theGOSPELPROJECT
FOR STUDENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

UNIT 28 JESUS IS FOR US

SESSION 1 • "Crucify Him!" 8
SESSION 2 • He Breathed His Last 16
SESSION 3 • Go and Tell 24
SESSION 4 • Peace Be with You 32

UNIT 29 JESUS IS WITH US

SESSION 1 • I Am with You Always 40
SESSION 2 • A Violent Rushing Wind 48
SESSION 3 • His Name 56
SESSION 4 • At Daybreak 64
SESSION 5 • The Face of an Angel 72

UNIT 30 JESUS CHANGES US

SESSION 1 • Unless Someone Guides Me 80
SESSION 2 • Light from Heaven 88
SESSION 3 • Even on the Gentiles 96
SESSION 4 • Scattered 104

THE GOSPEL PROJECT FOR STUDENTS
LEADER GUIDE

VOLUME 10

PRODUCTION AND MINISTRY TEAM
PUBLISHING TEAM LEAD:
Alecia Bryant
CONTRIBUTING PRODUCTION EDITOR:
Angela Reed
MANAGER, STUDENT ONGOING STUDIES:
Brett Buckland
DIRECTOR, NEXTGEN MINISTRY:
Chuck Peters

SEND QUESTIONS/COMMENTS TO:
Alecia Bryant
The Gospel Project for Students Leader Guide
200 Powell Place Suite 100
Brentwood, TN 37027

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CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

UNIT 28 | Stephanie Cross
UNIT 29 | Jody Dean
UNIT 30 | Jade Turner

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PREPARATION

- Access the leader training for each session at **gospelproject.com/leader-training**.
- Read through the main passage and surrounding chapters of Scripture listed on the opening page of each session.
- Study the **Before You Teach** section, focusing on which aspects of the study you will cover during group time.
- Check each session for a pack item list or description.



BEFORE YOU TEACH

These pages are designed to help leaders prepare for each session, providing content that digs deeper into the focal passages and main point emphasized throughout the session.

- **Biblical Commentary**: This content is compiled to help leaders understand how the passage connects to today's culture.
- **Theology Connection**: Each session contains a biblical doctrine that directly relates to the Bible study material.

CONTEXT

We believe Scripture should be studied within the context in which it was written. This section breaks down where the passage fits in the grand narrative of God's Word. At the beginning of each book, we highlight the author, time period, original audience, and purpose. This section also features important historical facts to help leaders and students understand the message.



INTRO OPTIONS

- **Kickstarter:** This is the shortest option for groups which may not have time for longer activities. They rotate between "Did You Know?" facts, short polls, and Heart Checks, which refer to the previous lesson as a form of accountability.
- **Activity:** This activity is mostly discussion-based. It's designed to take up minimal time with few or no supplies.
- **Cultural Connection:** This feature helps connect the week's content to the students' culture. It will hit on real-life questions and difficult topics. It's designed to encourage deep discussion between students and leaders.

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DISCUSSION SECTION



The **Discussion** section is designed to show how God's story connects with our own stories today. Here we will see how the biblical storyline for each session challenges the way we think, feel, and live each day. While this certainly happens on an individual level, we do want to stress to students that all Christians share this calling and mission to live differently. Leaders will also find suggested answers with sentences in bold as a guide for more reluctant groups.

CHRIST CONNECTION	This icon indicates questions that look at how the content connects with Christ, emphasizing to students how all of Scripture points to Him.
THEOLOGY CONNECTION	This icon indicates questions that directly relate to the doctrine for the week. We want to encourage discussion about these doctrines to expand students' biblical worldview.
HEAD, HEART, HANDS	The **Head/Heart/Hands** questions are designed to show how God's story connects with our own. We'll see how Scripture challenges the ways we think, feel, and live. While this certainly happens on an individual level, we do want to stress to students that this calling and mission to live differently is something all Christians share and pursue.

LEADER PACK

The **Leader Pack** provides additional ways to make the session interactive with One Sheets, PowerPoint templates, posters, and other resources to support both leader preparation and group time.





STUDENT DEVOTIONS

Students remember thirty percent of what they hear and seventy percent of what they say and write. To get students more involved in the biblical storyline of Scripture and in their personal discipleship, we have included five days of devotions following each session in the **Daily Discipleship Guide**. As a leader, emphasize weekly how important it is for students to read these devotions and develop the spiritual discipline of being in the Word of God. These devotions will provide simple techniques for studying the Bible as illustrated by the **Seven Arrows**. The pages are perforated so that students can tear them out and take them home.

SEVEN ARROWS

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

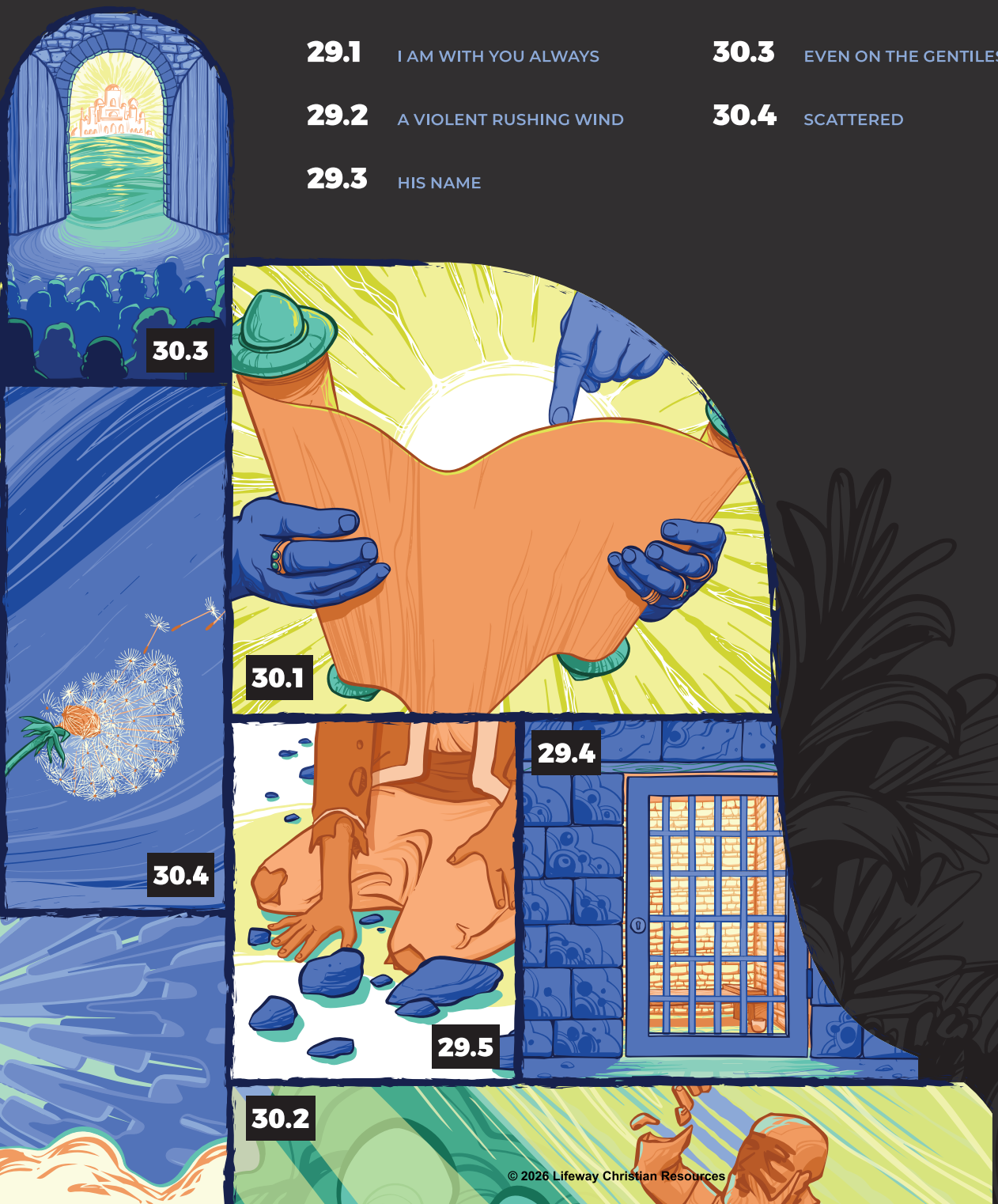
29.5 THE FACE OF AN ANGEL

30.1 UNLESS SOMEONE GUIDES ME

30.2 LIGHT FROM HEAVEN

30.3 EVEN ON THE GENTILES

30.4 SCATTERED



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PUBLISHING TEAM LEAD

ALECIA BRYANT

Welcome to Volume 10, where we reach a pivotal point in the biblical narrative as God's redemptive plan for humanity unfolds. This is it, friends—*this* is what the Old Testament pointed to all along. Like a thread, God wove His promise to save us throughout Scripture. Let's travel back for a moment, tracing the Lord's hand: He sent His Son as a fragile baby to live among us, to teach, to heal, and to be the Way to the Father; He brought a remnant back from Babylonian exile to rebuild the city and the temple; He used the voices of prophets, warning His people to return to Him; He worked through kings and kingdoms to further His kingdom and to position and preserve His people; He selected leaders like David, Joshua, and Moses to guide the nation of Israel; He dwelled with His people, even in their wandering, providing for them and carrying them as a father carries his child (Deut. 1:31); He set Israel apart, giving the people His law and revealing His character; He parted waters to free His people from Egyptian slavery; He displayed His power in plagues and His mercy through the blood of lambs; He positioned Joseph's family in a foreign land, using their betrayal to save them from famine; He made barren women mothers; He spared Abraham's son, though He would not spare His own; He called a man from Ur to be the father of nations, promising to bless all people through him; He spared one righteous family from a catastrophic flood, sealing them in an ark; He worked in Adam and Eve's fall, calling them from hiding, clothing them, and then banishing them so that restoration could begin. One thread of redemption weaves from eternity past to completion in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Now, we carry the thread, letting God use us, His church, to reach the world. We're part of the bigger story. May we carry it well, even in suffering, as the ones who came before us.



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"CRUCIFY HIM!"



MAIN POINT.

Jesus endured false accusations for our salvation.

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 read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

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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BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

Jesus endured false accusations for our salvation.

Leaders: Consider listening to a version of "Man of Sorrows," originally written by Hillsong. May our only response to Jesus willingly erasing our debt be lives of grateful worship.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

JESUS WAS INNOCENT IN OUR PLACE

MARK 14:55-61

"Since they could not produce evidence, their final recourse was this desperate attempt by Caiaphas to get Jesus to say He was the Messiah. If Jesus admitted to being the Messiah, it would be a clear case of blasphemy."[1]

MARK 14:63-64

"The symbolic tearing of garments, by now traditional on hearing blasphemy, was in origin a sign of grief, as is plain from the Old Testament (Lev. 10:6). Here it had become distorted into a sign of joy at a wicked purpose successfully accomplished. Joyfully, the worthless witnesses are now dismissed: the high priest hastily calls the *bêth dîn*, or court, to be themselves witnesses, and he formally asks for their opinion. Just as formally they give it: Jesus of Nazareth is liable to the death penalty for blasphemy. The agony is that, had His claim been false, it would indeed have been a blasphemy of such magnitude as to deserve the death sentence; but what if He were right?"[2]

JESUS WAS CONDEMNED IN OUR PLACE

MARK 15:6-15

"Jesus was innocent but declared to be guilty. Barabbas was guilty but was treated as though he were innocent. Jesus died in his place. He also died in our place, that in an amazing reversal we might truly become sons and daughters of the heavenly Father. Sinclair Ferguson says, 'Without knowing it, the religious leaders and Pilate and Barabbas were all part of a tapestry of grace which God was weaving for sinners. Their actions spoke louder than their words, louder than the cries of the crowds for Jesus's blood. Jesus was not dying for His own crimes, but for the crimes of others; not for His own sins, but the sins of others. He did not die for Himself, He died for us!' Ferguson then asks a most important question: 'Have you ever seen what they were all too blind to notice?'"[3]

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CONTEXT

God's law made clear that convicting someone of a capital crime—a crime punishable by death—required at least two witnesses (Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6; 19:15), and these witnesses had to agree about what happened. This protected the accused because the testimony of only one witness couldn't be verified; however, two witnesses who fully agreed on what happened pointed to an accurate accusation. Although Jesus plainly responded to religious leaders that He is the Messiah (Mark 14:62), the initial "testimony" brought against Jesus wasn't about them thinking Jesus had blasphemed God. Their accusation was based on a misunderstanding of what Jesus said in John 2:19-22: He would destroy the temple and raise it in three days. They believed He was talking about destroying their house of worship, which was punishable by death. But Jesus "was speaking about the temple of his body" (John 2:21)—about His death and resurrection. Even so, the false witnesses couldn't keep their stories straight, and their testimony wasn't enough to condemn Jesus. The high priest's question in verse 61 was a last-ditch effort to get Jesus to admit to a crime punishable by death. Ironically, in their eyes, He did just that when He claimed to be the Messiah.

Blasphemy: Actions or words that show disrespect to God's character.

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.

LEADERS' PRAYER

LORD JESUS, THANK YOU FOR DYING IN MY PLACE, PAYING FOR MY SIN, AND COVERING MY SHAME WITH YOUR BLOOD. YOU PROMISE ME FREEDOM IN YOUR NAME, NOT CONDEMNATION. HELP ME LEAD MY STUDENTS TO SEE THIS SAME TRUTH: YOU ARE OUR SAVIOR AND THE PERFECT ONCE-FOR-ALL SACRIFICE WE DESPERATELY NEED.

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KICK STARTER

DID YOU KNOW?

The Supreme Court opens each session by repeating the word "Oyez!" three times. "Oyez," is a call to **pay attention** and is basically translated as "Here ye."[4]

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These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.



ACCUSED

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **WHAT'S THE SILLIEST THING YOU'VE EVER BEEN ACCUSED OF? HOW DID YOU RESPOND?**
- **WHAT'S THE WORST THING YOU'VE EVER BEEN ACCUSED OF? WHAT HAPPENED?**
- **HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE ACCUSED OF SOMETHING YOU DIDN'T DO, ESPECIALLY WHEN PEOPLE ARE DETERMINED TO BELIEVE YOU DID IT?**

None of us likes being accused of doing something we didn't do, especially when people won't back down as we defend ourselves. Jesus knows what it's like to be falsely accused, yet He didn't defend Himself against those accusations. He answered only one question, and that answer condemned Him, even though He did nothing wrong. Instead of standing up for Himself, Jesus laid down His life for us.



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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DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

Jesus endured false accusations for our salvation.

JESUS WAS INNOCENT IN OUR PLACE

READ MARK 14:55-65

DO YOU THINK THE TRIAL JESUS FACED WAS FAIR? WHY OR WHY NOT?

Leaders: Share Context on witnesses. We like for things to be fair, right? The trial Jesus faced was anything but fair, from the gathering of false witnesses who couldn't keep their stories straight to the high priest tearing his clothes out of a wicked sort of joy rather than grief (v. 63). Jesus was innocent of every charge but stood accused. Their hearts were set on sending Jesus to the cross. Our hearts are "desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9, KJV), and our sin makes us just as guilty as the religious leaders. **The only fair outcome would've been for Jesus not to die, but His heart was set on the cross too—on saving us.**

WHY DOES JESUS'S RESPONSE TO THE FALSE ACCUSATIONS AGAINST HIM IN VERSE 61 MATTER?

The religious leaders who put Jesus on trial idolized keeping God's law and couldn't see Jesus came to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17). Instead, they rejected Him, their Messiah, at every turn. But in His silence, Jesus fulfilled another part of Scripture, a prophecy about the coming Messiah: "Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter . . . he opened not his mouth" (Isa. 53:7). This points us to the truth that John the Baptist called out: Jesus is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). **His silence fulfilled prophecy, further proving His identity as God's Son and our substitute for sin.**

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?

Leaders: See Context note on blasphemy. The witnesses twisted what Jesus said to paint a picture of Him as a liar and worse, someone who blasphemed God. They humiliated, insulted, mocked, and beat Jesus in the most demeaning manner. Their actions revealed their sinful hearts. They rejected Jesus, their pride convincing them to choose their own way. **Many of us are probably disgusted by the people's actions. But let's consider for a moment how, even in subtle ways, we reject Jesus by choosing our own way too.** We keep silent to hide our faith. We tell a "small" lie to our parents to get our way. We let our friends convince us to do something we know is wrong. We watch or read content that doesn't honor Jesus. **He is worthy of all our attention and adoration, not our rejection. And living partially devoted to Jesus is rejection.** When our hearts are set on loving Jesus, we boldly share the gospel. We obey God's Word. We tell the truth, even when it's tough. We choose to follow Jesus in big and small actions, even when it might cost us relationships and influence. Choosing Jesus, no matter what we face, shows that we truly believe He is better.

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JESUS WAS CONDEMNED IN OUR PLACE

READ MARK 15:6-15

WHY WOULD PILATE TRY TO SET JESUS FREE? DOES THE CROWD'S CHOICE SURPRISE YOU? WHY OR WHY NOT?

The Jews weren't allowed to put someone to death; only the Roman government could do this. Enter Pilate, a harsh Roman governor. He recognized Jesus's innocence (John 18:38). So, when the Jews asked him to release a prisoner for Passover as he often did, Pilate saw a way out of a tough situation. But he underestimated the chief priests' hatred of Jesus. They begged him to release Barabbas—a murderer and leader of a resistance movement. Their request shouldn't come as a surprise. Many of these religious leaders had consistently opposed and rejected Jesus; they didn't like being called out for their sin. Most of us dislike being called out for our sin too. **If given a choice, we choose the option that challenges us the least—the option we believe leads to freedom or causes less discomfort.**

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?

Pilate called it. The false accusations, the severe mistreatment, and the desire to see Jesus put to death showed even a ruthless Roman ruler what was in the chief priests' hearts. Jesus was a popular leader who consistently called out the religious leaders. To them, Jesus was as much of a revolutionary as Barabbas was to Rome. **Their desire to protect their own interests blinded them to the truth. Envy in our hearts blinds us too, pointing to a belief that what God has given us isn't good enough.** So, we want what others have, measuring our worth by their experience rather than what God says. Envy leads to dishonesty, gossip, distance, and division, even making us feel happy when others fail. This is the way of the world, but it isn't the way of Jesus.

HOW DOES JESUS TAKING THE PLACE OF BARABBAS HELP US UNDERSTAND JESUS AS OUR SUBSTITUTE?

Substitutionary atonement means Jesus died in our place as the final and perfect sacrifice needed to remove our sin and our guilt. Jesus taking Barabbas's place clearly represents how He is our substitute: He was innocent but declared guilty. Barabbas was guilty but declared innocent. Even though they didn't see who Jesus truly is, the religious leaders, Pilate, and even Barabbas all played a part in God's plan to rescue sinners and restore their relationship with God. **Jesus died for the very crimes Barabbas committed—and He died for all the "crimes" (sins) we commit against God too. Just like Barabbas, we can be free because Jesus died in our place.**

WRAP-UP

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

Before we shake our heads at the religious leaders and wonder what they were thinking, we need to look at our own hearts: We choose terrible options over Jesus all the time. We choose to follow people who make us feel good about ourselves, even when we know what we're doing is wrong. We choose our own influence over making the name of Jesus great. We choose to numb out with TV, books, video games, or harmful substances instead of taking our pain and questions to Jesus. We choose these things because they don't ask much of us in return; we don't have to change. If a parent, friend, or stranger sacrificed their life to save you, then you'd probably express your gratitude. We get to respond to Jesus with our gratitude—by loving Him and living for Him. **Jesus asks for our whole lives, but He also gave us *everything*. He does the work to change us from within. He gives us new hearts and His Spirit to help us put Him first.** All we have to do is follow the path He has laid out before us, one small step at a time (Ps. 119:105). We read His Word and obey it, worship Him, love and serve others, and share the gospel.

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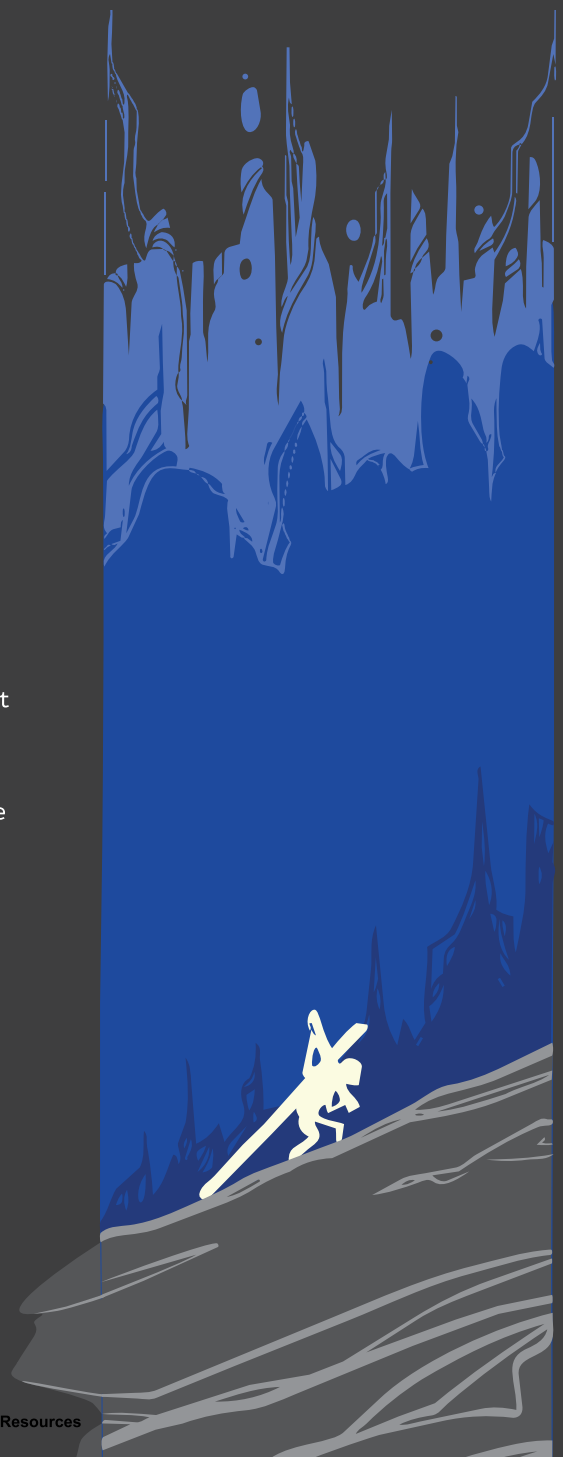
HE BREATHED HIS LAST



MAIN POINT.

