PRAY

LORD, PLEASE MAKE CLEAR TO ME ANY PRIDE OR THOUGHTS THAT I HAVE EARNED YOUR MERCY. HELP ME REJOICE IN THE WORK YOU ARE DOING BOTH IN MY LIFE AND IN THE LIVES OF OTHERS.

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DAY THREE

LUKE 14:7-14

Watch any movie with the setting at a high school and you'll notice cliques (the jocks, the geeks, the cheerleaders, etc.). Most of us see cliques in real life as well, even if movies exaggerate them a bit. The reality is that cliques exist in more than just schools. Even as people who love the Lord, we fall into creating groups within our churches.

At a meal with religious leaders, Jesus told a parable to teach about God's desire for His people to love others and practice humility. Jesus had observed how people selfishly grabbed the best seats for themselves, ignoring the needs of those around them. The parable centered on a banquet, where the host only invited people who "mattered" and could repay him and the guests fought for honored seats. In our context, what does this look like? Do we only talk to or welcome people based on their popularity, their appearance, or what they can offer to our group? Do we focus on ways we can earn applause and honor instead of humbly serving, even when no one notices our good works? Do we only reach out to people like us, ignoring others who are lost and in need of the gospel? Opening up our groups to outsiders can be hard sometimes because they might embarrass us or interrupt the dynamic we're used to, but Jesus taught the Pharisees to invite "the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind" (v. 13). We're to do the same. If we only welcome the people who make us feel good or have something to offer us, then we're nothing like the Jesus we claim to love and follow. Seek opportunities to invite people into your church, youth group, or friend group. The Lord will reward you in eternity, and He will be glorified you love and humbly serve others ignored by the world.

- **WHAT ARE SOME REASONS WE TRY TO KEEP OUR GROUP EXCLUSIVE? HOW MIGHT BEING EXCLUSIVE AS BELIEVERS HINDER THE GOSPEL?**
- **WHO CAN YOU INVITE INTO YOUR GROUP? HOW CAN YOU BE AN EXAMPLE TO YOUR GROUP OF LOVING PEOPLE WHO DON'T AUTOMATICALLY FIT IN?**

PRAY

LORD, OPEN MY EYES TO THOSE AROUND ME WHO NEED THE GOSPEL AND SHOW ME HOW TO LOVE THEM. HELP ME TO SERVE THEM THE WAY JESUS SERVES US.

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DAY FOUR

GALATIANS 3:27–4:7

Have you ever inherited something from a family member? Sometimes our loved ones leave behind sentimental objects, which we receive to pass down one day. Sometimes we inherit large sums of money. And then some of us have never inherited anything at all.

This week, we've been looking at what it means to be part of the family of God and the gift of being welcomed by the Lord. In this section of Galatians, Paul explained the significance of believers being called children and heirs of God. As believers who are now children of God, we were once separated from Him—enemies of God and enslaved to our sin. Paul said that if we have placed our faith in Christ and been saved, none of these things are true anymore. We are God's children and share Jesus's inheritance! This inheritance, which we didn't earn or deserve, is a gift we can't fully comprehend yet. Knowing that we're coheirs with Jesus should impact how we follow the Lord and how we relate to one another. Here's the truth: Every believer is in Christ, which means they are your brothers and sisters, coheirs with you in God's family. God's kindness to free us and make us His children should unite us to other believers and push us to take the gospel to every person we can. Paul made it clear that the gospel is for every person; what right do we have to be exclusive with this gift we didn't earn or deserve? If we want our lives to reflect Christ and what Scripture teaches, then we have to see others as children God longs to welcome into His family, regardless of ways they are different from us.

- **WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT FOR THERE TO BE NO DIVISIONS IN GOD'S FAMILY? WHY DO BELIEVERS STRUGGLE TO BE UNIFIED?**
- **HOW DO WE LET DIFFERENCES STOP US FROM SHARING THE GOSPEL? HOW CAN WE WORK TO GET PAST OUR DIFFERENCES?**

PRAY

LORD, THANK YOU FOR GIVING YOUR LIFE FOR MY SALVATION, EVEN WHEN I WAS SEPARATED FROM YOU AND A SLAVE TO SIN. HELP ME TO BRING THE GOOD NEWS OF SALVATION TO EVERYONE YOU PUT IN MY PATH.

