10

THE SON HAS RISEN

LEADER GUIDE



theGOSPELPROJECT

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GOD'S WORD FOR YOU

A SUMMARY OF THE BIBLE

In the beginning, the all-powerful, personal God created the universe. This God created human beings in His image to live joyfully in His presence, in humble submission to His gracious authority. But all of us have rebelled against God and, in consequence, must suffer the punishment of our rebellion: physical death and the wrath of God.

Thankfully, God initiated a rescue plan, which began with His choosing the nation of Israel to display His glory in a fallen world. The Bible describes how God acted mightily on Israel's behalf, rescuing His people from slavery and then giving them His holy law. But God's people—like all of us—failed to rightly reflect the glory of God.

Then, in the fullness of time, in the person of Jesus Christ, God Himself came to renew the world and to restore His people. Jesus perfectly obeyed the law given to Israel. Though innocent, He suffered the consequences of human rebellion by His death on a cross. But three days later, God raised Him from the dead.

Now the church of Jesus Christ has been commissioned by God to take the news of Christ's work to the world. Empowered by God's Spirit, the church calls all people everywhere to repent of sin and to trust in Christ alone for our forgiveness. By God's grace in Christ, repentance and faith restores our relationship with God and results in a life of ongoing transformation.

The Bible promises that Jesus Christ will return to this earth as the conquering King. Only those who live in repentant faith in Christ will escape God's judgment and live joyfully in God's presence for all eternity. God's message is the same to all of us: repent and believe, before it is too late. Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe with your heart that God raised Him from the dead, and you will be saved.

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THE EDITOR

We have reached the climax, the main event of the story. Throughout Scripture, we have seen humanity's rebellion—our selfishness, our tendency to be swayed toward other gods. Yet time and time again, God forgave and relented and showed Himself consistently faithful to His people despite our unfaithfulness. He even provided a sacrificial system so that humanity's sins could be atoned for, forgiven, and wiped clean. But our sinful ways continued and there was no sure way that we would or could remain faithful.

God knew that. God knew of our weakness, our idleness, our tendency to give in to temptation. But He already had a plan in motion. A plan for His Son to be the final sacrifice.

Jesus came on the scene, fulfilling every messianic prophecy. We have been waiting for this moment since Genesis 3:15, where God cursed the serpent and told him, "He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel." Jesus fulfilled this. He allowed Himself to be crucified. But then He rose again, having the ultimate victory over sin, Satan, and death. He ascended to heaven after commissioning His disciples to continue the mission to share the gospel and grow the kingdom of God.

This is good news! Jesus died and rose again for us to be forgiven and gain salvation that we may be adopted into His family. He sealed it with the Holy Spirit, whom He sent to empower believers. He has equipped us with all we need to obey Him and live as kingdom people until His return. May we be faithful to Christ as He is faithful to us! To God be the glory!

Y Bonesteele
Team Leader
The Gospel Project for Adults



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MOVING PEOPLE FORWARD IN THEIR FAITH

By G. Dwayne McCrary

Imagine a novice hiker setting out on a trail that leads to a mountain summit. The trail starts wide, but as the hiker ascends, it becomes steeper, rocky, and hidden under early-season snow. At a fork in the path, he realizes the hike is more than he can handle. What he needs is a seasoned hiker who has climbed up this path before—an experienced hiker to walk alongside the novice, give tips and warnings of loose rocks, and encourage every step.

Jesus taught as He walked with people, asking probing and personal questions, clearing up misunderstandings, and offering an example of what it looks like to follow God. Today, helping others grow in faith means following that same pattern: getting personal, making it practical, and setting an example.

GETTING PERSONAL

The experienced hiker would need to engage with the novice hiker to keep both of them moving. He could not ignore the novice or view him as an obstacle in his way. As group leaders, we have a list of people assigned to us, and we must see them as the sheep we are called to lead, including novices to the group or those who rarely attend. To shepherd these individuals well, we must get to know them, which requires intentionally engaging with them. We can invite them to tell their stories, listening and making mental notes of clues about their spiritual journey and needs. This requires us to visit with them outside the normal group time. We may need to keep a notebook (digital or paper) to record important tidbits so we can be better shepherds.