Jesus endured torture and death for our salvation.

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 read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

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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BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

Jesus endured torture and death for our salvation.

Leaders: Read the account of Jesus's crucifixion, determining to see the horrific price of sin and the immeasurable depth of God's love in allowing His Son to absorb the wrath we deserve.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

JESUS WILLINGLY SUFFERED HUMILIATION

MARK 15:16-20,29-32

"Completely alone, humiliated, naked, and beaten nearly to death, our Savior endured yet again ridicule, shame, and pain at the hands of sinful men, at the hands of those He came to save. Oh, how heaven must have looked on in disbelief! Perhaps the angels wept. The Father sent His beloved Son to rescue and redeem a rebel race. Look at what they have done to our Lord! But look, and never forget, what our Lord has done for us!"[5]

MARK 15:31-32

"The religious leaders could not resist getting in one last dig at the great King: 'He saved others; He cannot save Himself!' They too challenged Him to come down from the cross; then they would believe. How ironic. If our Lord was to save others, Himself He could not save. And save Himself He would not do. These men claim they would have believed if He had come down from the cross, but we believe precisely because He stayed on it!"[6]

JESUS WILLINGLY GAVE HIS LIFE

MARK 15:34

"Jesus suffered as 'a ransom for many' (10:45), while He bore the sins of the world, God could not be with Him; and He was literally abandoned not only by His disciples but also by His Father. This view is quite in keeping with the theme of the loneliness of Jesus, which has been prominent since the Gethsemane scene (14:32-41). On the other hand, the practice sometimes was to cite only one verse but to do so as a means of referring to a larger passage. If that were the purpose in the present instance, the reference would be to all of Psalm 22. Taken as a whole, it is not so much a complaint of abandonment in time of trouble as it is an expression of confidence that God will deliver from trouble. . . . Perhaps one should not choose between the views but try to combine them. At one point Jesus was abandoned by God, and He felt that very keenly; even then, however, He had confidence that God would restore Him."[7]

"In taking upon Himself a human soul, He also took upon Himself the affections of a soul. As God He was not distressed, but as a human He was capable of being distressed. It was not as God He died, but as man. It was in human voice that He cried: 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?' (Ps. 22:1). As human, therefore, He speaks on the cross, bearing with Him our terrors."[8]

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CONTEXT

The temple was the center of sacrifice and worship, where God's people could experience His presence before Jesus came. God's people believed His presence rested in a portion of the temple called the holy of holies. A tall curtain—which was appropriately thick and heavy—served as the barrier between God's people and His presence. This area was off-limits to anyone but the high priest, and he could only enter once a year on the Day of Atonement to offer a sacrifice for the people's sins. While we might find it unfair that only the high priest was allowed to enter the holy of holies, this was actually a protective measure for sinful people who couldn't stand in the presence of a holy God. The high priest even took specific measures to cleanse himself before he entered God's presence to offer a sacrifice for the people's sins (Lev. 16:1-34). All these practices and the design of the temple were set in place by God so that His people could have forgiveness for their sins and a relationship with Him. But going through a priest to do this was never God's *final* plan. His final plan was Jesus—our great High Priest, whose death tore the curtain, inviting us into close relationship with God.

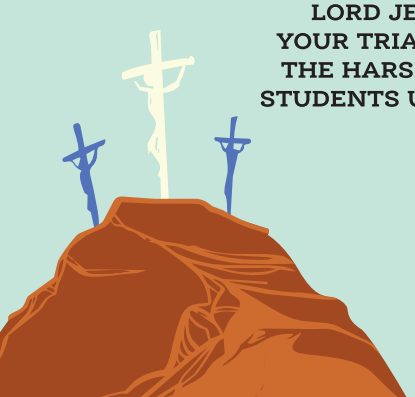
THEOLOGY CONNECTION

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).

LEADERS' PRAYER

LORD JESUS, MAKE ME SENSITIVE TO WHAT YOU EXPERIENCED DURING YOUR TRIAL AND CRUCIFIXION. HELP MY HEART REMEMBER AND NOT TREAT THE HARSH REALITY AS JUST ANOTHER STORY. GUIDE ME TO INSTILL IN MY STUDENTS UNDERSTANDING, AWE, AND RESPECT FOR ALL THAT YOU ENDURED TO SET US FREE FROM SIN AND DEATH.



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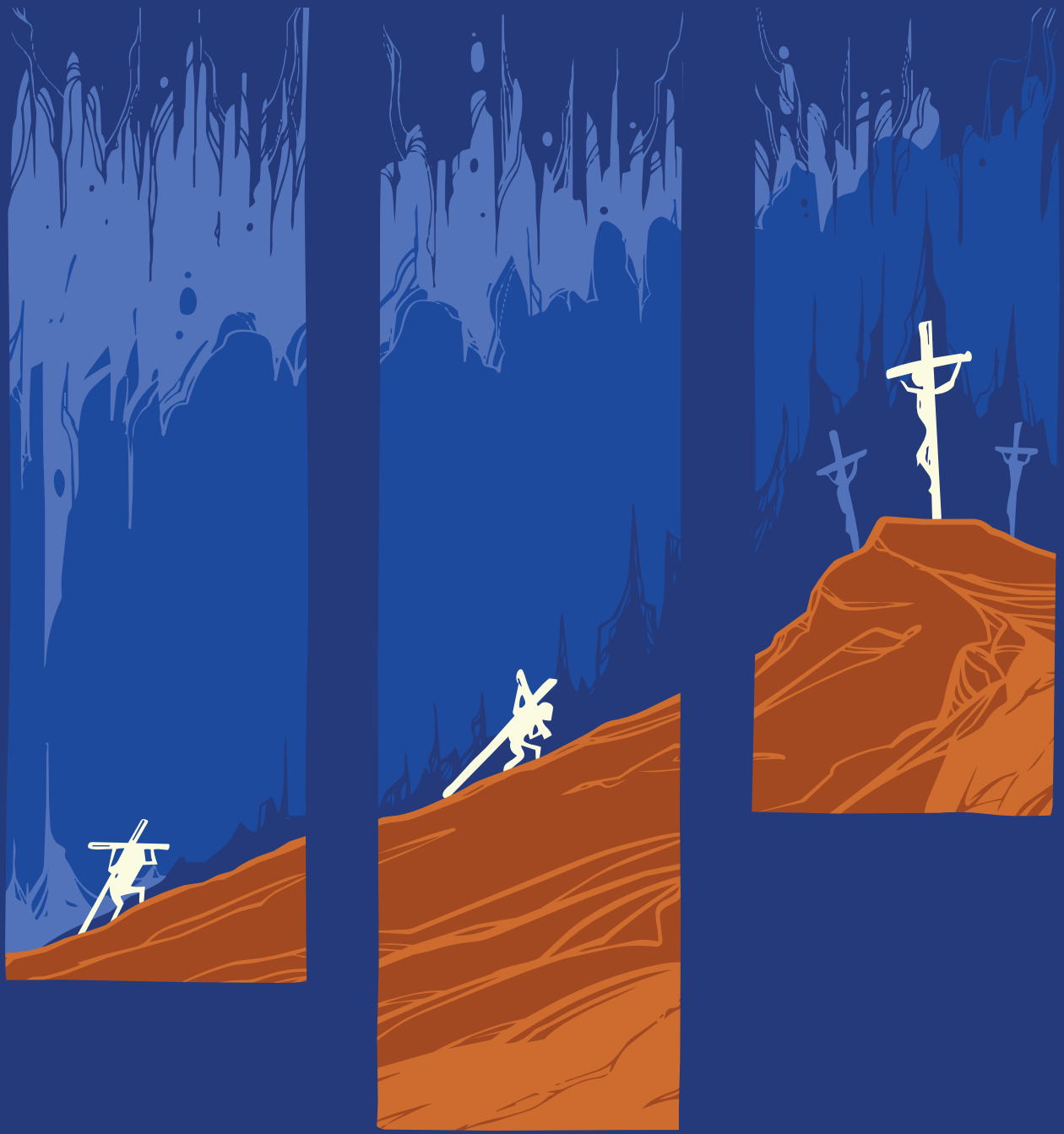

KICK STARTER

RATE IT!

How often do you think about what Jesus went through as He died **(1=Never; 10=Every day)**?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

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These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.



IT'S JUST A JOKE

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **WHAT KINDS OF THINGS DO PEOPLE TYPICALLY MAKE FUN OF IN OTHERS? APPEARANCE? INTERESTS? ACADEMIC ABILITY? THE WAY THEY TALK? EXPLAIN.**
- **WHY ARE WE TEMPTED TO MAKE FUN OF OTHERS?**
- **HOW DO YOU TYPICALLY RESPOND IF SOMEONE MAKES FUN OF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU LOVE?**

Being made fun of or seeing people we love being laughed at or gossiped about isn't fun—even if it's a joke gone wrong or we laugh it off at first. No matter how often we feel this kind of pain, it's nothing like what Jesus experienced when He went to the cross. He endured mocking, torture, and even death for God's glory and our salvation.



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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DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

Jesus endured torture and death for our salvation.

JESUS WILLINGLY SUFFERED HUMILIATION

READ MARK 15:16-20,29-32

WHY DO YOU THINK THE SOLDIERS MOCKED JESUS? HOW DOES IT AFFECT YOU TO IMAGINE THE SCENE?

Mark painted a painful picture of what the soldiers did to Jesus. He endured intense abuse—physical, emotional, and even spiritual. Below the surface of their ugly actions were hearts filled with sin. The scene reeks of disrespect for Jesus as a person, let alone as God the Son, the King of kings. **Their words and actions show a complete misunderstanding of—and need for—the Jesus they tortured. They denied His claims, His power, His identity, and ultimately, His Father.** And yet, even in that moment, it wasn't about what they'd done *to* Him but what He'd come to do *for* them.

HOW DID THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS MISS THE POINT WHEN THEY MOCKED JESUS? IN WHAT WAYS DO WE DO THIS TOO?

That Jesus could save Himself but didn't was the point: He had to be a perfect, *willing* sacrifice. Jesus chose to stay on the cross—in agony and shame, insulted and mocked—to save us instead. Let that sink in. **It's easy to step away from this story and view it as just that, becoming desensitized to the fact that what happened to Jesus—the torture, mockery, rejection, and crucifixion—was very real, as is our part in it.** He died for us, not just for our good but for His glory. This is the point. May we never lose sight of this truth: Jesus had the power to save Himself, but because of love, He chose us.

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?

Neither the soldiers nor the religious leaders truly understood Jesus's identity. Both expected Him to be like the worldly kings they'd known: powerful, strong, and victorious. They saw nothing of this stereotype when they looked at the man before them: bound and beaten, rejected by His own, and being led to His death as willingly and gently as a lamb to the slaughter (Isa. 53:7). So, they didn't respect Him as He deserved; instead, they were violent, cruel, and abusive. Here's the thing: What we say points directly to what we believe about Jesus, just as their words revealed what was in their hearts (Luke 6:45). **Wondering where Jesus is or the reason for God's plan is natural when He doesn't show up in our lives like we expected or wanted. But the words we speak in difficult situations and in moments of pain—even when we're surrounded by others who mock God in disbelief—can either grow our faith or hurt us; they can point people to Jesus or away from Him.** We can trust and proclaim that Jesus is worthy and that He is at work and has good plans for us (Rom. 8:28)—even in the unexpected, even when others mock Him.

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JESUS WILLINGLY GAVE HIS LIFE

READ MARK 15:33-47

WHAT WORDS DID JESUS CRY OUT IN VERSE 34? WHY SHOULD THESE WORDS MATTER TO US?

Deeper than the physical pain and mockery of the crucifixion was the pain Jesus endured from bearing God's wrath for us. His words are a heartbreaking cry our hearts never have to echo if we trust Him as Savior: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" His perfect communion—close relationship—with God was broken for a moment as He took on all the sin of all people across all time, but His identity as God the Son was never disrupted. The abandonment was real. The pain was intense. **Jesus trusted God's perfect plan, but as a human, He felt the distress of the separation meant for us. Thankfully, His separation was temporary. And in that separation, He healed ours, offering us a restored relationship with God.**



WHAT DOES THE CURTAIN TEARING AT THE MOMENT JESUS DIED MEAN FOR US? WHAT DO YOU NOTICE?

Leaders: See Context on the temple curtain. Mark wrote that "the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom" (15:38). This curtain had served as a protective barrier between God's presence and His people, and here, it was ripped from the top to the bottom—a supernatural act. Jesus cried out a powerful truth for us here: He finished what He came to do. He had lived a perfect life of obedience to God, died in our place, and made a way for us to have a restored relationship with God (John 14:6). **The torn curtain was a visual display of Jesus's redeeming work.** We don't have to go through anyone else to approach God. Jesus, our great High Priest, intercedes for us and gives us access to our heavenly Father (Heb. 4:14-15).

WHAT DID JOSEPH RISK BY ASKING FOR THE BODY OF JESUS? WHY DO YOU THINK HE DID IT ANYWAY?

Joseph was a member of the Sanhedrin—the Jewish council that accused Jesus of blasphemy and called for His death, but he was "a good and righteous man" (Luke 23:50), who disagreed with the council's decision (v. 51). He risked offending other Jewish leaders. Plus, Pilate disliked the Sanhedrin and might've been annoyed at Joseph's presence so soon after the crucifixion. Joseph could've been met with cruelty and violence; he could've lost his leadership position or faced ridicule, rejection, and persecution, just like Jesus. But Joseph chose to honor Jesus. **Joseph's actions remind us that following Jesus is worth any cost.**

WRAP-UP



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

Not all risks are good risks. God encourages wisdom from His Word, wise counsel (other godly people who help us make good decisions), and prayerful action. But we also see that following Jesus will be costly. Joseph counted the cost and determined that following Jesus was worth it. Choosing Jesus may not cost you your life. Still, it may come at the cost of your influence, friendships, dating relationships, goals, membership in a specific club or group, social status, or even an academic or work role later in life. In different ways throughout the New Testament, Jesus tells us to "count the cost" (Luke 14:28; see vv. 28-33). In other words, hold your plans, desires, resources, and relationships with a loose grip, knowing that following Jesus is worth letting go of everything else. **Following Jesus means putting His desires, plans, and ways above our own, trusting that even if we lose everything, we gain Him (Luke 9:23-27; Phil. 3:8-10)—and He is better.**

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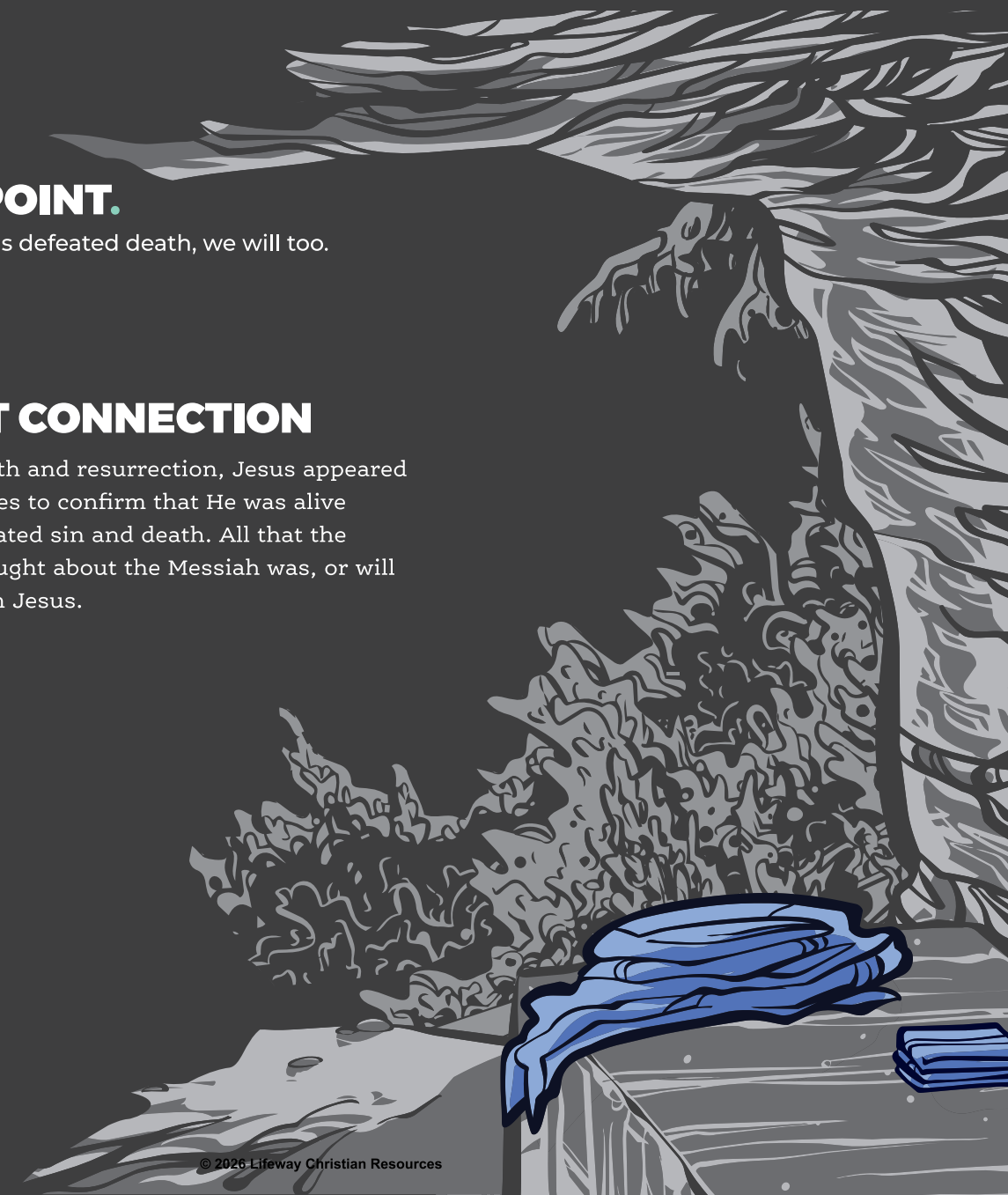
GO AND TELL



MAIN POINT.

Because Jesus defeated death, we will too.

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 read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

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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BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

Because Jesus defeated death, we will too.

Leaders: Culture teaches that truth is relative. But we know Truth (John 14:6). Now more than ever, our students need the truth of God's Word. Teach it boldly and live it authentically.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

JESUS'S RESURRECTION GIVES US HOPE

MATTHEW 28:5-7

"Belief is irresponsible and empty if it's not based in truth. People say, 'What is true for you may not be true for me,' but no one *really* believes that. . . . In most areas of everyday life we know instinctively to operate on the basis of truth instead of feelings and preferences. Yet, when it comes to the most important questions in life, questions that deal with grand, eternal realities, why would we want to disregard the question of truth? Do we really think God governs the world based on what we prefer? Matthew 28:1-15 reports to us *the* event in all of history, and our response to it should be based on truth, not feelings. Our eternity hangs on whether the resurrection of Jesus Christ actually happened. . . . Christianity stands or falls on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That doesn't minimize anything else Jesus did, especially the cross; however, we can only see the significance of the cross and the rest of Christ's perfect work through the lens of the resurrection."[9]

MATTHEW 28:6

"After the angel told the women not to fear (Luke 1:13,30; 2:10), the angel coupled his announcement of the resurrection with an invitation for the women to look into the tomb and see for themselves. His words, 'just as He said would happen,' remind the women that Jesus had repeatedly predicted His resurrection (12:40; 16:21; 17:9,23; 20:19; 26:32)."[10]

JESUS'S RESURRECTION IS REALITY

MATTHEW 28:10

"Jesus Himself reaffirmed the angel's promise (28:7), and referred to the disciples as His brothers (12:49-50; 23:8; 25:40; Rom. 8:29; Heb. 2:11). This use of the family metaphor indicates great love and patience, since the disciples could be said to have 'run away from home' in abandoning Jesus. Jesus welcomed the prodigals back home again."[11]

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CONTEXT

The women mentioned in the crucifixion story lived in a patriarchal culture, meaning men held all the power in their society. Women only held "power" through marriage or motherhood, depending on who they married or if they had sons. The truth is that God created both men and women in His image to do His work. They hold equal dignity: Neither is inferior to the other, but both hold different God-given roles. In God's good design, these differences are to be honored as we see in Jesus's treatment of women in the New Testament. Women followed Jesus, serving and caring for Him as He traveled. Women were key characters in His parables. His interactions and miracles included women. Jesus talked to women, even teaching them, which was culturally taboo during this time. He spoke highly of women and encouraged protecting their rights and dignity. While the culture at the time of Jesus held little value for women, especially their testimony, Jesus saw them differently—not with surface-level understanding but with an understanding of their hearts. Women were the first witnesses of His resurrection and deliverers of the good news. Their testimony adds authenticity to the resurrection story: People in that time wouldn't claim women as the primary witnesses if it wasn't the truth. Jesus elevated and chose those culture dismissed and devalued, as He still does today.

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.

LEADERS' PRAYER

LORD JESUS, HELP ME NEVER FORGET THE POWER OF YOUR RESURRECTION AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR MY LIFE. GIVE ME THE WISDOM AND THE WORDS TO HELP MY STUDENTS UNDERSTAND THAT YOU REALLY ROSE FROM THE DEAD, DEFEATING DEATH FOR US.



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KICK STARTER

♡ HEART CHECK

Let's check in on how you're doing spiritually. Last week, we saw Jesus experience brutal torture and death, all to glorify His Father and to save us from sin. Why is this **important to remember**? Why do we easily forget or become desensitized to this? How can you **keep remembering** what He did for you?

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1
TRUTHS AND LIES

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **WHAT'S THE LEAST CONVINCING LIE YOU'VE EVER HEARD? THE MOST CONVINCING?**
- **WHEN HAVE YOU STRUGGLED TO TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TRUTH AND A LIE?**
- **WHAT HELPS YOU FIGURE OUT WHAT'S TRUE, EVEN WHEN A LIE SOUNDS RIGHT?**

Our culture is all about finding the truth, but many people aren't satisfied when the truth they find doesn't line up with what they want or believe, especially when it comes to faith. People want to choose how they live; they want to choose their own "truth." But Jesus tells us that He is the truth—and the only way to have eternal life with God (John 14:6).

2
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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DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

Because Jesus defeated death, we will too.