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DAY FIVE

1 CORINTHIANS 1:26-31

Do you notice when people brag, or boast, about their gifts and accomplishments? Maybe you've been caught hyping up your good deeds, your wins, your awards; many of us have at some point, whether we share it on social media or talk about it in front of people. Deep down, we want people to know when we've succeeded, and we crave applause.

Today's passage, on the surface, may not seem like the most uplifting message. But when we take a moment to really think through what Paul wrote, we'll see the good news! Paul told the Corinthians that God didn't choose them for their strength or intelligence or special influence in their city. The Lord chose them based on His goodness, not theirs. God chose all of us for the same reason, not because we had anything good to offer Him but out of His goodness, which He shares with us. God's work saves us; none of us can claim that we were saved or used by God because apart from Him, we're hopelessly lost. What a relief, though! We don't have to rely on our own goodness. We get to rest in the power and mercy of God, who created the world and sent His Son for our sins. This passage reminds us of how little we have apart from the Lord. We might think we have a lot to offer, even boasting about our gifts, talents, money, and good morals, but all of our best efforts at righteousness are like dirty rags compared to God's goodness (Isa. 64:6). God's power works to sanctify us and to expand the kingdom through us. Paul called believers to boast only in the Lord. This doesn't mean you should reject every compliment you get; God uses other people to encourage us, but we must always check our motives. Lead and serve, not because you want attention for yourself but because you want to point to the One working within you. When people compliment you, point them to Jesus!

- **HOW IS KNOWING THAT GOD DIDN'T CHOOSE YOU FOR ANYTHING YOU DID FREEING? HOW DOES THIS CHANGE THE WAY YOU APPROACH GOD AND WORSHIP HIM?**
- **HOW CAN YOU BOAST IN THE LORD? HOW CAN YOU KEEP YOUR MOTIVES IN CHECK?**



PRAY

LORD, THANK YOU FOR THE CHANCE TO RELY ON YOU ALONE AND NOT ON MY OWN STRENGTH OR GOODNESS. HELP ME TO BOAST IN YOU SO THAT OTHERS SEE JESUS THROUGH MY LIFE.