We might look at our assigned ministry list and conclude that there are too many names to get to know everyone personally. We can organize our classes so others can carry that load, but ultimately, those in our groups expect us to know them on a personal level. If we can't do that, we may need to consider enlisting an apprentice so we can create two smaller groups to better serve everyone.

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Following Jesus is not always easy, and we as leaders need to be honest about the challenges. Yet the challenging days may be the most fruitful for showing others what it looks like to follow Jesus regardless.

MAKING IT PRACTICAL

Remember our hikers? The novice hiker required the help of the experienced hiker to teach him what he needed to know and how to put it into practice so they could both reach the summit safely. Application was the point. The experienced hiker could share information about the mountain, intriguing stories about others who had gotten lost on the trail but survived in a cave overnight, or details about the reasons some rocks are more treacherous than others. But what the novice hiker ultimately needed was practical instruction to overcome the treacherous terrain.

As teachers, our lives may be more important to those in our groups than what we say when we teach.

We can approach teaching as an opportunity to dazzle with our knowledge or to help those in our groups put into practice critical spiritual principles. Encouraging some basic spiritual disciplines, such as biblically informed prayer and daily Bible reading, could be a start. We can provide resources and tools to help them with these disciplines, showing them how to use those resources and tools so they can pray and read the Bible for themselves.

SETTING AN EXAMPLE

The experienced hiker needed to show the novice where to step and where not to, setting an example. As teachers, our lives may be more important to those in our groups than what we say when we teach. We set the standard by sharing our lives with them. We can share the challenges we have faced and those we are navigating now. We can show them what it looks like to fail, find forgiveness in the gospel, and take the next step back onto the path.

Following Jesus is not always easy, and we as leaders need to be honest about the challenges. Yet the challenging days may be the most fruitful for showing others what it looks like to follow Jesus regardless.

G. Dwayne McCrary is the manager of Adult Ongoing Bible studies at Lifeway.

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SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

The Gospel Project for Adults aspires to point to the gospel of Jesus Christ through weekly group Bible studies and additional resources that show how God's plan of redemption unfolds throughout all of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation. This curriculum provides theological yet practical studies that immerse your group in the STORY of the gospel, helping to develop a gospel CULTURE that leads to gospel MISSION.

GOSPEL STORY

Our aim is to help people see the storyline of Scripture, the thread from the beginning to end, that weaves God's plan to rescue and redeem His creation through His Son, Jesus Christ.

GOSPEL CULTURE

Our hope is that the message of the gospel saturates our understanding of Christ, increasing our joy in Him, helping doubters become believers who become declarers of the gospel.

GOSPEL MISSION

Our desire is to empower believers to live on mission, declaring the good news of the gospel in word and deed for God's glory and the growth of His kingdom.

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YEAR 1

VOL 01:
CREATION AND COVENANT

(Genesis; Job)
Fall 2024
Unit 01: Foundations
Unit 02: God's Promises
Unit 03: Struggles of Faith

VOL 02:
LAW AND LIFE

(Exodus–Deuteronomy)
Winter 2024–25
Unit 04: God's Miraculous Work
Unit 05: God's Character
Unit 06: Humanity's Selfishness

VOL 03:
LAND AND LOSS

(Joshua–1 Samuel)
Spring 2025
Unit 07: God Is for His People
Unit 08: God Delivers His People
Unit 09: God Cares for His People

VOL 04:
FOOLISHNESS AND WISDOM

(1 Samuel–1 Kings; Wisdom Literature)
Summer 2025
Unit 10: The Foolishness of God's People
Unit 11: Everything Belongs to the Lord
Unit 12: The Need for Wisdom

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YEAR 2

VOL 05:
DIVISION AND DEFIANCE

(1 Kings–2 Chronicles; The Prophets)
Fall 2025
Unit 13: Divisions
Unit 14: Renewal
Unit 15: Decline

VOL 06:
PROPHETS AND PROVISION

(The Prophets; Ezra–Esther)
Winter 2025–26
Unit 16: God in the Exile
Unit 17: God in the Restoration
Unit 18: God in the Return

VOL 07:
THE SON HAS COME

(The Gospels)
Spring 2026
Unit 19: The Arrival
Unit 20: The Preparation
Unit 21: The Ministry