JESUS'S RESURRECTION GIVES US HOPE

READ MATTHEW 28:1-7

WHO FIRST KNEW JESUS HAD RISEN? WHAT DOES THIS SAY ABOUT HOW JESUS VIEWS THOSE CULTURE IGNORES?

Leaders: See Context on women as witnesses.
While the disciples scattered, the women who'd followed Jesus didn't. When they went to the tomb to anoint Jesus with oils and spices, an angel rolled the stone away, giving these women the first glimpse at an earth-shattering truth: Jesus wasn't there. Their culture dismissed them; Jesus honored them with this news. **Jesus often lifted up the oppressed, the ignored, and the weak.** How the world sees you doesn't matter. Jesus doesn't look at your appearance or what your culture says about you; He looks at your heart. Jesus sees you as designed by God, in His image, for a specific purpose.

WHAT PART OF THE ANGEL'S NEWS DO YOU THINK WAS MOST SHOCKING? WHY IS THE MESSAGE GOOD NEWS FOR US?

Jesus trusted the women with the first evidence of His resurrection and with the most important message: He is risen, just as He promised. The resurrection is the heart of salvation and the gospel. Jesus defeated sin when He died on the cross, promising forgiveness for those who trust in Him. He defeated death through His resurrection, securing our victory over spiritual death. **Without the resurrection, we can't see clearly why the cross matters. Without the resurrection, our faith is empty and meaningless (1 Cor. 15:12-19).** But Jesus has risen, and in Him we can have eternal life.

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 was arrested, and the disciples who'd promised to stand by Him to the very end scattered. Even John, the beloved disciple, stuck mostly to the shadows. Although His closest friends ran and hid in fear in the days after Jesus's death, Jesus didn't give up on them. He promised to come to them. Here's the really good news for us: Jesus comes to us. He will keep His promises no matter what we do. He's a gentle Shepherd (John 10:11), who lovingly gathers His scattered, frightened, and wounded sheep, no matter how far we've wandered. **His forgiveness isn't restricted to our understanding of it. His grace for us never runs out. His love for us is unconditional. Not one part of our salvation or the promise of eternal life depends on us.** He meets us where we are, not with condemnation but with grace-filled reminders of who He is and that He will accomplish everything He has said. If you've drifted or messed up, don't hesitate—step toward Him in boldness and receive the hope and healing you need.

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JESUS'S RESURRECTION IS REALITY

READ MATTHEW 28:8-15

WHY DID JESUS MEET THE WOMEN ON THE ROAD? HOW DOES HE MEET US NOW WHEN WE NEED HIM?

Can you imagine arriving at the tomb to honor Jesus, only to experience an earthquake, see an angel of the Lord who looked like lightning, and be told the Savior you'd watched be crucified was very much alive? We'd probably respond like the women: terrified, joyful, and confused. Jesus met them, calmed their fear, and reminded them of their mission. **No matter where we are—in seasons of joy or sadness, fear or courage, doubt or security, pain or healing—Jesus is here.** He has authority over and knowledge of all things, including us and our hearts. Just as He did for the women, He meets us right where we are—through His Word and through the Holy Spirit—with exactly what we need in that moment to keep pursuing Him and taking His message into the world.

HOW DO THE WOMEN RESPOND TO SEEING JESUS? WHAT DOES THIS SHOW US ABOUT HOW WE SHOULD RESPOND?

Confronting truth leads to four possible responses: disbelief, indifference, curiosity that leads to more searching, and belief. Both the Bible and history point to the truth: Jesus really did rise from the dead three days after His resurrection, just as He'd said (Matt. 20:17-19). **The women in this passage show us the right response to the resurrected Jesus: They came close to Him, fell at His nail-scarred feet, and worshiped Him.** When we recognize who He is and what He has done for us, our only right response is to seek Him; submit to Him (to trust His authority); worship Him as our Savior, Lord, and King. Then, we spend our days telling others the good news: Jesus has risen from the dead, securing our hope because His victory over death is also ours.

WHAT EXCUSES DO PEOPLE USE TO DISMISS THE TRUTH ABOUT JESUS?

Jesus's empty tomb was a huge problem for the religious leaders and the soldiers. So, they made up a story about the disciples stealing His body, an argument we still hear from skeptics today. **The enemy wants the truth suppressed. He'll work hard to make sure that happens.** And honestly, his lies can sound good: *There's more than one way to heaven. God is good and loving; He won't send people to hell. We only have to be good people to get into heaven. Jesus was a good teacher, but He isn't God. Just pray this prayer, and you'll be saved.* But the truth is that Jesus is God. He is the only way to salvation. And this is only possible because He lived a perfect life, died for our sins, and rose from the grave.

WRAP-UP

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

Responding to Jesus isn't just about accepting His invitation to come and follow Him. **The women who visited the tomb help us see what following Him actually looks like. It's not just about doing good things as He did, although we are called to do the good works God has prepared for us (Eph. 2:10); it's about recognizing who He is, what He has done for us, and living our whole lives in response to that.** Practically, here's what that looks like: (1) *Come to Him*—reading God's Word, prayer, attending church and small group, listening to sermons and podcasts that grow your faith. (2) *Submit*—obeying Him even when His plan is costly or is different from yours and trusting Him when life doesn't look like you hoped it would. (3) *Worship*—giving thanks for what He has done, remembering and honoring His character, singing praise songs while focusing on what the words actually mean. (4) *Go and tell*—sharing the gospel and truth with all people, wherever God has you.

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PEACE BE WITH YOU

MAIN POINT.

Jesus offers us peace through faith.

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 read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

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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BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

Jesus offers us peace through faith.

Leaders: We have perfect peace in the presence of the Holy Spirit. Let's help students see that Jesus meets them in their fear, not to condemn but to draw them to greater faith.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

PEACE OVER FEAR

JOHN 20:21

"The new life Jesus gives begins in this life and extends eternally. Only a small portion of it is lived in our current earthly existence. Jesus calls us to use this brief time for a grand and glorious purpose. He commissions us to take the message of the gospel to those who have not heard it so they can believe, receive forgiveness of sin, and find life in Him. He sends His disciples in the same way in which He was sent (vv. 21-23): in obedience to the Father, empowered by the Spirit, to proclaim the message of salvation. That is our pattern for ministry. The significance of this work demands a supernatural commission and supernatural empowerment."[12]

FAITH OVER DOUBT

JOHN 20:24-28

"On this occasion Jesus concentrated so completely on Thomas that the appearance seemed to be a special visitation made entirely for his benefit. It was as if the exalted Christ, having finished the process of exaltation, now came back once more so that one of His own would not be lost (17:12). During the intervening week, however, Jesus had not been spiritually absent from their midst. Obviously, He had overheard the demand of Thomas enunciated in verse 25, for immediately He bade him fulfill those self-imposed conditions for belief. Thomas needed to be careful about what he was saying, for the walls between heaven and earth are thin to One who has inhabited both realms!"[13]

JOHN 20:28

"His confession is interlaced with commitment. He calls Jesus 'Lord.' The word can mean 'sir' or simply be a synonym for God, but it can also be used for 'Master.' That's the way Thomas uses it here. He stands before the risen Christ and understands that this One who has power over life and death has the right to rule his life. Thomas willingly submits himself to the control of Jesus. This commitment is personal. Thomas doesn't utter these words with cold detachment. He personalizes them. 'Jesus is,' Thomas says, 'my Lord and my God.'"[14]

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CONTEXT

When Jesus appeared to His disciples after His resurrection, He made the truth incredibly clear: He is the same Jesus who had walked, talked, and ministered with them before the crucifixion. In both of these early visits with the disciples, Jesus made a point to show them His nail-pierced hands and wounded side. While we don't know if the disciples touched His scars—specifically Thomas, who said He wouldn't believe unless he did (John 20:25)—we do know that Jesus invited them not to just *see* the evidence but to experience it (v. 27), echoing King David: "Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!" (Ps. 34:8). "Taste" here means to come and experience the fullness of what God offers to you—an invitation to experience His goodness. Essentially, Jesus gave His disciples the same invitation: "Come see Me, see My wounds. Experience My presence, and know that I am the same Jesus, the same good Savior, whom you knew before." They'd already heard the testimony of Mary Magdalene. Peter and John had seen the empty tomb. But here, Jesus invited them to see new, physical evidence that He is risen, and all He has said is true.

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.

LEADERS' PRAYER

LORD JESUS, THANK YOU FOR MEETING ME WHERE I AM, EVEN WHEN I'M AFRAID OR STUCK IN DOUBT. HELP ME TO POINT STUDENTS WHO ARE STRUGGLING WITH FEAR AND DOUBT TOWARD YOUR GRACE, COMPASSION, AND PRESENCE—ESPECIALLY WHEN THEY CAN'T SEE YOU CLEARLY.

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KICK STARTER

DID YOU KNOW?

Nomophobia is having separation anxiety—fear of being separated—from your phone. People with nomophobia check their phones multiple times a day, mostly because **they want to stay connected with loved ones.**[15]

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These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.



FEAR AND PEACE

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **WHAT'S YOUR WEIRDEST FEAR? ARE YOU AFRAID OF GARDEN GNOMES, SHARKS IN SWIMMING POOLS, A SPECIFIC COLOR OR NUMBER, OR MAYBE SOME OTHER RANDOM THING? EXPLAIN.**
- **HOW DO YOU TYPICALLY RESPOND WHEN YOU'RE AFRAID?**
- **WHAT ARE YOUR GO-TO PRACTICES TO HELP YOU FEEL AT PEACE?**

If we're honest, most of us have plenty of fears—whether they make sense (rational) or not (irrational). Our responses come from a variety of factors, from the way we grow up to the people with us when we face our fears. But no matter what fears believers face, trusting Jesus eases our fears. He meets us right where we are and gives us His peace.



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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DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

Jesus offers us peace through faith.

PEACE OVER FEAR

READ JOHN 20:19-23

WHEN MIGHT WE EXPERIENCE FEAR LIKE THE DISCIPLES FELT AFTER JESUS WAS CRUCIFIED?

The disciples weren't afraid because Jesus appeared in the room with them. They were afraid of being arrested and put to death for sharing the gospel—just as Jesus was. They were afraid because following Jesus could cost them everything. When we're afraid, we often take our eyes off Jesus and only see how powerful the world seems—what following Him could cost us. **Instead of remembering He's our all-powerful Savior, we hide, concealing our faith by living like the world.** And yet, just as He did for the disciples, Jesus meets us there and calls us to something bigger and better than our fear.

HOW DID JESUS MEET THE DISCIPLES IN THEIR FEAR? WHY WOULD HE DO THIS?

Jesus went to His disciples in their hiding and traded their anxiety for peace. He greeted them with, "Peace be with you" (v. 19), echoing His cry on the cross: "It is finished" (19:30). With these words, Jesus soothed the disciples' fears, reminded them of the peace He'd promised (John 14:27; 16:33), and declared that He'd finished the work He came to do—establishing a new covenant of peace between God and His people. His presence was enough to silence fear. And this peace wasn't just for the disciples but also for us! **All people who trust in Jesus as Savior receive the gifts of His presence and His peace—with us always, even in the middle of our fear.**

HOW CAN HAVING A PURPOSE SHIFT OUR FOCUS *AWAY FROM OUR FEAR* AND TOWARD SOMETHING BETTER?

When God appeared to people in Scripture, three things happened: a response of fear, a message of peace, and a commission (being given the power and authority) to do specific work. Jesus's first appearance after His resurrection followed this same pattern. In their fear and after His message of peace, Jesus redirected His disciples' focus to something better: Him. But He also gave them a new purpose: to do the same work God had given Him. He calls us to the same purpose as the disciples: to share the gospel with all people, helping them understand that they can have forgiveness for their sins when they repent (turn away from their sins) and follow Him. **Fear comes when we take our eyes off Jesus—when we focus on our circumstances, on what we lack, on what we wish was different. But when we turn our focus back toward Him, He gives us peace beyond anything we can understand (Phil. 4:7).** He reminds us that He is bigger than our fear and calls us again to come, follow Him, and make disciples wherever we go (Matt. 28:19-20).

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FAITH OVER DOUBT

READ JOHN 20:24-31

WHY DID JESUS MEET THOMAS? HOW HAS HE MET YOU WHEN YOU WERE DOUBTING, WEAK, OR STRUGGLING?

Leaders: See Context on resurrection evidence. Jesus had already visited with the other disciples, but He came back, this time for Thomas. He pursues the "one" who's lost, distant, or struggling (Matt. 18:12-14; John 17:12). You matter to Him, no matter what you're currently feeling and especially when you're doubting. **Think about it: Jesus met Thomas with the exact physical evidence he requested. He met Thomas's doubt with compassion rather than scolding, with grace, not condemnation.** Just as He came to Thomas, Jesus comes to us. He made the first move to offer us salvation and to restore our relationship with God, and He moves toward us when we're doubting or struggling. We may not always get the specific evidence we want, but Jesus meets us with grace, not expecting us to be perfect or strong but gently reminding us that He is our mighty Savior who's capable and in control.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO CONFESS JESUS AS LORD? WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO HAVE FAITH IN HIM?

Thomas's confession, "My Lord and my God" (v. 28), is a movement from doubt to recognition—that Jesus not only has power over life and death but over everything and everyone. Jesus "has the right to rule [our lives]."[16] Confessing faith in Jesus is admitting a deep need for Him, submitting to Him as Lord—the One with all authority—and committing to follow Him anywhere. **Confessing Jesus as Lord isn't just "claiming" Him when it benefits us but walking in obedience to Him, even when life is hard—even when relationships fall apart, friends become strangers, or a parent walks away.** This kind of confession means being all-in, no matter what.

ACCORDING TO JESUS, HOW IS OUR BELIEF DIFFERENT FROM THE DISCIPLES' BELIEF?

The disciples believed because they saw Jesus—they walked with Him on earth and saw His physical, resurrected body. They saw His scars and were invited to touch His wounds. The disciples received physical evidence for their belief in real time. But we don't get to see or talk to Jesus in the same way. We know what He did because He inspired the ones who walked with Him to faithfully record what they saw and sent the Holy Spirit to live in us. Yet, Jesus says those who trust in Him as Savior now are "blessed" because we believe though we haven't seen Him physically. **We are blessed because God has accepted us and given us His favor. We receive the inheritance God promised to those who confess faith in His Son.**

WRAP-UP

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

Committing ourselves to Jesus isn't just about saying we follow Him or that He's Lord of our lives. Yes, we should speak the name of Jesus and the truth of what He's done. But our lives should show that we have changed—and are changing—because of our beliefs. Yet, we still struggle to give our lives completely to Him in certain areas. Maybe you struggle with thinking negatively about yourself or others. Maybe your words aren't always kind, you give in to gossip, or you use foul language or make jokes that don't honor God. Maybe you live like people who don't follow Jesus. Maybe you read books, watch movies or TV shows, or play games that draw you away from God rather than closer to Him. **The tough truth is that you haven't given these areas completely over to God.** He wants our whole life—our full obedience. Consider what God might be asking you to surrender so that Jesus is truly Lord over *all* of your life. Then do it. **Jesus is better than whatever sin grips your heart or whatever you're afraid to surrender.**

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I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS

MAIN POINT.

Jesus prepares us to share the gospel.

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 read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

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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BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

Jesus prepares us to share the gospel.

Leaders: Remind students that they are the church today, commissioned to continue the same work Jesus gave His disciples.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

JESUS COMMANDS US TO GO

MATTHEW 28:16-20

"This short account contains the culmination and combination of all of Matthew's central themes: (1) the move from particularism to universalism in the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom; (2) discipleship and the establishment of the church; (3) Jesus's commands as ultimately incumbent on Christians; and (4) the abiding presence of Jesus as teacher, as divine Son of God, and the risen and sovereign Lord of the universe."[1]

JESUS PREPARES US TO GO

ACTS 1:4-8

"Having received essential teaching, the disciples would eventually be given the essential power required in witnesses of Jesus. The ordinary people of God, equipped with the Word of God, empowered by the Spirit of God, dedicated to the Son of God, can accomplish the mission of God. Sharing the right message is only half the matter. We must also be personally reliant on the Spirit of God. . . . Christians have no tribal deity. We have a Savior who loves and died for the nations! That means that we must relinquish any prejudices that keep us from sharing Him faithfully. We must repent of any ethnocentrism or unconcern for unreached peoples. Jesus sent ordinary people *to the nations*, just as He sends us."[2]

ACTS 1:9-11

"The risen King's ministry continues because the King is not dead. It continues because we have His Spirit and His Word. It continues because the kingdom of God is here, and it is still advancing through His Spirit-empowered witnesses."[3]

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CONTEXT

Background: Tradition says the book of Acts was written by Luke—a physician, Paul's traveling companion, and the writer of the Gospel of Luke. Acts covers the ministry of Jesus from His resurrection until His ascension, the works of the apostles, the establishment and rapid growth of the early church, and the challenges believers faced during that time. But a key focus in the book of Acts is the arrival of the Holy Spirit and His work in our lives. Through the Holy Spirit, the Comforter Jesus sent to encourage and guide believers as we follow Him (John 14:15-18), the church expanded from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria. And, as Jesus said, the Holy Spirit guided believers to spread the gospel "to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8)—even among the Gentiles. The work Jesus began and commissioned believers to carry out in the book of Acts shaped the body of Christ as it multiplied. Because of their efforts and the providence and plan of God, we have heard the gospel today! And like the early church, we get to gather and study God's Word, worship Him, fellowship with one another, and grow in our faith together.

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.

LEADERS' PRAYER

FATHER, BURDEN MY HEART FOR OTHERS. YOU HAVE COMMANDED ME TO GO; HELP ME LIVE OUT THIS COMMAND. AS JESUS MODELED THE WILLINGNESS TO COME TO EARTH FOR US, HELP ME TO WILLINGLY GO TO FAMILY, FRIENDS, COWORKERS, STUDENTS, AND STRANGERS TO SHARE THE GOSPEL.

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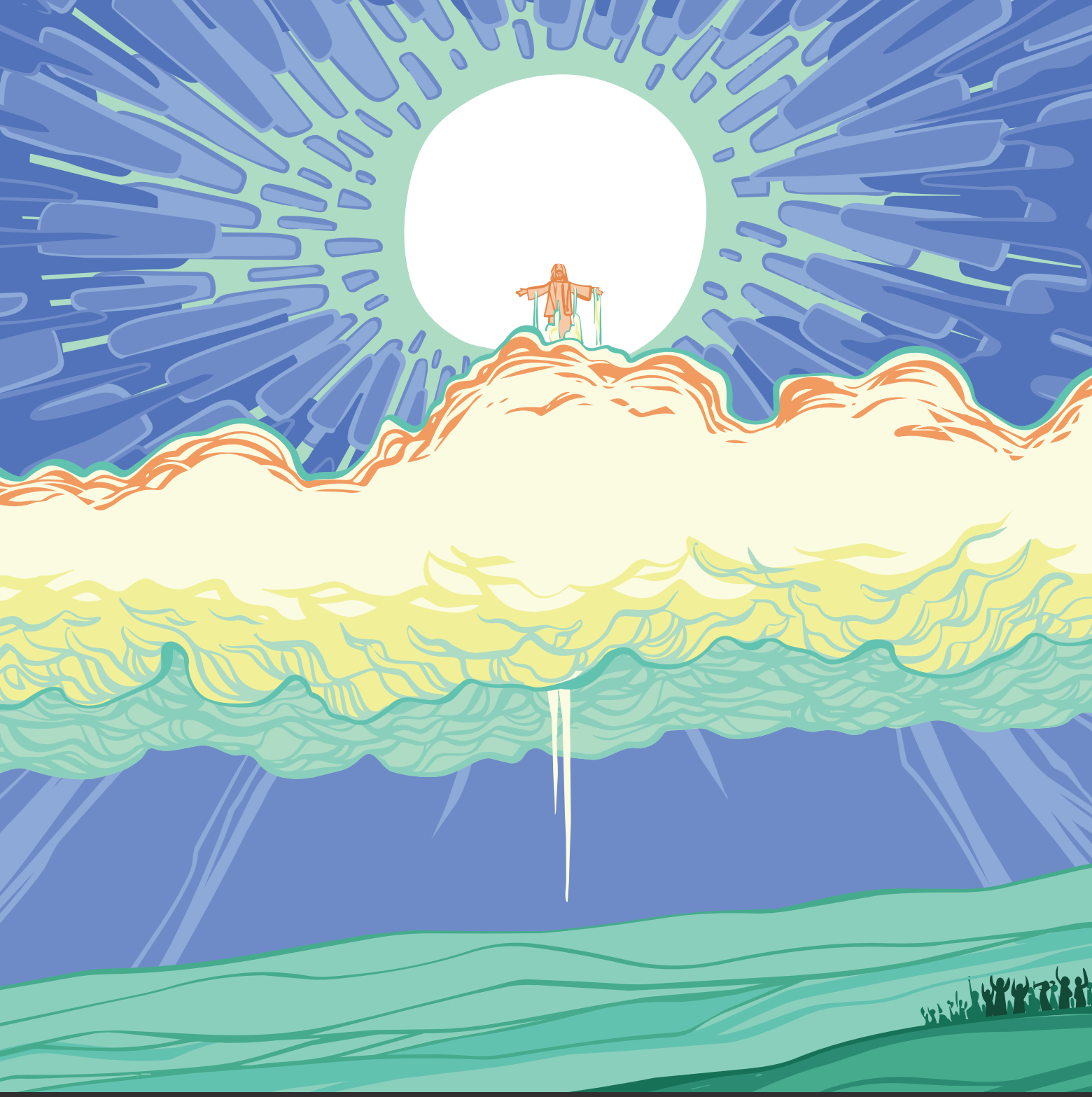

KICK STARTER

RATE IT!

Do other students believe Jesus is who He says He is **(1=He is a fraud; 10=Everything He said is true)**?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

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These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.



THE AWKWARD PHASE

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **HAVE YOU EVER HAD AN AWKWARD CONVERSATION WITH SOMEONE YOU WERE GETTING TO KNOW?**
- **WHAT ARE YOUR GO-TO TOPICS OR QUESTIONS WHEN YOU MEET SOMEONE NEW?**
- **WHEN HAS SOMETHING FUNNY OR WEIRD HAPPENED TO HELP YOU BREAK THE ICE WITH SOMEONE IN AN UNFORGETTABLE WAY?**

Let's be honest, meeting new people can be super awkward. We don't always know what to talk about or where to start. Building new relationships is scary—especially when we want to tell new people about our relationship with Jesus. Thankfully, Jesus doesn't just *tell* us to go and share the gospel with the whole world; He goes with us, sending us in the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit, who helps us remember what Jesus has said and how to share the gospel.