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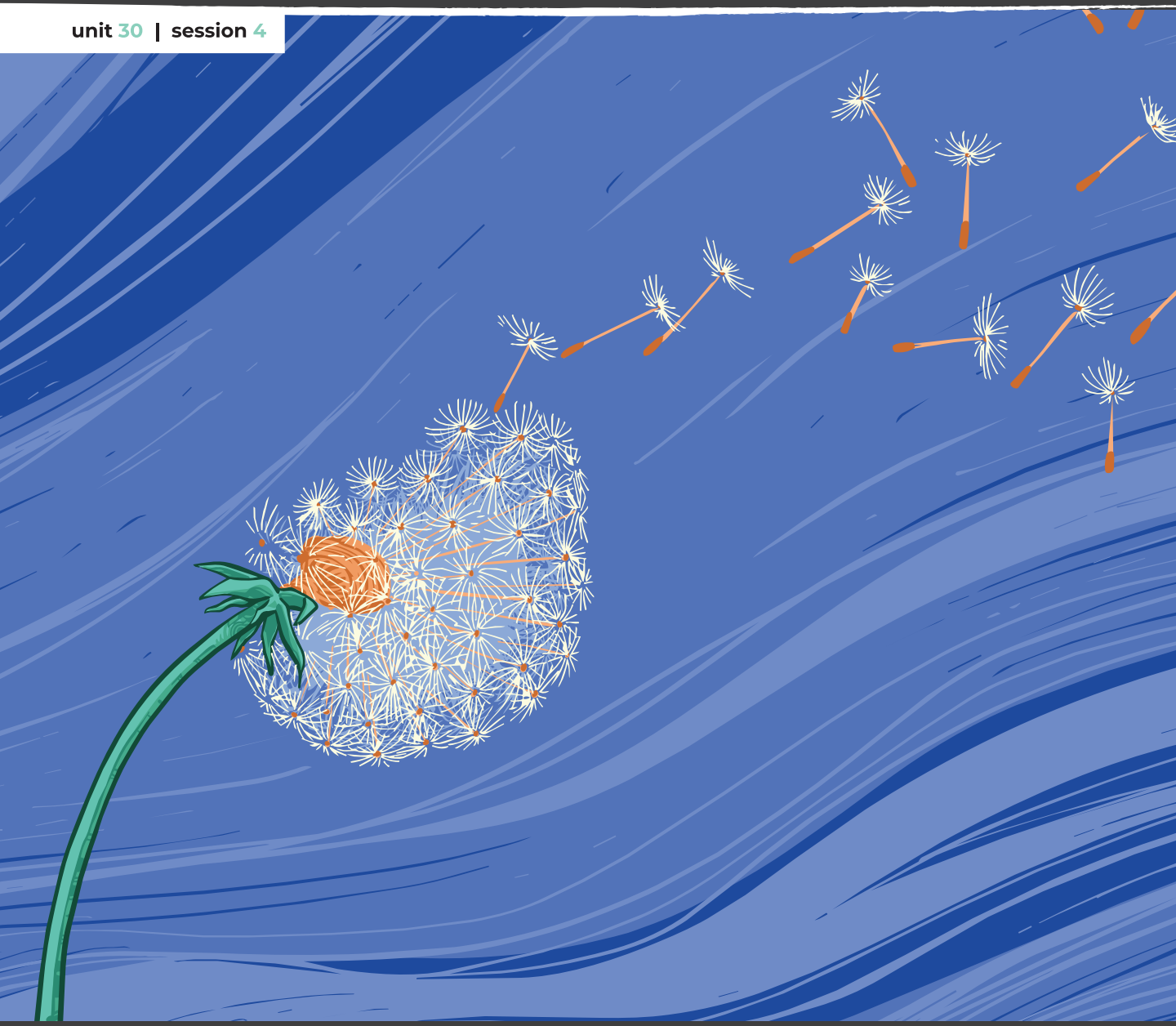
SCATTERED

unit 30 | session 4



CHRIST CONNECTION

Because we have been joined together with God through Jesus, we celebrate all who come to faith in Christ; we support, disciple, and care for them as part of the church.

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UNITY AND GENEROSITY

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

Acts 11

WE'RE CALLED TO REJOICE

ACTS 11:19-26

19 Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. 20 But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. 22 The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 23 When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, 24 for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. 25 So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26 and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

WE'RE CALLED TO MEET NEEDS

ACTS 11:27-30

27 Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). 29 So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. 30 And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul

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MAIN POINT.

The way we treat others either hinders or advances the gospel.



THEOLOGY *CONNECTION*

UNITY OF THE CHURCH

Jesus's desire for the church is for us to be united in Him by the gospel (Phil. 2:1-2), reflecting the oneness of our trinitarian God (John 17:20-23). We should allow no divisions to separate us (1 Cor. 1:10), such as ethnicity, social and financial status, nationality, language, politics, or secondary doctrinal beliefs. Our goal is not simply to look past these differences within the body of Christ but to celebrate the diversity of God's people made one in Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-13; Eph. 4:4-6,11-13), demonstrating humility (Rom. 12:3,16; Phil. 2:5-11) and freely loving and forgiving one another (Col. 3:13-14) to reflect the power of Christ who reconciles all things to Himself (Ps. 133:1; Eph. 1:10; 2:14).

DISCUSSION

WE'RE CALLED TO REJOICE

ACTS 11:19-26



- **How did God use persecution to spread the gospel? How does this encourage us when our circumstances aren't easy?**
- **Circle words in the text that describe Barnabas. Why are Christians like him needed in the church today?**



- **How does your group respond when people come to faith in Jesus and join the body of believers? How can your group respond like Barnabas?**

WE'RE CALLED TO MEET NEEDS

ACTS 11:27-30

- **Because of the famine, each of the disciples sent help to the church "according to his ability." What does this mean?**



- **What keeps us from being generous? What is at the root of our unwillingness to give to others?**



- **What keeps our group from experiencing unity? How can we practice unity in our church?**



WHAT ARE SOME WAYS YOU CAN MEET OTHERS' NEEDS IN YOUR CHURCH COMMUNITY RIGHT NOW?