VOL 08:
THE SON HAS AUTHORITY

(The Gospels)
Summer 2026
Unit 22: Responses to Jesus
Unit 23: The Way of Jesus
Unit 24: The Teachings of Jesus

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YEAR 3

VOL 09:
THE SON HAS TRUTH

(The Gospels)
Fall 2026
Unit 25: The Truth of His Power
Unit 26: The Truth of His Actions
Unit 27: The Truth of His Kingdom

VOL 10:
THE SON HAS RISEN

(The Gospels; Acts)
Winter 2026–27
Unit 28: The Final Days
Unit 29: Post-Resurrection
Unit 30: The Gospel Spreads

VOL 11:
THE CHURCH HAS A MISSION

(Acts; The Epistles)
Spring 2027
Unit 31: Sharing Truths of the Mission
Unit 32: Living Out the Mission
Unit 33: Christ Focuses Our Mission

VOL 12:
THE CHURCH HAS A FUTURE

(The Epistles; Revelation)
Summer 2027
Unit 34: We Are in Christ
Unit 35: We Are Citizens of Heaven
Unit 36: Jesus

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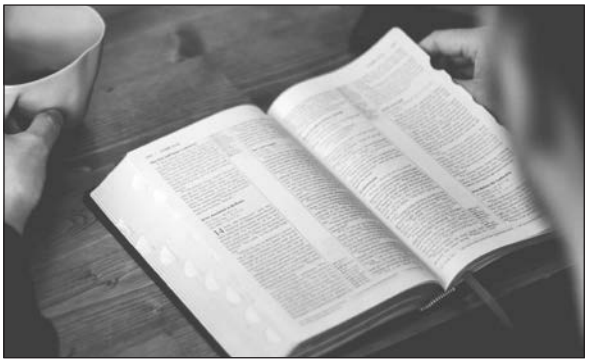
HOW TO USE THE LEADER GUIDE

The Leader Guide is an important tool in your personal and group experience with The Gospel Project for Adults. Here's how to make the most of your time with it:

1) READ THE WORD DAILY

Begin each week by reading the Scriptures according to the Daily Readings. These Bible readings will help you mentally and spiritually prepare for the group experience each week while also building healthy Bible study habits for personal growth. The daily readings will help you understand the context of the Bible story for each week's session and fill in the gaps between sessions. The weekly psalm reading will help you think worshipfully and prayerfully about the story's place in the greater redemptive narrative of the Bible. And the timeline will give you a visual perspective so you can place the Bible story in the larger context of the Bible's storyline.





- ***Daily Readings***
- ***Chronological Timeline***

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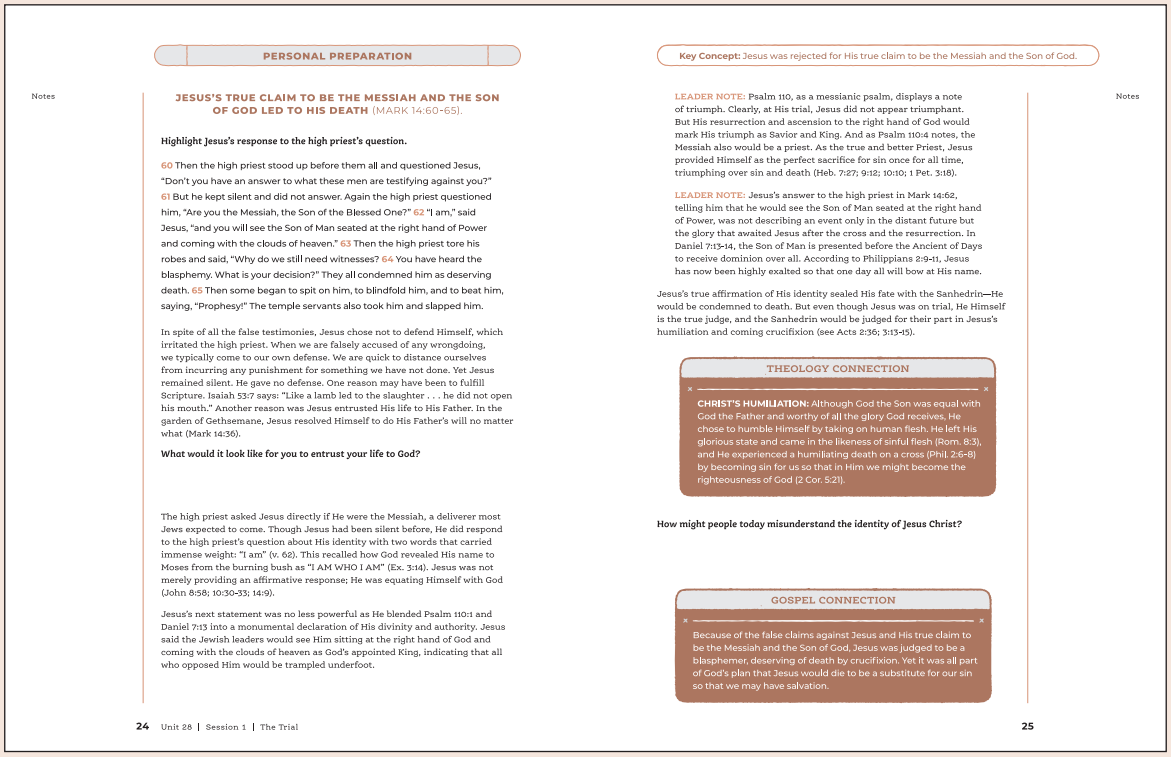
2) STUDY FOR PERSONAL PREPARATION