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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DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

Jesus prepares us to share the gospel.

JESUS COMMANDS US TO GO

READ MATTHEW 28:16-20

WHY DOES SHARING THE GOSPEL WITH OUR WORDS MATTER? WHY ISN'T LIVING A GODLY LIFESTYLE ENOUGH?

Jesus's command to go, make disciples, and baptize wasn't optional or exclusive. No matter where you are in your faith—if you've been following Jesus for a while or are completely new to it—this command is the same for you as it was for the disciples: Go wherever God sends you, and share about Jesus and what it means to follow Him. **The call carries eternal weight. There is no Plan B; believers sharing the gospel is part of God's good plan for redeeming the lost.** You can do this right where you are today, with the next person you meet who doesn't know Jesus, through your words *and* your actions.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE FOR US TO GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES TODAY?

When Jesus commanded the disciples to "go," He communicated a pretty simple idea for us too: Live your life for Jesus, and as you're doing that, in all your everyday places—like home, school, sports, clubs, community centers, work, and church—use your words and actions to teach people about Jesus and how to live for Him. **We complicate what Jesus asked us to do, often in an attempt to avoid it.** Making disciples doesn't mean using the perfect words or going overseas or out-of-state for a mission trip. It looks like honoring Jesus, imitating Him in the way we love others, and telling people about Him.

HOW DOES JESUS HAVING ALL AUTHORITY AFFECT THE WAY WE *GO, TEACH, MAKE DISCIPLES,* AND *BAPTIZE*?

No one is greater than Jesus, and no power matches His power. God has given Him authority over all things: people, nature, sickness, the powers of darkness (Satan and demons), sin, death, life. **His authority doesn't mean He forces us to go unwillingly; His authority gives us *courage* to go, even when obeying leads to the darkest places.** We share the gospel because our Savior is worthy of our effort, and we want others to know Him too. His authority over all things means we can go—motivated by who He is, His love for us, and love for others—even to the people who intimidate us, make fun of us, or gossip about us if we do. Sharing the gospel isn't rooted in thinking we're better than the people who don't know Him or attached to our own strength; we share the way to Jesus because we want others to know Him, to experience the better hope and abundant life He has promised to all who believe.

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JESUS PREPARES US TO GO

READ ACTS 1:4-11

WHY DO CHRISTIANS SOMETIMES STILL STRUGGLE TO WAIT ON GOD'S PROMISES? WHAT HELPS US TO WAIT WELL?

Most people don't share highlight reels of the waiting. Our natural response to waiting is often frustration, discontent, or even doubt—whether we're waiting in line for coffee or for something more serious, like the disciples waiting for God's kingdom to be established fully. **God makes us new when we trust Jesus for salvation, but the reality doesn't change that we're still waiting for all things to be made new—longing with creation for the day God makes all things right that sin made wrong (Rom. 8:22-23).** We know God is in control, but waiting for *all* things to work together for good can feel draining (Rom. 8:18-28). Why? Because God put eternity in our hearts (Eccl. 3:11); we're longing for our true home. The Holy Spirit helps us as we wait, filling us with His patience, growing our character and faith, and teaching us how to follow Jesus.

WHY DO WE RESIST LETTING THE HOLY SPIRIT GUIDE OUR LIVES? WHAT DOES THIS REVEAL ABOUT OUR HEARTS?

The disciples were new to the idea of the Holy Spirit living permanently within them. Honestly, someone living within us can sound a bit strange at first. But think of it this way: The Holy Spirit is God's literal presence within us, who guides us, comforts us, strengthens us, helps us know Him, and shows us how to live—if we'll follow Him. But because we set our eyes on the things of this world, we struggle to surrender our will and to let the Holy Spirit guide us, even though He leads us toward better things. **Honestly, we don't always trust God's way is better, but it is—always. We can trust Him, even when He leads us down paths the people around us aren't taking.**

WHERE DID JESUS TELL THE DISCIPLES TO GO WITH THE GOSPEL? HOW DOES THIS HELP US KNOW WHERE TO GO?

Jesus instructed the disciples to start where they were geographically (Jerusalem), then to travel out a little further geographically (Judea and Samaria), and then to take the gospel everywhere. Basically, Jesus said to start at home, with family, friends, neighbors. **His command goes beyond our geographical comfort zones and our relational comfort zones.** His disciples learned that the gospel wasn't just for the Jews but for the Gentiles. No one is excluded from the good news. Like the disciples, God calls us to go, and we can start with the people closest to us, no matter their beliefs.

WRAP-UP

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?

As you understand the command to take the gospel to all people, will you create margin in your life to live out this calling? In other words, we must make room to obey what God has called all believers to do. You can begin with family, classmates, or teammates. You can practice sharing with a friend or go on a short-term mission trip. As you go, you start by sharing the gospel—the actual good news that Jesus lived a perfect life, died for our sins, then rose from the dead, defeating death and offering us eternal life. You start by sharing how you met Jesus and how knowing Him has made a difference in your life. Then, you teach people about Scripture, prayer, and what living for Jesus looks like. Making disciples means you keep helping people understand how to follow Jesus after they've called on Him for salvation. **While you might not be able to go beyond your community right now, you can be faithful to share the gospel where you are and to pray for believers who are sharing the gospel around the world.**

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A VIOLENT RUSHING WIND

MAIN POINT.

We have everything we need to tell others about Jesus.

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 read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

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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BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

We have everything we need to tell others about Jesus.

Leaders: May you be empowered by the Holy Spirit and speak boldly the truth of God's Word.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS WITH US

ACTS 2:1-6

"Both the Hebrew and Greek words for Spirit can also mean 'wind' or 'breath,' and the power of the Spirit is likened to breathing life into corpses (Ezek. 37:9-10). Just as the Spirit consecrated the temple in the Old Testament, so here the Spirit is consecrating a new temple, God's new-covenant people. . . . The presence of fire in this passage should not surprise us. God's presence, in fact, is often associated with fire: at the burning bush, in the wilderness wandering, and in the tabernacle/temple (Ex. 3:1-6; 13:17-22; 25–27; 1 Kings 6–8). Indeed, God is a 'consuming fire' (Heb. 12:29). Fire resting on each believer, therefore, may be a sign that believers are new temples. The Lord is residing in each believer like He resided in the sanctuary (1 Cor. 6:19). That the fires look like tongues is significant, as the next sign indicates and as Peter later explains (Acts 2:14–21). So, what about this gift of speech? Each believer was 'filled with the Holy Spirit,' and He is the source of their speaking."[4]

THE HOLY SPIRIT HELPS US SHARE

ACTS 2:14-21

"The Spirit descended upon Jesus at His baptism 'in bodily form' (Luke 3:22). Likewise in its 'baptism' of the Spirit (Acts 1:5), the church received the Spirit in visible form (2:3). Endowed with the Spirit (Luke 4:1,14), Jesus delivered His 'inaugural address' at Nazareth, the keynote speech that set the pattern for His entire ministry (4:18). The Nazareth sermon announced the fulfillment in His own ministry of the messianic prophecies and, with its examples from Elijah and Elisha, pointed beyond the boundaries of Israel to the worldwide scope of His messianic mission. With this point the congregation at Nazareth was enraged and rejected Him. The 'inaugural address' at Pentecost was Peter's speech (Acts 2:14-40). It too was delivered through the power of the Spirit, which had just come upon him. It too dealt with the fulfillment of the messianic times. It too assumed a worldwide outreach (2:39), and it too would be rejected by a large part of the Jewish community according to the unfolding story of Acts."[5]

ACTS 2:16-21

"For Peter the universal pouring out of the Spirit on the whole Christian group was demonstration that the end time had come. Perhaps the clearest indication that the entire 120 received the Spirit at Pentecost is Joel's inclusion of daughters as well as sons—*all* were prophesying. Joel undoubtedly had seen the Spirit's outpouring only as a gift to Israel, and perhaps many of those Jewish-Christians at Pentecost saw it the same way. The remainder of Acts clarifies that the promise applies to the Gentiles as well: it is indeed poured out on 'all people.'"[6]

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CONTEXT

Pentecost, also called the Festival of Weeks, occurred every year, fifty days after Passover. But Pentecost also refers to an event recorded in Acts 2, when God sent the promised Holy Spirit to His disciples during the festival. The "all" in Acts 2:1 likely refers to the 120 disciples mentioned in Acts 1. They might've even still been sitting in the upper room where Jesus had His final meal with His disciples before His arrest. Despite their location, the "mighty rushing wind" from heaven and the "tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them" (Acts 2:2-3) weren't only signs for the disciples to pay attention but were likely heard and seen by others. And these weren't the only signs of the Holy Spirit's arrival. After receiving the Spirit, Peter preached a sermon to the crowd that had gathered nearby, and all people heard the gospel in their own language—even though Peter preached in his native language. This miraculous event enabled the gospel to travel to regions near and far, resulting in people being saved and churches being planted.[7]

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.

LEADERS' PRAYER

FATHER GOD, I WANT TO RECOGNIZE THE HOLY SPIRIT WITHIN ME, DISCERNING HIS GUIDANCE IN MY LIFE. I PRAY THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT WOULD USE MY WORDS TO COMMUNICATE TRUTH AND HOPE TO MY STUDENTS.



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KICK STARTER

HEART CHECK

Let's check in on how you're doing spiritually. Last week, we talked about **sharing our testimony**. Were you able to share your story or the gospel with someone over the last week? If not, who do you think God might be leading you to share with this week?

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These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.



WHAT WAS THAT?

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **WHAT'S THE LOUDEST NOISE YOU'VE EVER HEARD BUT COULDN'T SEE? HOW DID YOU FIND OUT WHAT IT WAS?**
- **WHAT KINDS OF NOISES OR SIGHTS MAKE YOU WANT TO GO FIGURE OUT WHAT'S HAPPENING?**
- **WHEN HAVE YOU HEARD A NOISE BUT FELT TOO AFRAID TO CHECK IT OUT?**

Most of us can't ignore a loud noise and feel the need to investigate what caused it. Our curiosity leads us to search. The disciples heard a "mighty rushing wind" when the Holy Spirit arrived (Acts 2:2), and the crowd who'd gathered there for Pentecost heard the sound too. Their curiosity led to a powerful moment when the Holy Spirit used Peter to share the gospel in a supernatural way!



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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DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

We have everything we need to tell others about Jesus.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS WITH US

READ ACTS 2:1-6

WHY DO YOU THINK GOD CHOSE THIS MOMENT TO SEND THE HOLY SPIRIT? WHAT DREW CROWDS TO THE DISCIPLES?

Leaders: Consider sharing Context. Jews from all over had gathered in Jerusalem for Passover and stayed or returned to Jerusalem for Pentecost, a festival to celebrate God giving the law to Moses on Mount Sinai. God gave them more good news to take back home. Apparently, the disciples entered the temple courtyard, where the crowds would've gathered for the festival. The crowd heard disciples speaking—but in each person's native language! **The Holy Spirit arrived for this exact moment, enabling this large crowd to hear the good news of the gospel.**

HOW DID THE DISCIPLES KNOW THE HOLY SPIRIT WAS WITH THEM? HOW CAN WE KNOW HE IS WITH US?

The disciples received clear evidence the Holy Spirit had come: hearing intense rushing wind, seeing fire "rest" on each person, speaking in foreign languages. Jesus had promised to send the Holy Spirit, and His arrival was unmistakable, marked by signs from God. **Signs of the Holy Spirit's presence within us today are different but still unmistakable. We can know the Holy Spirit is with us because God promised His presence in the Bible.** We experience the presence of the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, the gentle nudge to do the right thing, or when we understand what we read in the Bible.

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 disciples recognized the Holy Spirit's arrival and immediately began carrying out the mission Jesus had given them to share the good news. Knowing the Holy Spirit lives within us is one thing; living like it's true is another. We sometimes have a disconnect between *knowledge of* the Holy Spirit and *knowing* the Holy Spirit. **At all times, we have the power and presence of God within us as a Comforter, Helper, and Guide, and He has promised to never leave us. But at times, the way we live doesn't reflect that the Spirit lives within us, confusing both unbelievers and believers. They don't detect anything different about us because our language, our attitudes, our desires, our relationships look just like the world.** The same Spirit who came on those early disciples in fire and wind has also been given to us, yet we've rationalized that it's okay if others don't know He lives within us. Many of us have even purposely concealed Him in an effort to blend in, but the same Spirit who gave them boldness has filled us with His presence. He helps us live in a way that honors God and reveals Him to others. **Knowing the Holy Spirit means surrendering to His leading, and when we do this, people around us will see evidence.**

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THE HOLY SPIRIT HELPS US SHARE

READ ACTS 2:7-21

WHY DID PETER SPEAK TO THE CROWD? HOW ARE WE CALLED TO DO THE SAME?

Jesus commanded His disciples to share the good news, and in this moment, the Holy Spirit moved and empowered Peter to speak. Many people in the crowd were curious but others doubted. Jesus had told the disciples about the Holy Spirit and prepared them for His arrival in Jerusalem, but the crowd was confused. **This moment mattered greatly: If the people left without hearing the good news and without an explanation, they wouldn't carry the gospel with them, possibly impacting the world as we know it today.** Jesus had shaped Peter for this moment, when Jesus would begin to "build [His] church" (Matt. 16:18). The Holy Spirit empowered Peter to fulfill the call. The Holy Spirit empowers us for these important moments too—when we help confused and searching people know Jesus is the Way (John 14:6).

WHY DO YOU THINK PETER QUOTED THE PROPHET JOEL (VV. 17-21)? HOW DOES THIS CONNECTION HELP US?

The Old Testament is full of Messianic prophecies—prophecies about Jesus. Sometimes, we forget that all three Persons of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) have always existed; none were created but all participated in the act of creation and are mentioned throughout the Old Testament. We have the whole Bible to help us see the fuller picture of God's plan of salvation, but the people Peter spoke to only had the Old Testament. **To believe the truth of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, they needed evidence rooted in God's Word—so that's what Peter gave them by explaining God had fulfilled His promise to "pour out [His] Spirit on all flesh" (Acts 2:17).** This good news for them and for us is supported by Old Testament promises.

WHY WAS BELIEVING GOD SENT HIS SPIRIT TO ALL PEOPLE IMPORTANT FOR THE CROWD? FOR US?

Twice, Peter quoted Joel, indicating that the gift of the Holy Spirit was for everyone who trusted Jesus for salvation (Acts 2:17,21). Joel might've assumed the Spirit was only for Israel—and many of the Jews gathered before Peter might've thought the same—but Joel's prophecy included all people. **The rest of the book of Acts helps us see that "all people" means *all*, no matter their culture, previous beliefs, past, personality, likes or dislikes; all people who trust in Jesus as Savior receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.** So, when we "go" to all the world, starting with the people closest to us, we go to *everyone* to tell them the good news.

WRAP-UP

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

We all have a responsibility to share God's Word and the truth of the gospel. But if we're honest, sharing with a world that often seems hostile to being told there's a right way to live, that sin exists, and that truth is absolute instead of opinion-based, can feel so intimidating. Knowing the truth about God is the easy part: We can trust what He says in His Word, even if we don't understand or have an answer for everything He does. But God knew we would need real-time support to carry out His work, so He sent the Holy Spirit to live within us, giving us courage, the ability to recall Scripture, and even the words we need to share the gospel with anyone—no matter their background or view of God. **The best way to prepare for sharing God's Word is spending quality time with God, studying Scripture and growing in your relationship with Him. He also gave us community with other believers, who can walk with us as we "go."**

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HIS NAME

MAIN POINT.

God's power transforms us and works through us.

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 read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

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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BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

God's power transforms us and works through us.

Leaders: You get to show students the love of Jesus. They will learn about His character and His heart for them in the way you live and in the way you love others.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

THE HOLY SPIRIT DOES THE WORK

ACTS 3:1-10

"In Acts the miracles were always in the service of the Word, confirming God's presence in the spread of the gospel or as a sign that enabled faith. Nowhere is that more evident than in this healing of the blind beggar."[8]

ACTS 3:1-2

"That he would have been carried there so late seems strange, for the afternoon *Tamid* was the final stage of the daily temple worship; the crowds would soon have been gone for the day. Still, it was one of the two major periods of worship, and many would have come to the temple at precisely this time to express their devotion to God. It was prime time for receiving alms. The rabbis taught that there were three pillars for the Jewish faith—the Torah, worship, and the showing of kindness, or charity. Almsgiving was one of the main ways to show kindness and was thus considered a major expression of one's devotion to God. With their minds set on worship, those who entered the temple for the evening sacrifice and prayer would be particularly disposed to practice their piety by generously giving alms to a lame beggar."[9]

WE POINT TO JESUS

ACTS 3:16

"It was through faith in [the] name of the resurrected Lord Jesus that this lame man had been made well. Peter exercised faith when he told the man to walk, and the lame man exercised faith when he responded to the spiritual help that enabled him to get up."[10]

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CONTEXT

Each gate of Jerusalem's city wall had a specific purpose. The Beautiful Gate, also called the Golden Gate, opened to the Court of the Gentiles, operating as a barrier between it and the Court of Women. It's also referenced as Nicanor's Gate, which is made of Corinthian bronze. However, this gate was likely the main and most popular entrance to the temple.[11] Whatever the gate was made of and wherever its true placement in relation to the temple, it would've been a well-known place to temple attendees and a good spot for the poor to set up to seek alms (charity). Rather than serving as an open door for the lame man to enter and worship, the gate likely represented a barrier between him and God, since his disability excluded him from entering the sanctuary.[12] But just as Jesus's sacrifice tore the curtain that existed as a barrier between God and His people (Matt. 27:51), His name held the power to restore this broken man, allowing him access to the place where he could gather with God's people and worship. This miracle is a visible representation of what Jesus does for us: He sees us in our brokenness, even when others don't; He heals us from our sin; He raises us to walk in new life.

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.



LEADERS' PRAYER

FATHER, HELP ME TO SEE PEOPLE WHO NEED TO HEAR ABOUT THE POWERFUL HEALING WORK OF JESUS. GIVE ME A WILLING HEART TO STOP AND SHARE. MAY I BE A LIVING EXAMPLE OF YOUR LOVE TO MY STUDENTS AND OTHERS.

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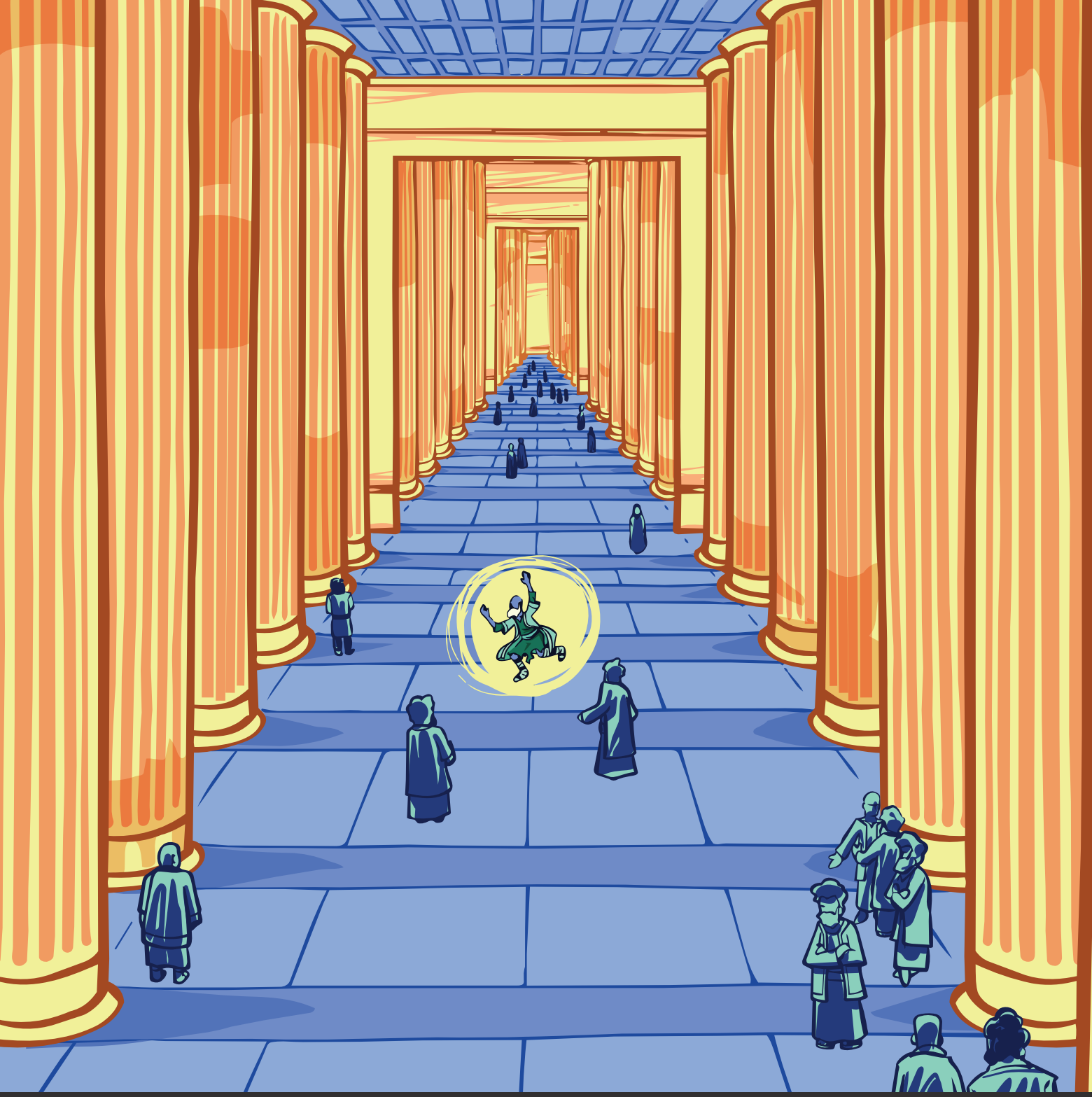

KICK STARTER

DID YOU KNOW?