CULTURAL *CONNECTION*

We all come from different backgrounds, different families, different beliefs. The fact that we all have our own struggles, personalities, and preferences means that conflicts can arise within our churches—just like they do within any family or friend group. This is why it is so crucial to treat each other with Christlike love and to walk in unity with the same purpose: to make Jesus known. The authors of the New Testament knew that there would be personality clashes among the imperfect people who made up the new church, which is why there are so many verses reminding us to be patient and compassionate, forgiving one another as Christ forgave us (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:12-13). Loving each other well reflects Jesus's character and is a witness to unbelievers. Non-Christians watch how we act and treat each other. They notice if we really practice what we preach. The love and kindness we show our brothers and sisters in Christ should make nonbelievers want to know God and to be a part of His church.

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DAY ONE

JOHN 17:20-23

Would you agree that our world today lacks unity? Everything from college football teams to politics creates division, and it can be hard to imagine anything being capable of bringing these groups together. In this passage, we get to read John's record of Jesus's prayer right before He was betrayed and taken to be crucified. What Jesus prayed for may not be what we'd expect: He prayed for all those who believe in Him to be united as one. He specifically mentioned the disciples and all who came to belief through their word, which includes believers today! Let that sink in: When Jesus prayed for you, He didn't pray for an easy life without struggle; He prayed for you to be united with other believers. Why would our unity now matter to Jesus in that moment? Well, He was hours away from sacrificing Himself to save us—hours away from suffering unimaginable pain and loss so that we can be united with Him and made right with God. And the gospel reaching the world happens through our unity, not our division. If believers allow division, then the gospel is hindered. We mostly agree with the idea that we should be unified in Christ, but we don't always live this out in real life. This passage helps us to remember why unity matters in the church. To be united, we set aside any temptation to gossip, to divide, or to seek our own interests. We can humble ourselves as we remember that Christ died for our sins, and in His prayer for us, He asked for unity. When we grow in unity with other believers, we honor Christ's prayer!

- **WHAT DOES UNITY IN THE CHURCH REALLY LOOK LIKE? WHERE DO YOU SEE DIVISION BETWEEN BELIEVERS OR IN YOUR GROUP?**
- **HOW DOES BEING UNIFIED HELP US TO FULFILL THE CALL TO SHARE THE GOSPEL? HOW DOES DIVISION HINDER US?**

PRAY

LORD, THANK YOU FOR LOVING US SO MUCH THAT YOU STOPPED TO PRAY FOR US AS YOU ANTICIPATED THE CROSS. HELP US TO BE UNIFIED IN YOUR LOVE AND TO SERVE ONE ANOTHER WELL.

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DAY TWO

ROMANS 12:9-10

If you have siblings, then you've probably experiences times when you are not one another's favorite person in the world. You fight over silly things, but if anyone else tries to hurt or attack your siblings, you'll be there to defend them. Your love for each other is stronger than any argument because at the end of the day, you're family.

In today's passage in Romans, Paul called the believers in Rome to love one another as brothers and sisters in the family of God. Paul didn't just call them to love one another like earthly brothers and sisters but to go above and beyond what is typical. We may disagree with other believers, just like we do our siblings, but we can't allow those disagreements to divide us. If we are going to cling to what is good and hate what is evil, then we need each other. Paul wrote that we should be diligent in honoring each other, which means putting others before ourselves, valuing them enough to care for them and to do good for them. Love and honor between believers are not something we can fake or force; treating each other nicely when we secretly don't like one another won't work and isn't true unity. Scripture clearly calls us to love our brothers and sisters in Christ. Whatever differences keep us from getting along or loving each other must be put aside because Christ has made us into one body and one family. You may not get along with everyone in your group or your church, but they are a part of the family of God, so you're commanded to love them regardless. Trust that God will use your obedience to bring unity to His people and to make much of His name.