Located in India, Buland Darwaza, meaning "Victory Gate" or "Gate of Magnificence," is considered the **largest gate in the world**, standing at about 177 feet.[13]

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ZONING OUT

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **DO YOU TAKE THE SAME ROUTE EACH TIME YOU GO TO SCHOOL, CHURCH, OR A FRIEND'S HOUSE? WHY OR WHY NOT?**
- **HAVE YOU EVER ARRIVED SOMEWHERE AND NOT REMEMBERED ACTUALLY DRIVING OR WALKING THERE? HOW DID YOU FEEL WHEN YOU REALIZED YOU COULDN'T REMEMBER?**
- **WHEN IS ZONING OUT A GOOD THING? WHEN IS IT MORE NEGATIVE? EXPLAIN.**

You might call it autopilot—or zoning out—but scientific evidence backs up the idea that we don't focus on what's around us when we're taking a familiar path. Every day, we walk in the patterns we've developed, so we don't always see who or what's around us. But in today's story, Peter and John show us that paying attention to details—even in familiar settings—matters, especially when we're following Jesus.



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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DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

God's power transforms us and works through us.

THE HOLY SPIRIT DOES THE WORK

READ ACTS 3:1-10

WHAT WAS THE LAME MAN LOOKING FOR? WHY ARE ONLY SOME PEOPLE HEALED THIS SIDE OF HEAVEN?

Leaders: Share Context about almsgiving. The lame man wasn't necessarily looking for healing; he was looking for alms, or gifts given to the poor. Peter said he didn't have any silver or gold to give the man, but he had something better: healing from Jesus. God's sovereign will—His complete control over and unbreakable plan for all of creation—is hard to understand and hard to trust when we're hurting. **We don't know why He heals some people here and not others, but through faith and the power of the Holy Spirit, we can trust His plan is best, even when healing doesn't come.**

HOW DO YOU THINK THE MAN FELT WHEN PETER COULDN'T GIVE HIM MONEY? WHAT CAN THIS TEACH US?

Leaders: See Context on the Beautiful Gate. The man sat at the gate to beg for money, not for healing. Imagine the letdown when Peter expressed he had none to give. Maybe the man's hopelessness swelled, but his greatest need wasn't money. His disappointment turned to joy when he was healed in Jesus's name—healing he likely didn't expect. He jumped for joy! **We sometimes feel disappointed when God doesn't give us what we *think* we need. But thankfully, God is kind and good, and in Jesus, we receive the healing we desperately need from our sin.**

HOW DID PETER AND JOHN TREAT THIS MAN? WHAT DOES THIS TELL US ABOUT THE WAY WE SHOULD TREAT *THOSE WHO ARE HURTING*?

Our natural response to people in need is often to look the other way. Because we're caught up in our routines, we convince ourselves that we don't have time to stop, that we don't have what they need, and that someone will come behind us and help. **We keep walking because we're uncomfortable, we're busy, or if we're deeply honest, we don't care.** Peter and John had a different perspective. They paid attention. They saw a man in need and had compassion. They stopped for him and engaged with him. Then, instead of giving the man what he asked for, they gave him what he needed: healing in Jesus's name. Certainly, we should give time, money, food, and so on to help meet people's needs in tangible ways. **But the way we see them and treat them matters; they deserve to be treated with compassion, love, and dignity. When we treat people this way, we point them to Jesus—the One who bent low to touch those deemed unclean, the One who saw people ignored by society.** The man who had been lame from birth followed Peter and John into the temple, likely for the first time. He wanted to get close to the Jesus who had healed him (v. 16), and it all started with being seen.

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WE POINT TO JESUS

READ 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?

Peter spoke to the crowd's curiosity: They didn't heal the man by their own power; the power of Jesus healed the man through faith. While Luke didn't specify whose faith brought the healing, Peter and John had faith when they told the man to walk, trusting God would heal Him; the man had faith when he obeyed, stood, and followed the men, praising God. **God doesn't need us to do His work; we need Him to do His work (2 Cor. 12:9-10).** Here, Peter stepped back, revealing that he didn't have the power to change anything, but he had faith in Jesus, who has all power and authority, and that changes everything. The pressure isn't on us to do God's work perfectly, but the Holy Spirit within us empowers us to do God's work.

WHY DOES IT MATTER THAT EVERYTHING IN OUR LIVES POINTS TO JESUS?

Our lives either point people toward or away from Jesus. Even in the first two chapters of Acts, we see a pattern unfolding: Something amazing happens, and the disciples use the opportunity to point the curious crowds to the best answer—Jesus. God created us all uniquely and gave us all specific gifts and talents. While we enjoy these gifts and talents, they aren't *about* us; they help us to serve God and others and to share the gospel. People today don't get to see Jesus face-to-face—not yet. But we are His representatives to a watching world. **Whether you give God the glory for your successes and growth or share what He's provided for you with someone in need, take every opportunity to use the "good" He has given you to show people that *He* is good.**

WHERE DO YOU SEE PETER'S BOLDNESS? WHY DO WE STRUGGLE TO SHARE OUR FAITH WITH BOLDNESS TODAY?

Peter spoke to Jews who didn't believe Jesus is the Messiah and accused them of "[killing] the Author of life" (v. 15) by sending Jesus to be crucified. He spoke the truth boldly: God glorified Jesus, though they'd rejected Him—the same Jesus in whose name the lame man was healed. These were the very people who'd condemned Jesus to death for speaking the same truth. **Even though most of us won't face death or physical harm, we struggle to speak the truth boldly and confidently because we're worried that people will look at us differently, reject us, or exclude us.** And maybe they will. But living boldly is worth any cost because Jesus paid the greatest cost to free us from our sin.

WRAP-UP

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

Caring for others the way Jesus does starts with seeing them as He does: worthy of dignity, compassion, love, and grace—worthy of God's love (John 3:16). **If the King of kings saw people as worthy of His time and attention—more importantly, worth spilling His blood—then why would we see them as invaluable? People are worthy of our time, our energy, and our words.** Think about the people around you. Take a minute to really notice them. Where are they hurting? What needs do they have? Who is supporting them? Who is ignoring them? When was the last time they seemed happy or excited about something? How can you meet their needs? We can't actually be everything people need—only Jesus can do that. But we can try to show up for them in tangible ways. It might be as simple as picking up an extra cup of tea from your favorite coffee shop. Maybe you can pay their way to a fun event. Maybe you just show up and listen. **It's really pretty simple: Ask God to help you notice people's needs—and then, to stop and care, like Jesus.**

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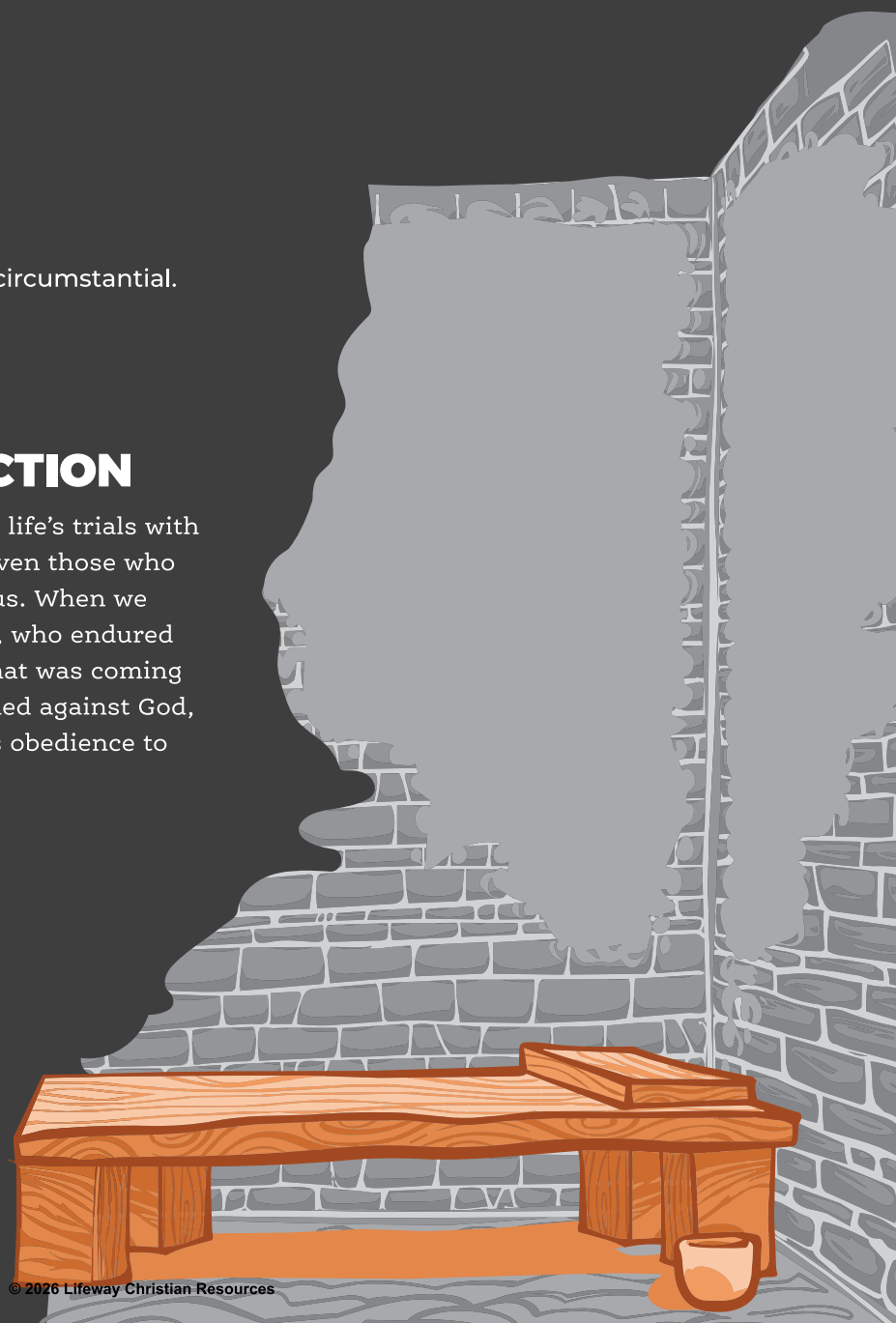
AT DAYBREAK

MAIN POINT.

Our faithfulness to Jesus isn't circumstantial.

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 read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

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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BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

Our faithfulness to Jesus isn't circumstantial.

Leaders: This week, lean into the truth that God uses our trials and our suffering for His glory, for our good, and to spread the gospel. He won't waste a single sorrow that we surrender to Him.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

WE ENDURE FAITHFULLY

ACTS 5:17-18

"When zeal for God is not grounded in the whole truth of God or is mixed with human pride or opinion, it can easily become personal jealousy masquerading as piety. Such misguided zeal can do great harm to those who are the real messengers of God's truth."[14]

"This text needs focused consideration because there is a growing hostility to gospel ministry around the world. According to D. A. Carson, more people have been martyred for following Christ in the last century than in all of the first nineteen hundred years of the church's history. . . . At this point it often expresses itself in the forms of *intimidation*, *threats*, and an increased level of *negativity* toward anything Christian."[15]

WE SPEAK BOLDLY

ACTS 5:26-30

"The Sanhedrin was totally thwarted in its designs, totally helpless to control the situation. All was in God's hands. The only reason the apostles finally appeared before the Council was their own willingness to do so. And they were willing to do so because the events of the night had convinced them once more that they were very much in God's hands."[16]

ACTS 5:26-32

"What the high priest and his associates were afraid of was that the masses whom they had persuaded to shout for Jesus's crucifixion might now get so worked up by the apostles as to turn on the chief priests, perhaps even violently, for what they now regarded as the murder of Jesus. They never did, of course; nor did the Christians ever incite them to do it. . . . Peter was not now addressing the whole nation, but the chief priests and the Sanhedrin. It was an unalterable fact that they had prevailed on Pilate to crucify Jesus; and in demanding crucifixion they had subjected Jesus to the most shameful and infamous death penalty they knew. According to their law (Deut. 21:22–23), a person hanged on a tree was accursed by God."[17]

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CONTEXT

The “angel of the Lord” in Acts 5:19 isn’t like the angel of the Lord mentioned in some Old Testament passages. Before Jesus came to earth in human form, the Angel of the LORD was often a theophany, an event where God physically appeared to someone. In fact, it was the most common form of theophany. Many Scriptures plainly identify the Angel of the LORD as God Himself: He appeared to Hagar (Gen. 16:7-13), Abraham (Gen. 18:2,22; 19:1; 22:11), Jacob (Gen. 32:24,30), Moses (Ex. 3:2-4), and Joshua (Josh. 5:13,15)—just to name a few. These appearances of God in human form are important because they foreshadowed—pointed forward to—Jesus coming to earth in human form.[18] In other passages in the Old Testament, as well as New Testament passages like the one we’ll read today, the angel of the Lord is simply a messenger from God to His people. Here, he was an active messenger, appearing to the apostles, opening the locked doors of the jail, leading them into freedom, and sending them back to the place where they’d just been arrested to keep sharing the gospel. Interestingly enough, the Sadducees, who had thrown the apostles in jail, didn’t even believe in angels (Acts 23:8). So, the apostles’ miraculous rescue and reappearance at the temple would’ve been even more shocking to them.

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.

LEADERS’ PRAYER

FATHER, PLEASE GUIDE MY THOUGHTS TODAY AS I TEACH. MAY I SPEAK BOLDLY ABOUT YOU TO THOSE WHO DON’T KNOW YOU. AS I TEACH YOUR WORD TO STUDENTS, I WANT THEM TO SEE YOUR WORK IN ME AND DESIRE TO SPEAK BOLDLY ABOUT YOU TOO.

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KICK STARTER

RATE IT!

How likely are you to talk to someone you don't know **(1=I'd rather hide; 10=I've never met a stranger)**?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

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These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

1
ALWAYS THERE

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **WHO IN YOUR LIFE IS ALWAYS THERE FOR OTHERS, NO MATTER WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THEIR OWN LIVES?**
- **WHY DOES FAITHFULNESS, OR LOYAL COMMITMENT, MATTER IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS?**
- **WHO DO YOU SHOW UP FOR, NO MATTER WHAT'S HAPPENING IN YOUR LIFE? WHY?**

Faithfulness is more than keeping our word; it's showing up for people—even if it's inconvenient or we gain nothing. Faithfulness is often sacrificial and selfless, and because we're so used to people doing what's "right" for them, we may struggle to recognize what true faithfulness looks like. In today's session, Peter and John faithfully share the gospel, no matter what.

2
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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DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

Our faithfulness to Jesus isn't circumstantial.

WE ENDURE FAITHFULLY

READ ACTS 5:17-25

READ ACTS 5:12-16. WHY WERE THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS JEALOUS? HOW CAN WE DEAL WITH OUR JEALOUSY?

Jealousy drove the religious leaders' actions. The apostles had gained attention for performing miracles in the name of Jesus, further proving His identity. The Sadducees were losing influence, so they imprisoned the apostles. The miracles were never about lifting the disciples' names but lifting up Jesus's name. **Jealousy is destructive (James 3:16), convincing us to treat others like enemies, to compare, to desire what others have. We can't arrest them, but we gossip, exclude, or downplay the good in them.** The reality is that we aren't responsible for the good work done through us—God is.

HOW DID THE APOSTLES RESPOND TO BEING FREED? WHY DIDN'T THEY TAKE THIS CHANCE TO GO INTO HIDING?

Leaders: Share Context on angel of the Lord. The apostles weren't imprisoned for crimes but for healing, loving, and sharing the gospel with people. God never lost sight of them and sent an angel to free them; they were always in His hand (John 10:28-30). They went back to preaching the gospel in the temple, the place of their arrest! No circumstance could change what Jesus called them to do; they couldn't forget all they'd seen and heard. **We may be rejected or punished for our faith, but God sees us. Our call remains: Go; share the gospel; invite people to come and see Jesus.**

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?

Persecution is more than being made fun of; it's being rejected or targeted for physical, verbal, or social harm because of your faith. This is exactly what the apostles endured, but they didn't let that stop them from preaching the gospel. Their perseverance is a model for us. Following Jesus isn't a one-time decision, though our salvation happens only once and is secure forever in Him. **Following Jesus is a lifelong process of becoming more like Him and doing the good work God has prepared for us, not to *be* saved but because we *are* saved (Eph. 2:10; Phil. 2:12).** Enduring when we're made fun of, left out, or even physically hurt because of our faith can feel exhausting, overwhelming, and terrifying. Following Jesus can be lonely at times. We struggle with the idea of not fitting in. But Jesus endured all of this and more to save us. He calls us to follow Him, and He walks with us through every moment of rejection and persecution. Because He is with us, we can share the gospel no matter what we face.

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WE SPEAK BOLDLY

READ ACTS 5:26-32

WHERE DO YOU SEE GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY (HIS CONTROL AND POWER OVER ALL THINGS) IN THESE VERSES?

God's sovereignty is His "absolute right to do all things according to His own good pleasure."[19] We are used to doing what's best for us or going our own way, so hearing that our lives aren't about our "good pleasure" may feel odd. Even though God wants to give His beloved children (all believers) good things, His ultimate goal is for His glory, His will, and our good *all* to be accomplished. And sometimes, what's for our good doesn't *feel* good in the moment. We see this in the apostles' lives: God's hand is evident in their healings, but they were still arrested. After the angel freed them, they continued ministering and speaking truth before the religious leaders. **Their persecution never once meant they weren't in God's sight, control, or perfect plan. Through their persistent ministry, people heard the truth and were healed.**

WHY DOES OUR BOLD FAITH MATTER? WHY CAN'T WE JUST LIVE QUIETLY FOR JESUS?

The apostles could've gone somewhere less hostile, but they went back to the temple. After all, Jesus had commanded them to start sharing the gospel in Jerusalem with His people, the Jews. Despite knowing they'd face hostility, they counted the cost and decided it was worth it so people could hear the truth about Jesus. **We often determine our boldness and faithfulness to Jesus by our circumstances: who we're with, what's popular, what's expected of us.** But our Savior has given us the same command: to share the gospel in our daily lives, wherever He leads us. Everywhere we go, we are His ambassadors and representatives to the world. Wherever you are, faithfully represent Jesus and do His good work.

WHEN HAVE YOU STRUGGLED TO SAY, "I MUST OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MEN"?

Peter called out his listeners for their treatment of Jesus, putting himself and the other apostles in greater danger of execution. Obeying God mattered more than giving in to the fear of people and saving themselves. Here's the deal: God will position us to speak the truth that others don't want to hear. **We often sacrifice obedience for our reputations, our relationships, our desires. We reveal that saving these things matters more than obeying God—that pleasing God is conditional on us not losing anything in the process.**

WRAP-UP

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

We can see how the disciples prepared to stand strong in their faith, no matter what they faced. Before they met Jesus, they had studied the Old Testament. After meeting Jesus, they walked with Him every day; they knew Him and were eager to learn from Him. They prayed as they waited for their next steps after He returned to heaven. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and lived in community with each other. Some, like Peter, knew the cost of *not* standing for Jesus: shame and disappointment. Their example, and the example Jesus set in His own ministry, shows us how to prepare before we ever face hard conversations or situations: **Get to know Jesus; walk with and listen to the Holy Spirit, and lean into His guidance; read the Bible for understanding and memorize it; pray, asking God to give you the courage and boldness to share the gospel wherever He leads; surround yourself with other believers who are following Jesus too, no matter the cost.**

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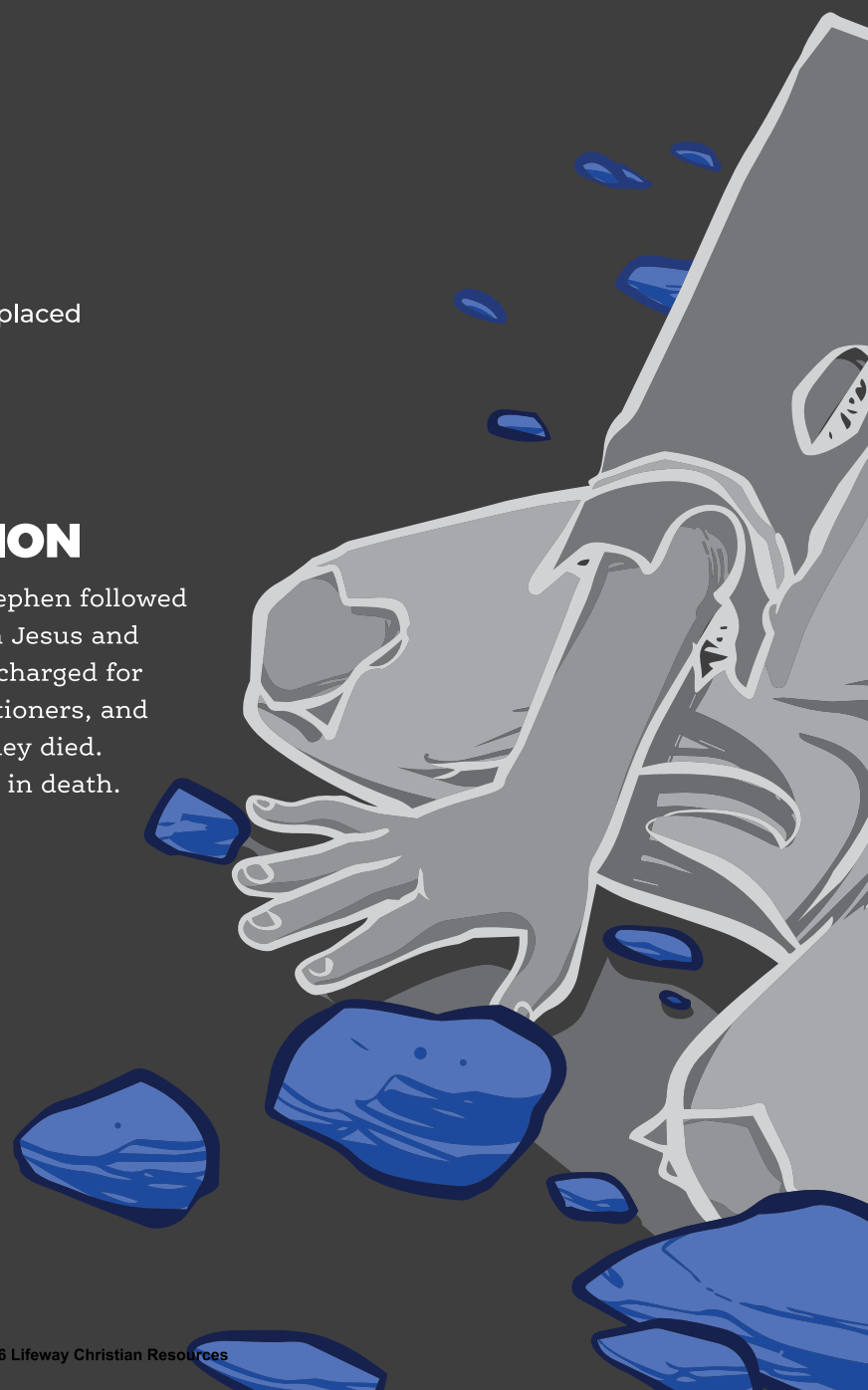
THE FACE OF AN ANGEL

MAIN POINT.