- **WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICAL WAYS YOU CAN WORK THROUGH DIFFERENCES WITH OTHER BELIEVERS? HOW CAN YOU PUT OTHERS FIRST THIS WEEK?**
- **WHY IS FAKING THAT WE LOVE OTHERS NOT ENOUGH? WHY DOES IT MATTER THAT OUR LOVE FOR OTHERS IS GENUINE?**

PRAY

LORD, THANK YOU FOR PROVIDING ME WITH A FAMILY OF BELIEVERS TO PURSUE YOU WITH. HELP ME TO LOVE AND HONOR THEM WELL SO THAT OTHERS MIGHT SEE YOUR LIGHT IN US.

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DAY THREE

ROMANS 12:13

Hospitality is not a word we use much, but it simply means to welcome and care for guests or to make people feel valued. We love being on the receiving end of hospitality, and some of us even love showing hospitality, but many of us struggle with it. This verse is crystal clear: Hospitality isn't just nice for Christians to do or something only small committees at church do, but it's a command for all of us.

Hospitality is more than planning parties or hosting people in your home; it's welcoming people into your life and serving them by making them a part of your community. As a student, you have huge opportunities to invite others into your life and make them feel welcome, even if it doesn't look like hosting them at your house. By inviting other students to join your friends when you hang out or to do homework together, you create opportunities to love others and help them see Jesus. Think especially of students in your school or youth group who may not be well-connected or who might be struggling with loneliness. Do you stop to notice them? By taking the time to invite them into your home or to a hangout with other friends, you help build the community that God desires for us. Another side of hospitality is meeting the needs of others. You may not have a lot of money or resources right now, but the Lord has called you to serve in any way you can and to love those around you. This might look like spending time volunteering or being a part of a ministry in your church that provides food or clothing to those in need. The Lord has called us to be in community with our fellow believers but also to welcome others. As Paul explained, seek opportunities to love those around you by welcoming them in and ensuring they have all they need.

- **WHY IS HOSPITALITY SO IMPORTANT FOR BELIEVERS? HOW CAN YOU HELP BUILD A SENSE OF COMMUNITY IN THE GROUPS YOU ARE A PART OF?**
- **WHAT NEEDS DO YOU SEE AROUND YOU? HOW CAN YOU HELP MEET THOSE NEEDS AND INVITE OTHERS TO SERVE TOO?**

PRAY

LORD, THANK YOU FOR ALL YOU HAVE GIVEN ME AND FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE THOSE BLESSINGS WITH OTHERS. HELP ME TO LOVE OTHERS WELL AND CREATE COMMUNITY BY WELCOMING THEM IN.

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DAY FOUR

ROMANS 12:15

A common phrase today, especially on social media, is to "protect your peace." The world teaches us to cut off friends who ask too much of us and to avoid feeling stressed at all costs, even if it means not being there for others. The world's version of community is often shallow and ranks below personal feelings and preferences. In Romans 12:15, Paul painted a completely different picture of community and how to love one another: Walk with people through the highs and lows of life. In other words, rejoice with people when God blesses them with good gifts. Put aside jealousy or your desire for the same gifts, and genuinely celebrate with others. On the other side, weep with people who are walking through sorrow, sickness, or pain. Sitting with someone while they weep isn't easy, and many of us struggle with feeling awkward or not knowing what to say. But the Lord calls us to weep with them, not to say the perfect words. We even see that Jesus did this when a good friend died (John 11:35); though He arrived to restore the dead man back to life, He still paused and entered His friends' grief. Celebrating with others, especially when your own life is difficult, requires sacrifice. Weeping with others means that you're willing and available to sit with others as they mourn—that you love them enough to grieve what they're grieving. Both rejoicing and weeping require the same of us: to put aside our own needs. Caring for people by loving them deeply enough to be moved for them is one way we can help, even when what they need is more than we can provide.