Our suffering reveals where we've placed our hope.

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 read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

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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BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

Our suffering reveals where we've placed our hope.

Leaders: Even in suffering, we can rest in the hope of heaven and in the peace Jesus offers us now.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

THE WORLD WILL OPPOSE US

ACTS 6:8-15

"Before the Sanhedrin the plotters presented the charges against Stephen. He is described as speaking 'against this holy place' and 'against the law.' These are really the same as the original charges of blasphemy against Moses and against God made in verse 11. Moses was identified in their minds with the receipt of the law at Sinai and its transmission in the Pentateuch. To speak against Moses was thus to attack the law itself. 'This holy place' was the temple, which was considered by contemporary Jews as the dwelling place of God, containing His very presence in the holy of holies. To attack the temple was seen as a direct affront to God Himself. . . . In the background to verse 14 stands the charge of blasphemy directed against Jesus at His own trial when He was accused of threatening to destroy the temple (Mark 14:57-58). . . . Stephen had only been faithful in his witness to the teaching of Jesus. To reject the testimony of Stephen was ultimately to reject Jesus. That is what his trial was all about. The violent rejection of Stephen represented a rejection of Jesus the Messiah. Ultimately it was not Stephen but the Sanhedrin on trial that day."[20]

GOD'S PROMISES NEVER CHANGE

ACTS 7:51-60

"Stephen's opponents see in his preaching a challenge to first-century Judaism's twin pillars of piety: the law and the temple (6:11,13-14). Stephen now proceeds to answer these charges, not as one defending himself but as a witness to the gospel (Luke 21:13). He exposes the falseness of the charges as he affirms his loyalty to God's law and true worship. But more important, he reveals how religious effort, in this case first-century Judaism, is an obstacle to the true knowledge of God's saving provision, the Messiah."[21]

ACTS 7:55-56

"Scholarly opinion differs about the significance of the uncharacteristic standing position in Stephen's speech. Some see no significance other than a variation in expression. Others see it as a reference to Christ having risen from His seat to welcome the martyr Stephen. The view with the most far-reaching implications, however, is that Stephen's vision links up with the original Son of Man vision in Daniel 7:13-14, where the Son of Man is depicted as standing before the Ancient of Days. The primary role of the Danielic Son of Man was that of judgment, and the New Testament consistently depicts Christ in this role of eschatological judge (Matt. 25:31-46). The standing position may thus depict the exalted Christ in His role of judge. If so, Stephen's vision not only confirmed his testimony, but it showed Christ rising to render judgment on his accusers. They, not he, were the guilty parties."[22]

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CONTEXT

The word *martyr* comes from a Greek word that means "witness."[23] To be a witness is for someone to tell the story (give a testimony) about what he or she believes to be true and right, especially regarding matters of faith. Historically, being a martyr didn't just refer to someone who died for his or her faith but to someone who was persecuted or suffered for his or her faith. Still, a martyr's belief was strong enough that he or she would be *willing* to die for defending it. The early church was the first to adopt the term for people who died for their faith, starting with Stephen, who was recorded as the first Christian martyr.[24] The accusation leveled at Stephen was certainly a serious one: blasphemy, or speaking out against the character of God. Like the accusations of blasphemy leveled at Jesus, however, these wouldn't hold up in court; the religious leaders had to seek out false witnesses in both cases, after all. All Stephen did was tell the truth, taking the religious leaders back through their own history and prophecy and explaining the reality of who Jesus was and what they had done to Him. So, it seems less likely that this was an official trial and ruling and more like mob justice.[25] Many people around the world still face the same threat of death that Stephen faced for sharing their faith.

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).

LEADERS' PRAYER

FATHER, SHOW ME HOW TO SUFFER LIKE JESUS, WITH GRACE AND LOVE, NEVER BACKING DOWN FROM THE TRUTH. GIVE ME THE RIGHT WORDS TO HELP MY STUDENTS UNDERSTAND THAT IF WE SUFFER FOR OUR FAITH, GOD IS STILL GOOD IN OUR SUFFERING.

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KICK STARTER

♡ HEART CHECK

Let's check in on how you're doing spiritually. Last week, we talked about standing up for Jesus and sharing the gospel, even when we face persecution. When have you **shared your faith** this week, despite feeling scared or intimidated? Where have you boldly spoken the truth about Jesus, even if you were uncomfortable at first? When did you stay silent instead?

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These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

1
DEFENDING TRUTH

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **WHEN SOMEONE FALSELY ACCUSES YOU, HOW LIKELY ARE YOU TO RESPOND BY CALMLY TELLING THE TRUTH? IF NOT, HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND?**
- **WHEN HAVE YOU SEEN SOMEONE RESPOND CALMLY AND KINDLY TO A FALSE ACCUSATION? WHAT HAPPENED?**
- **WHY DOES THE WAY WE RESPOND TO PEOPLE MATTER, EVEN WHEN THEY'RE WAY OUT OF LINE AND HURTFUL?**

Responding calmly when we're hurt—whether from false accusations, gossip, or painful truths—isn't easy. And yet, it's possible. Beyond that, grace and forgiveness are good for us and others. Forgiveness moves our attention from the problem to the person, and for believers, from the problem to God and His forgiveness. As believers, we can forgive, no matter what, because God has forgiven us—and them!—of everything we've done or will ever do.

2
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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DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

Our suffering reveals where we've placed our hope.

THE WORLD WILL OPPOSE US

READ ACTS 6:8-15

DESCRIBE STEPHEN BASED ON THIS PASSAGE. WHY SHOULD WE WANT TO BE KNOWN FOR THE SAME QUALITIES?

Stephen is described as "full of grace and power" (v. 8), doing miracles in the power and name of Jesus, and having incredible wisdom because the Holy Spirit filled him and gave him the words to speak. Even Stephen's physical appearance changed: His face shone, much like Moses's face after he spoke with God (Ex. 34:35). **Like Stephen, we should want to reflect that we've been spending time with God.** Our faces may not shine, but as we invite the Holy Spirit to work in and through us, we can be full of grace, power, wisdom, and the right words as we do God's work.

WHAT OPPOSITION DID STEPHEN FACE? WHAT DOES HIS RESPONSE SHOW US ABOUT FACING OPPOSITION?

Stephen faced opposition from the Jews and their religious leaders. They argued with him about the truth of the gospel, but Stephen stood firm. None of their arguments could stand up to the truth: Jesus is the Messiah. They plotted against Stephen with false witnesses and lies, but he continued to speak the truth boldly. We know people will stand against us when we boldly speak the truth of the gospel; they may gossip about us, exclude us, or turn on us. **But even if we face the very worst, we can trust the Holy Spirit to empower us, give us wisdom, and help us know what to say and do.**

WHAT STRUGGLES OR QUESTIONS DO YOU WRESTLE WITH WHEN IT COMES TO BELIEVERS *SUFFERING FOR THEIR FAITH*?

The Bible says we should expect to suffer for our faith (John 16:33; 1 Pet. 4:12-13), and we see examples of suffering throughout Scripture. But if we're honest, we don't *want* to suffer. We'd rather avoid it and may even wonder, *Why would God let me suffer? Why can't I be faithful without suffering?* As believers, we're already united with Jesus through salvation, but we experience a different kind of closeness, or unity, with Him through suffering. Suffering has a way of producing endurance, godly character, and most importantly, hope—hope that is incapable of disappointing us (Rom. 5:3-5). In our suffering, we learn more deeply how to lean on the Lord—that hoping in anyone or anything else will fail. **Suffering points to God's goodness, not away from it, because it reminds us of this truth: Jesus willingly entered our suffering to redeem us. He's the Savior we can run to because He understands suffering on a deeper level than we ever will.** And He experienced it for us. If we suffer, let it be for Him. Simply put: We can be bold even when others are against us and even when we suffer because God Himself is for us (Rom. 8:31).

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GOD'S PROMISES NEVER CHANGE

READ ACTS 7:51-60

WHY DID STEPHEN CALL HIS AUDIENCE "STIFF-NECKED"? WHAT DO YOU THINK HE COULD CALL US? EXPLAIN.

Stephen called out the people for being resistant to God's work in their lives, describing them as stiff-necked, which means stubborn. The Jews had ignored the truth right in front of them, up close and personal, even though they had "received the law" (v. 53). They knew the truth, but their hearts weren't changed or moved by it. But God's promises never change—even if we choose not to believe them. **Our stubbornness today often looks more like indifference: We hear the Word of God and believe it, but we don't want to change anything about our lives to follow Him. We seek comfort over conviction and righteousness.** But Jesus invites us to a better way: Take Him at His word, obey Him, and live a full life.

HOW DO WE WALK THROUGH SUFFERING WITH HOPE AND JOY? WHO HAVE YOU SEEN DO THIS?

Stephen was unapologetically honest about Jesus because people hearing the truth mattered more than saving his life. However, the people refused to hear Stephen; they attacked him with their words, dragged him outside of the city, and stoned him. Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit, who gave him a glimpse of heaven and evidence of God's promises. In that moment, Stephen saw Jesus, God's glory, and his future. With the image and certainty of what waited for him, he embraced the joy of Jesus and endured suffering with grace. **The Holy Spirit fills us with peace, opens our eyes to see Jesus, and reminds us of the glory to come—especially when we suffer for our faith.**

IN WHAT WAYS DO YOU SEE STEPHEN IMITATE JESUS?

Stephen faced a rioting crowd and certain death. Even as he was dying, Stephen displayed his trust in God for salvation and vocalized that he would be with Jesus immediately (v. 59). (We see Jesus do the same thing in Luke 23:46 as He took His last breath.) He also communicated trust in God's grace and forgiveness when He echoed Jesus by asking God not to hold the mob's sin against them (v. 60; see also Luke 23:34). When life hurts, we lose hope if we only look around us. **But when we keep our eyes on Jesus, who endured everything because of the joy of our salvation (Heb. 12:2), we can also endure, knowing that the joy before us outweighs any of the suffering we face here on earth (Rom. 8:18).**

WRAP-UP

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

Whether you personally know people who are being persecuted for their faith or they're more of a distant thought, you can support them in several ways. Here are a few ideas: *Locally.* (1) Pray with them. (2) Take a thoughtful gift or meal, babysit, pick up an extra coffee for them, do laundry, yard work, or housework. Don't ask—offer. (3) Give a hug. (4) Sit with them. (5) Invite them to do something fun. Talk about normal, everyday life. (6) Encourage them by speaking the truth of God's Word over them. *Globally.* (7) Pray specifically for a person or nation, using guides from places like the Voice of the Martyrs, NAMB, and IMB to guide your prayers. Write out your prayers and send letters. (8) Send a care package. (9) Be educated and raise awareness about persecuted people groups. (10) Financially support organizations that help persecuted believers across the world. (11) Write to government representatives, asking them to pursue religious freedom. **You make a difference when you join the cause, both locally and globally.**

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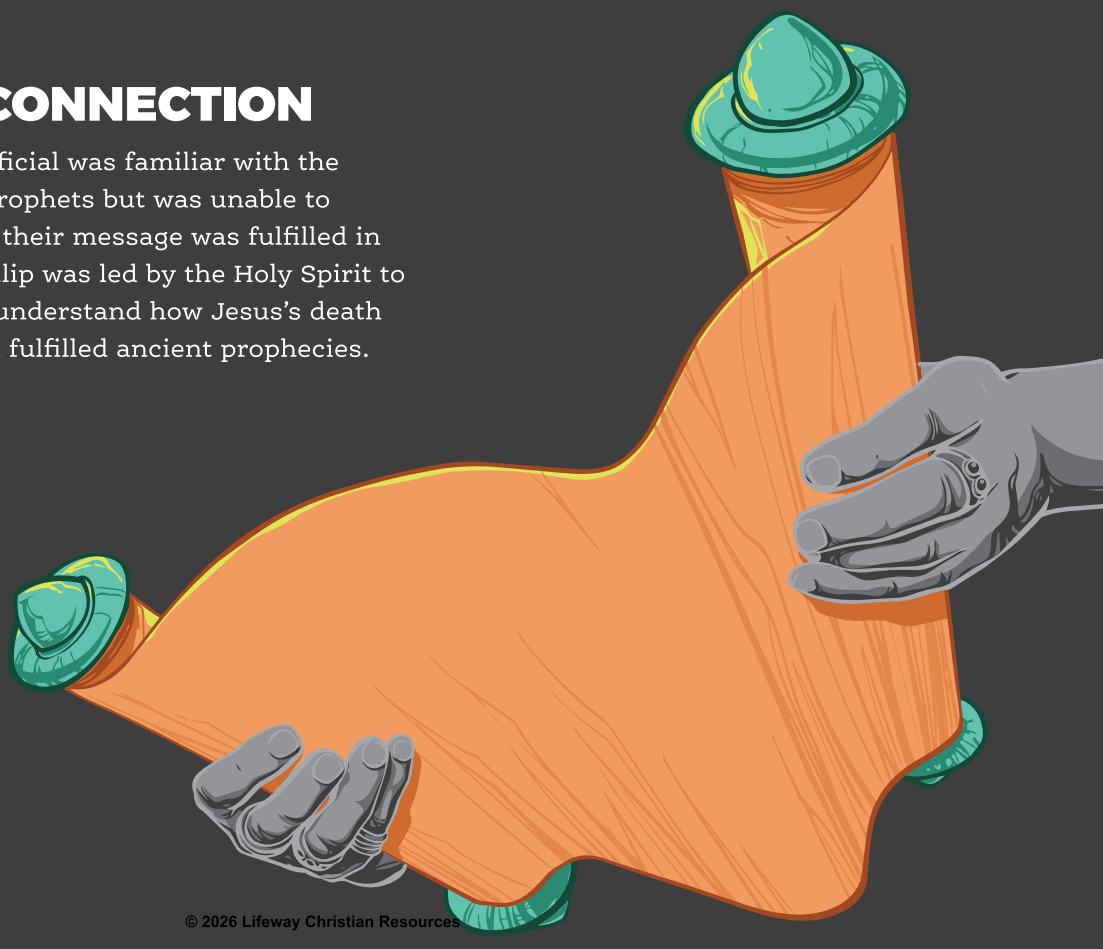
UNLESS SOMEONE GUIDES ME

MAIN POINT.

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

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 read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

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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BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

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

Leaders: This week, push students to consider the people God is leading them to share the gospel with and ways they can do so. Let's help them see their participation in God's work as a great gift!

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

GOD POSITIONS US

ACTS 8:27-29

"Ethiopia was considered 'the end of the earth' by the Greeks and Romans, and Philip's witness to the Samaritans and the Ethiopian is no doubt a foretaste of the completion of Christ's completed mission (Rev. 7:9)."[1]

ACTS 8:27

"In the ancient world slaves were often castrated as boys in order to be used as keepers of the harem and the treasury. Eunuchs were found to be particularly trustworthy and loyal to their rulers. So widespread was the practice of placing them over the treasury that in time the term 'eunuch' became a synonym for 'treasurer' and did not necessarily imply that the one bearing the title was castrated. In the present passage it is likely that Philip's Ethiopian was an actual physical eunuch, however, since the terms 'eunuch' and 'official over the treasury' are both given. His physical status was then highly significant for the story. He had been on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and was in all probability, like Cornelius, one of those 'God-fearing' Gentiles who believed in the God of Israel but had not become a proselyte, a full convert, to Judaism. In his case, as a eunuch, full membership in the congregation of Israel was not even possible because of his physical blemish (Deut. 23:1). He could visit the temple in Jerusalem, as he had done; but he could never enter it."[2]

GOD USES OUR OBEDIENCE

ACTS 8:35

"A missional church is composed of individuals who are led by the Spirit like Philip. The Lord will direct us, but we must be willing to obey. Understand, Philip could have used the common excuse, 'Not now!' to release himself from following God's prompting in his heart. After all, Christian ministry was exploding in Samaria. Why would he want to leave that to head down a desert road? Conventional wisdom, in fact, would lead him to think he was already doing what he was supposed to do. Yet Philip went as directed."[3]

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CONTEXT

After Stephen's death in Acts 7, severe persecution against Christians arose in Jerusalem. Leading this wave of persecution was Saul—a man described as "ravaging the church" (Acts 8:3), who would drag Christian men and women from their homes and throw them into prison (Acts 8:1-3). Fearing for their lives, Christians fled Jerusalem and scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Philip chose to preach the gospel in Samaria, where many believed and were baptized (Acts 8:4-8,14-17). Then, the Lord directed Philip to share the gospel with an unlikely person: an Ethiopian eunuch who served as an official of Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians. Rather than a name, "the Candace" was the title for the ruling queen of this ancient kingdom that included regions of modern-day Egypt and Sudan.[4] Eunuchs were men who had been made unable to have children, and they were considered to be trustworthy and loyal to their leaders. As a eunuch, this man would not have been able to enter the temple in Jerusalem to worship (Deut. 23:1). He was also a Gentile, and many Jewish believers would have been surprised by his worship of the God of Israel. The fact that the Spirit led Philip from the crowds in Samaria to the Ethiopian eunuch demonstrates how the gospel was going out to the ends of the earth, just as Jesus said (Acts 1:8).

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.

LEADERS' PRAYER

LORD, THANK YOU FOR THE GIFT OF SALVATION THAT YOU OFFER THROUGH YOUR SON. PLEASE GIVE US EYES TO SEE THE PEOPLE YOU HAVE SOVEREIGNLY PLACED IN OUR LIVES WHO DO NOT KNOW YOU. HELP US TO BOLDLY AND LOVINGLY SHARE THE GOOD NEWS OF THE GOSPEL WITH THEM.

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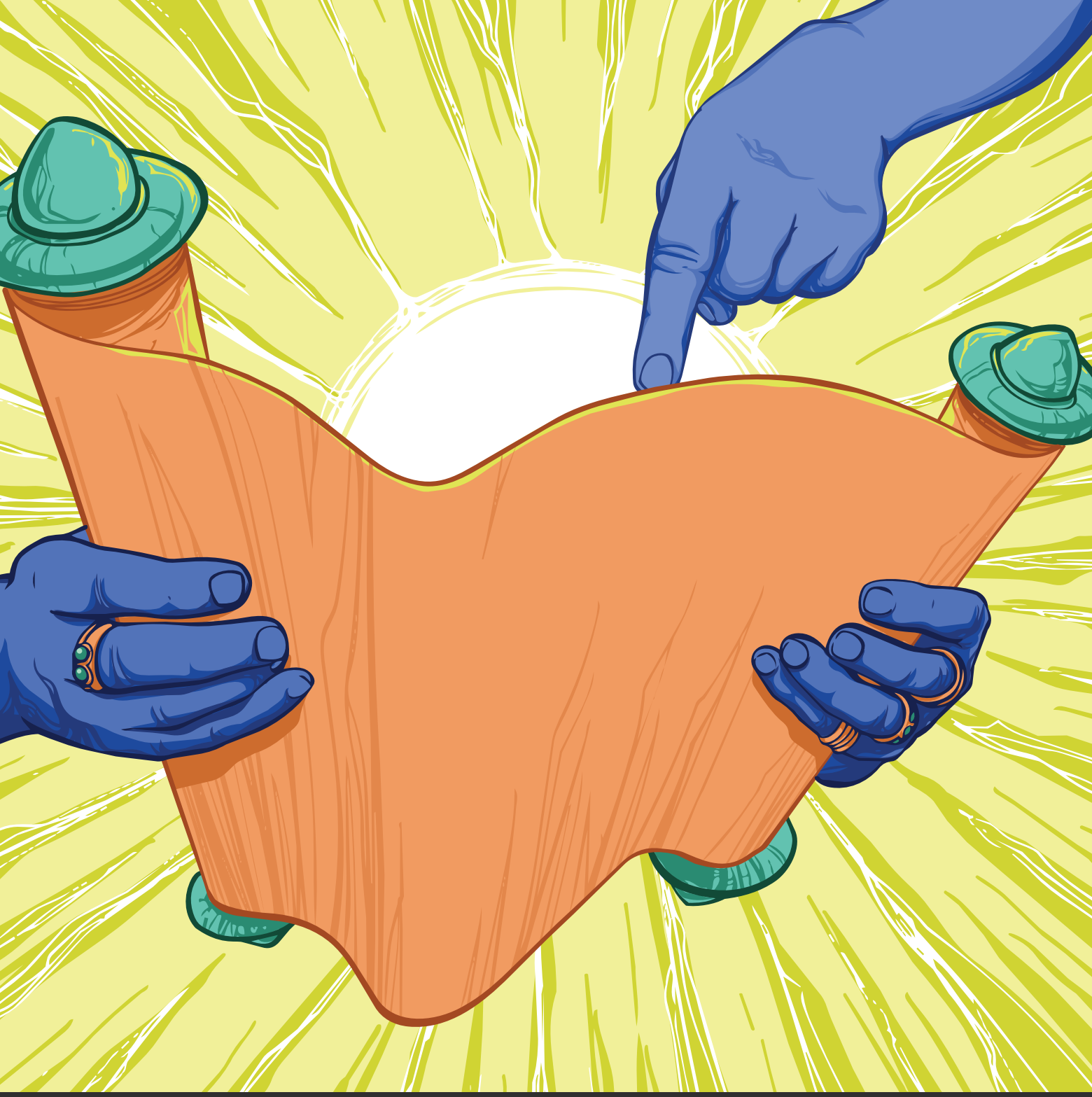

KICK STARTER

DID YOU KNOW?

The average person makes **around 35,000 decisions every day**—from something as simple as not hitting snooze on an alarm to the big things like what colleges to apply to or when to have a difficult conversation.[5]

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These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.



PERFECT TIMING

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN PLANS CHANGE UNEXPECTEDLY?**
- **HAVE YOU EVER FOUND YOURSELF SOMEWHERE AT THE WRONG TIME OR AT THE WRONG LOCATION? WHAT HAPPENED?**
- **HAS THERE EVER BEEN A MOMENT WHEN YOU REALIZED YOU WERE IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME? EXPLAIN.**

Multiple factors and decisions have led each of us to where we are at this very moment. Sometimes, we don't realize where God is directing us until we arrive. In today's lesson, we will learn about the day that God sent Philip to meet an unlikely person who had questions about faith and how Philip responded in obedience by sharing the gospel.



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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DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

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

GOD POSITIONS US

READ ACTS 8:26-29

PHILIP HEARD THE LORD GIVE HIM DIRECTIONS. HOW CAN WE POSITION OURSELVES TO KNOW GOD'S VOICE?

Throughout Scripture, God communicated with His people in different ways. However, many of us wait for a miraculous, audible word from God, forgetting we have access to His revealed Word: the Bible. The Scriptures are God's own inspired words, and they give us what we need to live godly lives (2 Tim. 3:16-17); we can obey what God has already spoken. **While God can choose to speak audibly to us if He wants, we can all hear His voice and understand His general will for us by reading His Word.** Seeking God in prayer and reflecting on His Word allows us to hear Him when He calls us to action.

HOW DO WE KNOW THE BIBLE IS RELIABLE AND REVEALS GOD CORRECTLY?

God has revealed Himself to us primarily through His Word. The Bible is divinely inspired and has been protected by God. It contains sixty-six books written over 1,500 years by nearly forty different authors! And yet, the same message flows throughout the Bible: God is working to bring salvation to the world. Thousands of manuscripts exist in numerous languages, which demonstrate how the Bible's words have been preserved for thousands of years with precise accuracy. **We can trust that the book of Isaiah the eunuch read is the same book in our Bibles today. And we can trust God is who He says He is in His Word.**

WHAT IS SURPRISING ABOUT THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH READING THE SCRIPTURES? WHAT ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT OTHERS KEEP US FROM *SHARING GOD'S WORD* WITH THEM?

Leaders: Consider sharing Context. Many people wouldn't have expected this man to be interested in God's Word: He wasn't a Jew by birth; eunuchs weren't allowed to worship in the temple; and he was from a foreign place where the church had not yet been established. In many ways, this man represented the "end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). When people come from a family or culture where Christianity isn't the norm, we might assume they won't be interested in hearing about Jesus. We look at their lifestyle, their mistakes, or their appearance and decide to stay silent, even when the Holy Spirit leads us to share our faith. We write people off based on what we can see and consider them hopelessly lost, but God offers salvation to everyone and wants all people to come to Him (1 Tim. 2:3-4). **He is often working in the hearts of unlikely people to draw them to Himself, even though we may not be able to tell from the outside. We should obey Jesus's command to share the gospel, trusting that God can bring even the most unexpected people into a relationship with Him.** Let's assume that everyone around us needs the hope of the gospel—because they do—and let's point them to Jesus.

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GOD USES OUR OBEDIENCE

READ ACTS 8:30-40

WHAT EXCUSES COULD PHILIP HAVE MADE TO AVOID APPROACHING THE CHARIOT? WHAT EXCUSES DO WE MAKE IN SITUATIONS LIKE THIS?

Philip could've ignored the Spirit's voice, convincing himself that he misheard, that he was busy, or that God wanted him to stay put, but he ran immediately to the chariot and began a conversation with the eunuch. We often make excuses, questioning what we heard, claiming we're busy, or refusing to leave what's comfortable. God goes before us in every situation; no matter where we go, He is already there, working in people's hearts and circumstances to prepare them to respond to the gospel. **We can fight the fear of rejection or feeling awkward by trusting God is with us, using our obedience for His glory and to save the lost! What an incredibly humbling truth that God uses imperfect people like us to bring others to Him!**

WHAT CONFUSED THE ETHIOPIAN ABOUT THIS PASSAGE IN ISAIAH? HOW WOULD YOU EXPLAIN THAT THIS PASSAGE POINTS TO JESUS?

Many people are unaware of ways that the Old Testament foreshadows Jesus's life and death. The book of Isaiah was written nearly seven hundred years before Jesus lived.[6] **Isaiah's prophecies described what the Messiah would be like and what He would accomplish but didn't specifically name Him.** The official needed help with connecting Isaiah's prophecies to Jesus of Nazareth. This passage from Isaiah 53 points to Jesus dying on the cross for our sins. Like the lamb in this prophecy, Jesus *willingly* laid down His life for us. He didn't resist or defend Himself and was unjustly condemned to a criminal's death, despite His innocence. Jesus endured this shameful death because of His great love for us and His desire to save us from our sins. All who confess Jesus as Lord and believe in His death and resurrection will be saved (Rom. 10:9).

IF GOD HAS THE POWER TO REACH ANYONE WITH THE GOSPEL, THEN WHY DOES HE NEED US?

God certainly isn't dependent on us, but He *chooses* to give us the honor of participating in His work. We were created to do good works that God has prepared for us (Eph. 2:10), like sharing the gospel with the lost. God has graciously saved us, and we get to be messengers of His grace and experience the joy of seeing others come to know Him (Phil. 1:7). **Only God has the power to save, but He uses our obedience to share the gospel with those who need to hear it.** We can plant and water the seeds of the gospel, trusting God will bring a harvest in His time (Matt. 9:37-38).

WRAP-UP

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?

Like Philip, God calls us to obedience, often without giving us the full picture of what He is doing. **We often let this lack of understanding excuse us from obeying Him.** Are you willing to step out in faith and trust Him, even if you can't see the end goal? Think about it: Has the Lord placed someone in your life who needs to hear the good news of the gospel? Is there a sin that you've been struggling with that you need to lay down, but you've been putting it off? Is God asking you to follow His direction regarding certain relationships or plans for your future? Could He be asking you to give something up in your busy schedule to create more time for Him? **Whatever step of obedience God is calling you to, He is not asking you to do this on your own. He is the One working in you for His good purposes (Phil. 2:13), and He can "do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us" (Eph. 3:20).**

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LIGHT FROM HEAVEN

MAIN POINT.

A genuine encounter with Jesus transforms us.

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 read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

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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BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

A genuine encounter with Jesus transforms us.

Leaders: Some of your students may feel like they're incapable of being loved and changed by God. Use the truth in this passage to help them see that God loves them and longs to give them new life.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

JESUS CONFRONTS US IN OUR SIN

ACTS 9:1-9

"Saul's conversion was not a matter of a slight adjustment to his former beliefs, a small helpful addition to his Judaism. It involved a radical change. His original journey to Damascus was never completed. Its goal abandoned, it became an altogether different kind of journey, as the once brilliant, energetic initiator, Saul (9:1-2), now blinded and led by the hand, shuffled his way into Damascus, under new management to await instructions."[7]

ACTS 9:4-5

"Like many Old Testament individuals, Saul is summoned by name. Then, as he wonders whose voice he hears, Jesus stuns him by identifying Himself as the speaker (v. 5). Saul had thought he was on a righteous mission to eradicate followers of this very Person, but now he's quivering on the ground before the blinding glory of Christ, and he's made aware that he's on the wrong team. Saul learns that to persecute the church is to persecute Jesus. The Lord identifies with His bride. Theirs is an amazing union."[8]

JESUS CALLS US TO CHANGE

ACTS 9:17

"Ananias goes, lays his hand on the waiting Saul, and says, 'Brother Saul . . .' (v. 17). This means that the first word Saul hears from this man, this follower of the Way, is 'brother.' What a comfort! Surely in that moment Saul not only received his new identity but recognized that in Christ he also received a new family. Becoming a follower of Jesus involves coming into a family of brothers and sisters in the faith."[9]

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CONTEXT

Saul was a Jewish man who had been educated by the Rabbi Gamaliel to strictly observe Jewish ancestral law (Acts 22:3). As a Pharisee, he was zealous for God, but he saw Christianity as a corruption of Judaism and determined to destroy the growing Christian movement. Saul's first appearance in the New Testament placed him at Stephen's stoning (Acts 7:58), approving of his death (Acts 8:1). Saul's persecution of Christians—members of "the Way," a term Christians used to describe themselves in the early days of the church—contributed to the "scattering" of the church. Many Christians fled from Jerusalem into the surrounding areas, like Damascus, to take refuge. Damascus was the capital of modern-day Syria, about a six-day journey by foot from Jerusalem. Saul wanted letters of support from the Sanhedrin so that he could arrest the Christians who were hiding there and return them as prisoners.[10] Saul's willingness to make this journey demonstrated his passion for persecuting believers. But on this mission to halt the spread of Christianity, Saul collided with undeniable truth, changing him completely—from passionately persecuting believers to even more passionately sharing the truth about Jesus.

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.

LEADERS' PRAYER

LORD, WE PRAISE YOU FOR YOUR WILLINGNESS TO PURSUE US, EVEN WHEN WE ARE RUNNING FROM YOU. THANK YOU FOR TRANSFORMING US INTO NEW CREATIONS AND ADOPTING US INTO YOUR FAMILY. PLEASE HELP US TO RESPOND TO YOUR GRACE WITH FAITH AND OBEDIENCE AND TO TEACH OUR STUDENTS TO DO THE SAME.

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KICK STARTER

RATE IT!

If you couldn't see, how well could find your way around your home **(1=Totally helpless; 10=All good)**?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

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These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

1
CHANGE OF MIND

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **WHAT'S SOMETHING YOU BELIEVE SO STRONGLY THAT YOU'D ARGUE ABOUT IT ALL DAY? (YOU KNOW, THAT ONE OPINION YOU'LL ARGUE ABOUT NO MATTER WHAT—WHETHER IT'S FOOD, MUSIC, MOVIES, OR SOMETHING BIGGER.)**
- **HAVE YOU EVER CHANGED YOUR MIND ABOUT SOMETHING YOU ONCE BELIEVED? WHAT INFLUENCED YOUR DECISION?**
- **WHAT EXPERIENCE OR EVENT HAS SIGNIFICANTLY SHAPED THE WAY YOU THINK?**

Experiences help to shape our identity and our beliefs. Today, we are going to discuss how one man's identity and sense of purpose dramatically changed after he encountered the risen Jesus. We will see how meeting Jesus changed everything about Saul of Tarsus, a man who once was determined to wipe out the early church.

2
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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DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

A genuine encounter with Jesus transforms us.

JESUS CONFRONTS US IN OUR SIN

READ ACTS 9:1-9

WHY WAS SAUL DETERMINED TO PUT CHRISTIANS IN PRISON? WHY ARE PEOPLE TODAY OFTEN HOSTILE TOWARD CHRISTIANS?

Leaders: Share Context on Saul. Saul saw Christianity as a threat to Judaism—to the Jewish way of life. He accused Christians of blasphemy for worshiping Jesus and believing He was the divine Son of God. Saul, and other Jewish leaders, disagreed with the Christian belief that Jesus had fulfilled the law of Moses. By arresting and imprisoning Christians, Saul hoped to wipe out this growing movement. Even today, people view faith in Jesus as a threat to their way of life. **In reality, faith is a threat to our way of life because it invites Jesus to change us from the inside out.**

WHAT DO YOU THINK WAS GOING THROUGH SAUL'S HEAD AFTER THIS DIVINE ENCOUNTER WITH JESUS?

Saul was likely in shock after Jesus appeared and spoke to him. Not eating or drinking for three days reveals his confusion and brokenness.[11] This powerful, determined man was now powerless and humbled. What he thought he knew was proven wrong by only one encounter with Jesus. **Saul had to rethink his most dearly held beliefs about God, Jesus, and his own identity and purpose.** He had to reflect on the fact that he had been working against God by relentlessly persecuting Christians, whose message about Jesus and His resurrection was truth. Saul had a decision to make: resist or accept the truth.

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?

Thankfully, Jesus is gracious and loving. He doesn't want us to continue in the sin that hurts us and separates us from Him. As He draws us to Himself, He firmly but lovingly shows where we have wandered from Him, just as He did for Saul. This conviction can feel painful, but showing us the truth of our situation instead of leaving us to our own destruction is God's mercy to us. His correction is really kindness that leads us to repentance and salvation (Rom. 2:4). As we grow in our walk with Jesus, God continually shapes us to look more like Him; this includes convicting us of the sin we still struggle to let go of. **Conviction doesn't equal condemnation or shame—there is no condemnation in Christ (Rom. 8:1). Instead, the Lord kindly redirects us, reminding us to turn from our sin. God is a loving Father who wants His children to flourish. He brings sin to our attention so that we can repent and pursue Him with the freedom purchased for us through the death of His Son (Rom. 8:2-4).**

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JESUS CALLS US TO CHANGE

READ ACTS 9:10-20

IF YOU WERE IN ANANIAS'S SHOES, HOW WOULD YOU FEEL ABOUT THE LORD'S DIRECTIONS? WHY?

Ananias demonstrated great faith when the Lord spoke to him in a vision. He was understandably surprised when the Lord said Saul would be expecting him in the house on Straight Street. Ananias knew Saul's reputation as the one persecuting Christians in Jerusalem. Even though Ananias was confused, he didn't refuse what God was calling him to do. He went to the house and laid his hands on Saul without hesitation. **The truth is that God's directions can (and likely will) lead us to uncomfortable situations—to people we don't associate with normally, to new places, to situations in which we feel unprepared.** Ananias's obedience is a great example of trusting God's calling, even when we initially feel afraid or anxious.

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?

We can be tempted to believe that some people are too far from God to ever want to follow Him. Maybe we once felt like God could never save us. We can feel discouraged when lost people we love resist Jesus. But Saul gives us hope that things can change. The resurrected Jesus who appeared to Saul is the same Jesus who draws us to Himself today (John 12:32). **Jesus has the power to save even those with the hardest hearts. Only Jesus had the ability to change Saul from an aggressive persecutor of the church to an apostle who would willingly suffer persecution for Jesus's name.** Saul's story proves that no one is out of God's reach.

WHAT IS THE EVIDENCE OF SALVATION WE CAN EXPECT TO SEE IN A PERSON'S LIFE?

When we repent and put our faith in Jesus, we are born again. The new life we receive comes from regeneration, or the Holy Spirit's divine work to bring us from spiritual death to spiritual life (Rom. 8:11). We can't gain salvation by our own efforts, but the Holy Spirit supernaturally makes us new (Titus 3:5). When we are born again and this regeneration has occurred, we should expect to see evidence of a transformed heart—of words and actions that look increasingly more like Jesus because of His work in our hearts. When Saul received new life in Jesus, his actions revealed the inward change. **We can't follow Jesus yet remain the same. Knowing Him changes us, and we grow in holiness as we pursue the Lord.**

WRAP-UP

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?

Jesus freely offers eternal life to each of us, a gift of His love and grace. While we cannot earn salvation by good works, following Jesus requires that we deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him (Matt. 16:24). **God calls us to lay down our plans, our goals, our desires to pursue His will. If we claim to feel no fear in obeying this call, then we're either not being honest or not considering the cost. Surrender is costly.** Following Jesus cost Saul his reputation, status in the Jewish community, and ultimately, his life, as he was persecuted and later killed for the gospel. Yet, Saul counted what he gave up as worthless compared to knowing Jesus and gaining life in Him (Phil. 3:8). **Here's the truth: We're safe with God. Even when He asks us to surrender something we cling to for comfort, even when He asks us to follow Him somewhere we never thought we'd go, we can trust Him.** We're secure in Christ's love and have the Holy Spirit's strength to help us, so we can surrender all and run the race of faith with our eyes focused on Jesus (Heb. 12:1-2).

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EVEN ON THE GENTILES

MAIN POINT.

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

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 read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

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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BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

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

Leaders: This week, consider how you can model God's heart for the students who may feel unwelcome. Encourage your students to do the same, rejoicing when outsiders become family!

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

THE GOSPEL ISN'T PREJUDICED

ACTS 10:11-12

"Some interpreters suggest a symbolic meaning here, the four corners representing the ends of the earth in a vision, the ultimate meaning of which points to the worldwide mission. The sheet contained representatives of all the animals of the earth—four-footed animals, reptiles of the land, and birds of the air. It thus symbolized the entire animal world and included clean as well as unclean animals."[12]

ACTS 10:22-23

"Left to himself, Peter would never have entered the houses of uncircumcised Gentiles and eaten with them, because to his way of thinking it would have contravened the Old Testament laws on holiness. Peter and his fellow Jews who kept those laws were 'saints'; people who did not keep them were 'unclean'. It was wrong for 'saints' who wanted to please God by maintaining their holiness to mix socially and to eat with 'unclean' people. And, therefore, if taking the gospel to Gentiles meant entering their homes and eating with them, it could not be done. Holiness would not allow it."[13]

WE'RE CALLED TO REFLECT GOD'S HEART

ACTS 10:34-35

"The Jewish food laws presented a real problem for Jewish Christians in the outreach to the Gentiles. One simply could not dine in a Gentile's home without inevitably transgressing those laws either by the consumption of unclean flesh or of flesh that had not been prepared in a kosher, i.e., ritually proper, fashion (Acts 15:20). Jesus dealt with the problem of clean and unclean, insisting that external things like foods did not defile a person but the internals of heart and speech and thought render one truly unclean (Mark 7:14-23). In Mark 7:19b Mark added the parenthetical comment that Jesus's saying ultimately declared all foods clean. This was precisely the point of Peter's vision: God declared the unclean to be clean. In Mark 7 Jesus's teaching on clean/unclean was immediately followed by His ministry to a Gentile woman (7:24-30), just as Peter's vision regarding clean and unclean foods was followed by his witness to a Gentile. It is simply not possible to fully accept someone with whom you are unwilling to share in the intimacy of table fellowship."[14]

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CONTEXT

The early Christian church grew quickly as the gospel reached both Jews and Gentiles. Peter's vision and interaction with Cornelius would be an important turning point in his understanding that salvation wasn't for Jewish people only. Over a thousand years before these events, God had given the Mosaic law to Israel so that they understood their identity as God's chosen nation. This law included commands for ritual and ceremonial purification, as well as dietary restrictions (Lev. 11; Deut. 14:3-21). The intention of the law was to separate the Hebrew people from the pagan nations around them in their holiness and worship of Yahweh. Jews would not have been able to fellowship with Gentile believers in their homes since Gentile food and customs were considered unclean. But Jesus perfectly observed and fulfilled each of the Mosaic laws and applies that righteousness to His followers when they come to faith in Him (Matt. 5:17). God removed the barriers that would keep Jews and Gentiles from uniting as brothers and sisters in Christ. God gave both Peter and Cornelius a vision that would lead them to each other, demonstrating God's divine hand in this story and His willingness to welcome Gentiles into His kingdom.

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).

LEADERS' PRAYER

GOD, YOU ARE LORD OVER ALL THAT YOU HAVE CREATED. WE PRAISE YOU FOR GRACIOUSLY ALLOWING PEOPLE OF ALL BACKGROUNDS TO BE A PART OF YOUR FAMILY. HELP US TO HAVE THE SAME WELCOMING ATTITUDE TOWARD THOSE WHO DO NOT YET KNOW YOU, ESPECIALLY THOSE IN OUR STUDENT MINISTRY.



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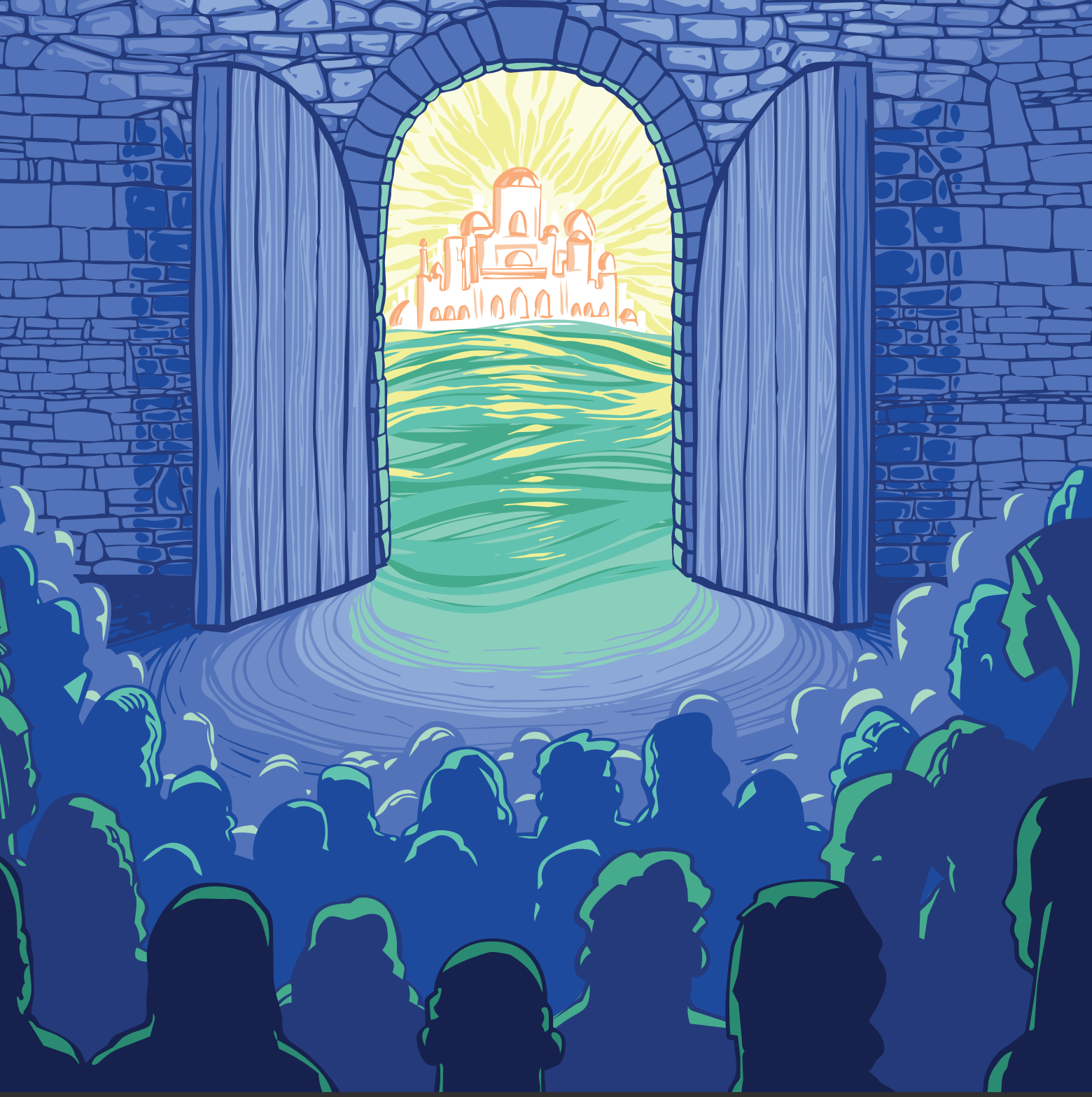

KICK STARTER

♡ HEART CHECK

Let's check in on how you're doing spiritually. Last week, we discussed how Saul was **dramatically transformed** when he encountered Jesus. How is Jesus currently working in your heart and mind to shape you into His image? What shifts did you experience in your thoughts, words, and actions even over the last week?