- **WHAT HAVE YOU HEARD FROM THE MEDIA OR THE WORLD ABOUT ALWAYS PROTECTING YOUR PEACE AND YOUR FEELINGS? WHAT IS DIFFERENT ABOUT PAUL'S MESSAGE?**
- **HOW CAN YOU MAKE A PRACTICE OF WALKING WITH OTHERS THROUGH LIFE? WHAT SACRIFICES MIGHT COME WITH REJOICING AND WEEPING WITH OTHERS?**

PRAY

LORD, HELP ME TO LOVE MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST WELL BY WALKING WITH THEM THROUGH REJOICING AND WEEPING. THANK YOU FOR GIVING ME PEOPLE TO LOVE.

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DAY FIVE

ROMANS 12:16-18

Do you have a peacekeeper in your family or in your group of friends? This person is usually the mediator, helping others solve issues. This person usually apologizes easily and moves on from drama quickly. For most of us, practicing humility and peace are probably not natural tendencies. We can be prideful and divisive, seeking to get revenge for wrongs done to us and always thinking of our own interests. The Lord calls us to live a life that looks different from the world and different than our natural impulses! Today's passage says that we shouldn't be prideful or think too much of our own wisdom but should instead be humble and seek the wisdom of the Lord. This passage also calls us to live at peace with others. These things are deeply connected to each other. If we have pride in our own abilities or in our wisdom and allow that pride to grow, then we will likely begin to think less of others or cause division because we value our opinions and needs over others'. However, as we live in godly wisdom and humility and seek to forgive and resolve conflict, we will see our communities and our hearts transform. The Lord has called believers to be lights in the world as carriers of the gospel. On the surface, living with each other in peace might not seem like an important aspect of our calling, but it is actually incredibly significant! At times, we have no control over a situation and can't force others to seek peace. But as far as it depends on us, we can live peacefully with others. Just like our natural tendency apart from the Lord is to sin and to live selfishly and pridefully, the world is also marked by these traits—even excusing them as normal or "self-care." When believers live peacefully with one another and are known for humility and love, the world sees something different in us. Our goal is to bring glory to the Lord, and we do this by living differently from the world.

- **WHY IS HARD TO LIVE PEACEFULLY WITH THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU? HOW CAN YOU HUMBLY SEEK PEACE WITH OTHERS?**
- **WHY DOES HUMILITY AND PEACE STAND OUT? HOW CAN THIS DIFFERENCE GIVE US OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE THE GOSPEL?**

PRAY

LORD, THANK YOU FOR TRANSFORMING AND SANCTIFYING ME SO I MIGHT BE MORE LIKE YOU. HELP ME TO LIVE HUMBLY AND PEACEFULLY SO THE WORLD CAN SEE JESUS IN ME.

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PUBLISHING TEAM LEAD

ALECIA BRYANT

Some days, living for the Lord can feel like a sacrifice. We struggle with our sin. We struggle with desiring to fit in and with taking the easy road. We struggle with loneliness, being excluded, or being misunderstood. In our struggles, we can take strength from these truths: We're never alone because God's Spirit lives within us, helping us to fight temptation, comforting us, convicting us of our sin, and reminding us that the narrow path is the better way. Here's the truth: Living for Jesus and honoring His commands won't always be easy. In fact, it will be costly. But we can look to God's Word and see that many others walked this path before us. They paid the cost, some even losing their lives for the sake of the gospel. They lived to proclaim the name of Jesus, and this meant their actions, words, and desires looked very different from the world's. It's costly. But nothing here compares to the gift of our salvation—the gift of knowing Jesus. Carry that gift with you everywhere you go. Walk the path so many others walked before you—the way Jesus walked. It's worth it.



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CAITLIN HURLBUT
(Unit 30)

Caitlin Hurlbut is a Bible teacher and youth ministry leader in New Orleans and currently serves as a Student Ministry Resident at First Baptist Kenner. With nearly five years of ministry experience, she's dedicated to guiding young people toward a deeper, Christ-centered understanding of Scripture. She studied Missions at Oklahoma Baptist University and is pursuing her Master of Divinity at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

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