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These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

1
NOT ALONE BUT ALONE

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **WHEN HAVE YOU BEEN SOMEWHERE AND FELT LIKE YOU DIDN'T BELONG THERE?**
- **HAS SOMEONE EVER HELPED YOU FEEL MORE INCLUDED BY WELCOMING YOU? WHAT HAPPENED?**
- **WHAT REASONS DO WE GIVE FOR EXCLUDING PEOPLE? WHEN CAN EXCLUDING A PERSON BE HARMFUL?**

Most of us have experienced feeling unwelcome or unaccepted at some point. Thankfully, we never have to feel this way with Jesus! Each of us has the invitation to be a part of God's family, no matter where we come from. Today, we'll see how Peter learned that God had removed barriers between Jews and Gentiles and that salvation was available to all people.

2
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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DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

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

THE GOSPEL ISN'T PREJUDICED

READ ACTS 10:9-16,19-23

WHY WAS PETER CONFUSED BY THE LORD'S COMMAND TO EAT FROM THE ANIMALS IN HIS VISION?

Leaders: Share Context. The creatures in Peter's vision represented all the animals that God had created, including ones that were "unclean" under Mosaic law. Peter thought God's command to eat them would break the law since Jews were forbidden to eat these animals. **He didn't understand that Jesus had fulfilled Old Testament laws on behalf of believers and fully introduced a new covenant, where He made them clean internally and not by keeping laws.** God declared these things as clean and removed the obstacles for both Jews and Gentiles, who did not have the Mosaic law, to be brought together as part of God's family.

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?

Tradition is difficult to break, and God's law is more than simple tradition. Peter's vision had left him deep in thought, unclear on what God's declaration of all foods being clean meant for the greater gospel mission. When the Spirit told Peter that three men were looking for him, and these men told Peter that a Gentile named Cornelius had been told by an angel to find Peter, the bigger picture became clearer. **God had divinely coordinated these events to teach Peter that Gentiles weren't forbidden from God's family but gladly welcomed along with Jewish Christians.**

WHAT DOES BEING *PREJUDICED* MEAN? WHAT DOES THIS PASSAGE TEACH US ABOUT BEING *EXCLUSIVE*? WHAT KEEPS US FROM SEEING PEOPLE AS GOD SEES THEM?

Every single person, regardless of race or nationality, is precious to God. Each one of us is created in God's image—*imago Dei*—to reflect His glory through our diversity and uniqueness. In Revelation, John saw people from every nation, tribe, and language worshiping around the throne of the Lamb (Rev. 7:9). The church—the body of believers—includes people from all backgrounds. In fact, most of the modern church is comprised of Gentiles—we are the "end of the earth" type of people that Jesus mentioned in Acts 1:8! **We were once outsiders, but God welcomed us as family through Jesus's blood (Eph. 2:13). Knowing this—*experiencing* this—how can we ever position ourselves as exclusive?** We often focus entirely on our differences, even fearing people who aren't like us, but Jesus unites us and makes us family. When we love the lost and express genuine care for them, we communicate God's willingness to welcome them as well. We should be excited to share the gospel message with people from different backgrounds, without discrimination. The good news is the same for all people: We are saved because of Jesus!

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WE'RE CALLED TO REFLECT GOD'S HEART

READ 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?

God taught Peter that he shouldn't call any person impure or unclean. Gentiles (sometimes called Greeks in the New Testament) weren't born of Jewish descent. Like Peter, many Jews would've feared becoming ritually unclean by associating with Gentiles, who didn't follow the purification laws of Moses. **While many Jewish Christians theoretically understood that the gospel was for all people, they still struggled to apply that truth to real life—to grasp that Gentiles could receive status as children of God through faith in Jesus.** Cornelius's faith and the Spirit's leading Peter and Cornelius together helped transform Peter's mind to know that God welcomes all people into His family.

BASED ON THIS PASSAGE, WHAT WORDS WOULD YOU USE TO DESCRIBE GOD'S HEART FOR THOSE WHO SEEK HIM?

We're so accustomed to being excluded—or excluding others—that we struggle to understand God's impartial love for us. Through his interaction with Cornelius, Peter realized that God doesn't exclude anyone from His love (John 3:16). **Believers aren't members of some elite social group; we've simply recognized our complete dependence on Jesus.** While God formed and chose the nation of Israel to bring the Messiah through the line of Abraham, being Jewish didn't grant someone exclusive access to the gospel. Jesus is the Savior for all people who believe in Him (Rom. 1:16). **God isn't concerned with our ethnicity or nationality but with whether or not we believe the truth concerning His Son.**

HOW DOES ADOPTION INTO GOD'S FAMILY IMPACT HOW WE RELATE TO EACH OTHER AS CHRISTIANS?

When we trust in Jesus for salvation, He forgives us from the penalty of our sin, makes us right before God, and gives us the Holy Spirit and new identities. Part of this new identity means that we're adopted forever into God's family as His children (John 1:12; Gal. 4:5). As children of God and members of His household, we are bonded with other Christians who have been adopted by God—our brothers and sisters in Christ. **Because we know what life is like outside of God's family, we rejoice when others believe and are adopted in!**

WRAP-UP

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?

One of the most important things Christians can do is to kindly and warmly welcome people into our spaces. People often come to church with questions about God or when they're hurting and aren't sure where else to go. They might worry they'll be judged based on where they come from or how they look, dress, or act. Believers should be the most welcoming people, eager to invite others in and willing to go the extra mile to make them feel seen and included, even if they don't look like a "typical" church person. Jesus died for the whole world and wants all people to come to repentance (1 John 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:9). He doesn't discriminate, so why should we? **If people leave our church settings or a conversation with us and feel like they were unwelcome or inferior, then we're missing the mark. Jesus met us in the middle of our sin, and we should meet the lost with the same love and compassion.**

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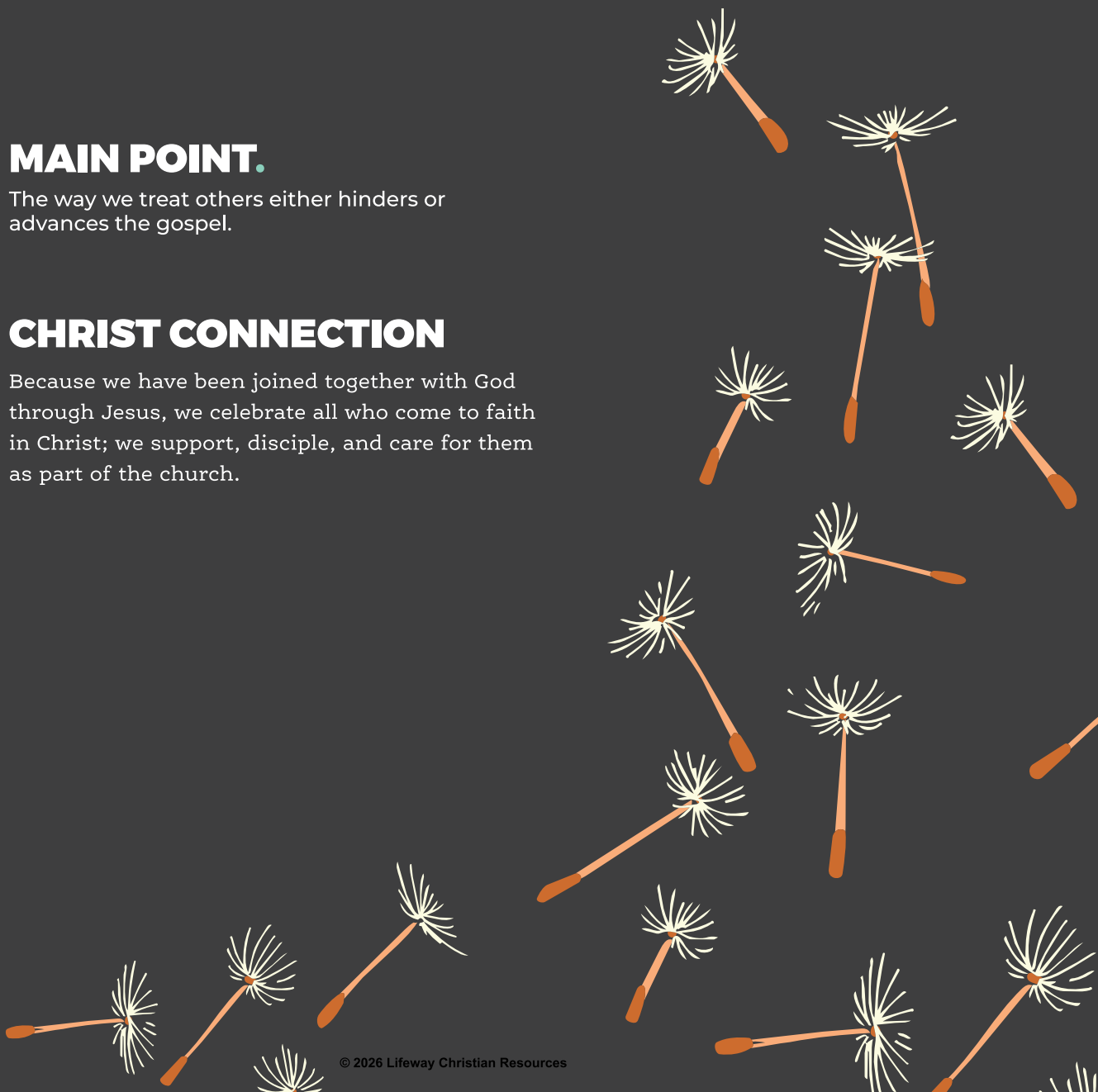
SCATTERED

MAIN POINT.

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

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 read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

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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BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

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

Leaders: Consider how you can model unity in your group. The way we handle conflict and differences spills over, teaching our students how to handle them as well.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

WE'RE CALLED TO REJOICE

ACTS 11:20-25

"Religiously, Antioch was an amalgam. Five miles from the city was a major cult center for the Greek goddess Daphne and her consort Apollo. The Antioch version of the cult seems to have been but a weak Hellenization of the worship of the ancient Assyrian goddess Astarte, in which sacred prostitution played a major role. This practice evidently continued because Antioch was notorious throughout the Roman Empire for its immorality. . . . Cosmopolitan center and port center that it was, it is not surprising that the Christians there caught the vision of an empire-wide mission. Paul would be the one who most carried it out, and Antioch was his sponsoring church."[15]

ACTS 11:26

"The followers of Jesus were so different from the culture around them that citizens had to develop a third classification of people—something new beyond the Jew or Gentile distinction. Where once the world saw Christians as Jewish followers of Jesus the Nazarene and assumed they followed some divergent form of Judaism, something changed. Clearly the followers of the Way, comprised of people of all cultural backgrounds, weren't Jews. But because some of them had converted from Judaism, they weren't exactly Gentiles either. People from all sorts of nations were worshiping together. This unified group represented a third 'race' of people. The Christians were a new humanity."[16]

WE'RE CALLED TO MEET NEEDS

ACTS 11:27-30

"The famine hasn't taken place yet when the disciples determine to send relief. Yet, embracing Agabus's prophecy by faith, the Christians seem more concerned with preparing aid for others than they are with hoarding personal supplies in preparation for the hardship to come. They put others before self. This is a great reminder that we must not only do mercy ministry when we think we're financially stable and secure. We need to begin now—even if that means starting small. It's important that we show mercy to this broken world as we can, 'according to [our] own ability.'"[17]

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CONTEXT

Acts 11 shows how the gospel continued to spread among the Gentiles beyond the region of Judea. Persecution against Christians continued, even though Saul had become a believer and no longer persecuted the church. Believers had scattered to various Greek-speaking cities like the seacoast towns in Phoenicia, the Mediterranean island of Cyprus, and farther north to Antioch. Located in modern-day Turkey, Antioch was the third-largest city in the Roman Empire, with a reputation for immorality and cultic worship of Greek deities.[18] Many Gentiles came to faith in Jesus at Antioch, and its church would send missionaries to the Greek-speaking world. The church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to witness what the Lord was doing there. He was a natural choice to send, since he was a faithful man and likely spoke Greek (Acts 4:36). Followers of Jesus were called "Christians" for the first time at Antioch, signifying that Christianity was no longer tied to Jewish identity only but to people from Gentile backgrounds as well. The flourishing church in Antioch proved that God continued to call Gentiles to His kingdom.

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).

LEADERS' PRAYER

LORD, THANK YOU FOR THE GIFT OF OUR CHURCH FAMILY. HELP US TO LOVE AND CARE FOR EACH OTHER WELL AS WE SERVE YOU AND MINISTER TO OTHERS. PLEASE UNIFY US AS WE PARTNER TOGETHER FOR YOUR GLORY.

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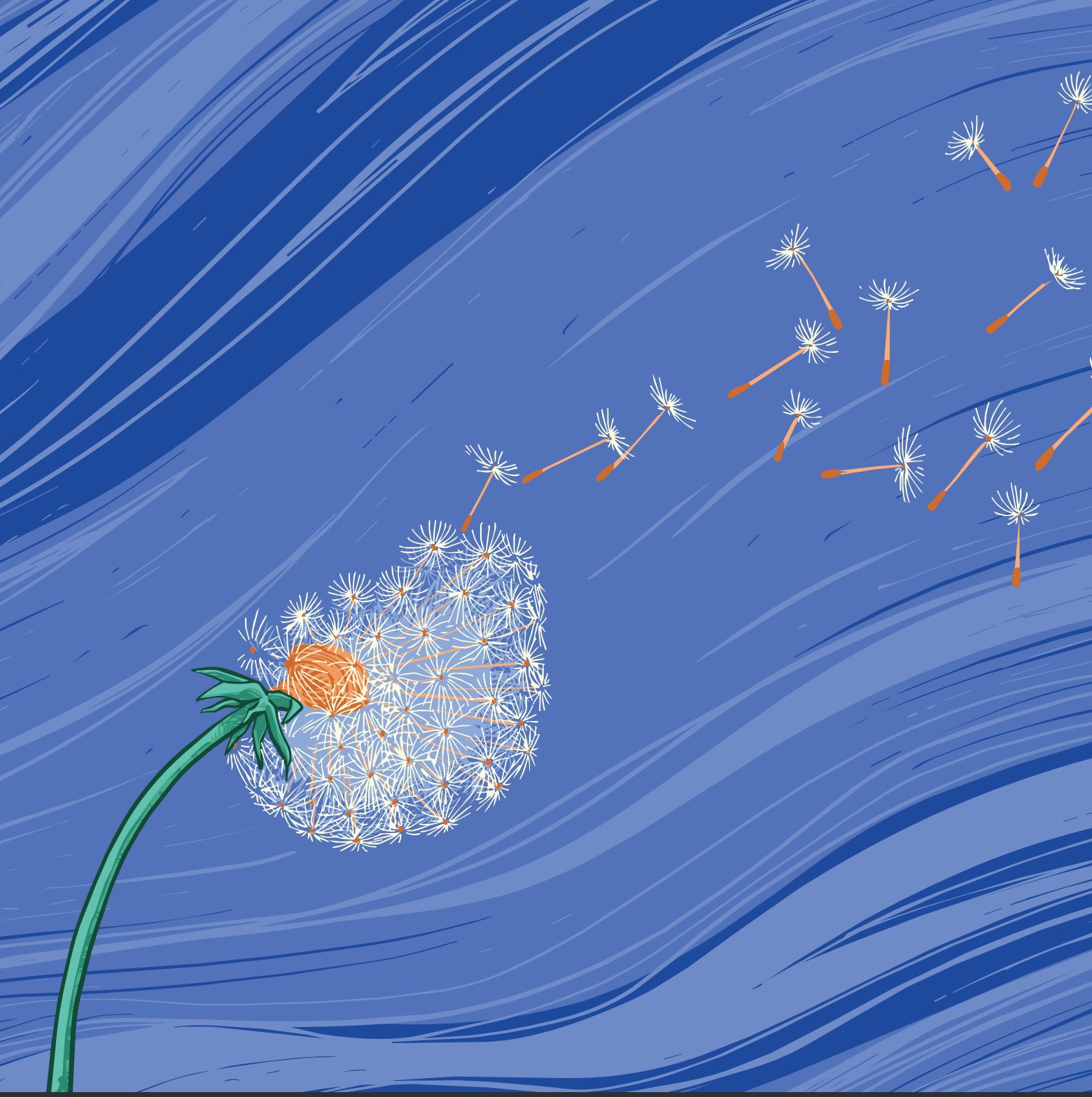

KICK STARTER

DID YOU KNOW?

The Greek language was the first writing system **to use vowels** in their alphabet.[19]

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These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

1
MEETING NEEDS

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **WHEN HAVE YOU RECEIVED NEWS THAT CAUSED YOU TO CELEBRATE AFTER YOU HEARD IT?**
- **CAN YOU REMEMBER A TIME WHEN YOU HEARD THAT SOMEONE WAS IN NEED OF HELP? HOW DID YOU RESPOND?**
- **HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE A PART OF MEETING SOMEONE'S NEED?**

Despite persecution in the early church that caused believers to scatter, the gospel continued to spread. This news would encourage the disciples as more Gentiles came to faith in Jesus. Today we will see how the disciples ministered to the growing church by rejoicing with them, teaching them, and caring for their members' needs.

2
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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DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

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

WE'RE CALLED TO REJOICE

READ ACTS 11:19-26

HOW DID GOD USE PERSECUTION TO SPREAD THE GOSPEL? HOW DOES THIS ENCOURAGE US WHEN OUR CIRCUMSTANCES AREN'T EASY?

When persecution scattered Christians to different regions, Greek-speaking disciples began to share the gospel with Gentiles in Antioch, and many decided to follow Jesus. **By His sovereign hand, God used persecution to scatter believers, who then took the gospel to even more Gentiles and established a thriving church in Antioch. God is still in control and always at work during situations that seem disruptive to us.** We can be encouraged by the truth that God's purposes aren't hindered by our chaotic, unexpected, or painful circumstances.

CIRCLE WORDS IN THE TEXT THAT DESCRIBE BARNABAS. WHY ARE CHRISTIANS LIKE HIM NEEDED IN THE CHURCH TODAY?

Barnabas was described as a good and faithful man, full of the Holy Spirit. Think about what this simple description implied: His life was notably different, Spirit-led and faithful. He celebrated new believers in Antioch and encouraged them to devote themselves to the Lord. He recognized that these new Christians needed instruction, so he recruited Saul to help teach and equip them. Barnabas selflessly and lovingly built up this group of believers for a whole year. **The church needs believers like Barnabas—joyful, willing to disciple new believers, and ready to follow the Lord wherever He is working.**

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?

Do you remember the excitement you felt when you first put your faith in Christ? This feeling is more than just a spiritual high; it's realizing you've been saved from spiritual death and judgment for new life and freedom! We get to share in that same joy when other people trust in Jesus! Can you imagine how the Lord celebrates when sinners come to Him for salvation—when even *one* lost person is found? In the parable of the prodigal son, a loving father celebrated and threw an over-the-top party when his long-lost son came home; our Father in heaven rejoices over us in this way (Luke 15:11-24). We can rejoice with Him when people are adopted into His family, no longer slaves to sin but coheirs with Christ (Gal. 4:4-7). **Our role doesn't stop with celebration; in fact, what we do in the coming weeks and years matters greatly. We're called to disciple our new brothers and sisters—to walk with them, studying Scripture together and showing them how to live as new creations, encouraging and building each other up (1 Thess. 5:11).** We use the gifts God has given us to serve others, to strengthen the church, and to invite others to know Jesus.

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WE'RE CALLED TO MEET NEEDS

READ 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?

Like our churches today, the members of the church in Antioch had different resources. Some people may have been wealthy and could afford to send a large sum of money to the church in Jerusalem, while others may have been able to give a small amount. Regardless of how much each person had, each disciple chose to give from what was available. The early church was characterized by its generosity. Believers often sold their possessions and property to meet the needs of others (Acts 2:45; 4:34-35). **We must ask if we model the same generosity by providing for our brothers and sisters in Christ who are in need. We give out of what we have, not comparing what we give to what others give.**

WHAT KEEPS US FROM BEING GENEROUS? WHAT IS AT THE ROOT OF OUR UNWILLINGNESS TO GIVE TO OTHERS?

Scripture teaches that we should humbly consider others as more important than ourselves and be more concerned with their needs than our own (Phil. 2:3-4), trusting God to give us everything we need. **Each of us is tempted to be selfish with what we have: We worry that we won't have enough for ourselves if we give too much away and often cherish our comfort over other people's needs. Honestly, we grip tightly what's ours because we sometimes don't trust God to provide for us.** Jesus demonstrated what it looked like to put others' needs before His own: He humbled Himself, took on flesh, became a servant, and gave His life to save us (Phil. 2:5-8). What a beautiful example for us to follow.

WHAT KEEPS OUR GROUP FROM EXPERIENCING UNITY? HOW CAN WE PRACTICE UNITY IN OUR CHURCH?

We don't always follow Jesus's example in our relationships with other believers. Jesus opened His arms to all who desired to come to Him. He didn't look down on others because of ethnicity, nationality, gender, or level of wealth—or even sin—but called everyone to faith. We should aim to treat others the same way Jesus did. Are we ignoring people who are shy? Are we shunning people we know partied the night before? Are we gossiping about someone's public sin, forgetting we've sinned too? **We're often the cause of division, but Jesus desires unity between believers through the Spirit (Eph. 4:3).** How? We resolve conflicts quickly; focus on sharing the gospel; and show the love, patience, and forgiveness Jesus has shown us (Col. 3:13-14).

WRAP-UP

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

We have a special responsibility to care for other believers (Gal. 6:10). If we can meet other's needs but withhold compassion from them, then we aren't showing them God's love (1 John 3:17). Like the disciples in Antioch who gave according to their ability, each of us has something we can use to help meet others' needs. Do you have time to spend with someone who is lonely or could use help around the house? Could you encourage or pray with someone who is struggling? Do you have the passion to advocate for justice where some mistreatment is occurring? Maybe you have the influence to bring people together to start a ministry project or collect money for someone in need. Maybe you just need to sit with someone who always sits alone. **Whatever you have to offer, give it; God can use it to bless believers around you. We have the amazing privilege and responsibility of being the Lord's instruments of love and provision to the body.**

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