The Personal Preparation section contains the Scripture passages that will guide you and your group to prepare for Bible study during the week before group time begins. A Bible study prompt will help you engage with the Scripture passage, but encourage your group to do more than what's asked in the prompt. Space is provided for you and your group to add notes and questions and markings that will help you study the passage more deeply and see any nuances about the words and phrases of the Scripture provided. In addition to a brief commentary with thought-provoking questions to help you and your group dig deeper into the text, leader notes will provide you with additional nuggets for understanding the Scriptures. Use this Personal Preparation to experience what your group is experiencing as they study the week prior. Consider what questions, thoughts, or challenges they might have while engaging with the Scripture passages.

• **Scripture** • **Commentary** • **Questions**



PERSONAL PREPARATION

Notes

JESUS'S TRUE CLAIM TO BE THE MESSIAH AND THE SON OF GOD LED TO HIS DEATH (MARK 14:60-65).

Highlight Jesus's response to the high priest's question.

60 Then the high priest stood up before them all and questioned Jesus,
"Don't you have an answer to what these men are testifying against you?"
61 But he kept silent and did not answer. Again the high priest questioned
him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" 62 "I am," said
Jesus, "and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power
and coming with the clouds of heaven." 63 Then the high priest tore his
robes and said, "Why do we still need witnesses? 64 You have heard the
blasphemy. What is your decision?" They all condemned him as deserving
death. 65 Then some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to beat him,
saying, "Prophesy!" The temple servants also took him and slapped him.

In spite of all the false testimonies, Jesus chose not to defend Himself, which irritated the high priest. When we are falsely accused of any wrongdoing, we typically come to our own defense. We are quick to distance ourselves from incurring any punishment for something we have not done. Yet Jesus remained silent. He gave no defense. One reason may have been to fulfill Scripture. Isaiah 53:7 says: "Like a lamb led to the slaughter . . . he did not open his mouth." Another reason was Jesus entrusted His life to His Father. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus resolved Himself to do His Father's will no matter what (Mark 14:36).

What would it look like for you to entrust your life to God?

The high priest asked Jesus directly if He were the Messiah, a deliverer most Jews expected to come. Though Jesus had been silent before, He did respond to the high priest's question about His identity with two words that carried immense weight: "I am" (v. 62). This recalled how God revealed His name to Moses from the burning bush as "I AM WHO I AM" (Ex. 3:14). Jesus was not merely providing an affirmative response; He was equating Himself with God (John 8:58; 10:30-33; 14:9).

Jesus's next statement was no less powerful as He blended Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13 into a monumental declaration of His divinity and authority. Jesus said the Jewish leaders would see Him sitting at the right hand of God and coming with the clouds of heaven as God's appointed King, indicating that all who opposed Him would be trampled underfoot.

Key Concept: Jesus was rejected for His true claim to be the Messiah and the Son of God.

Notes

LEADER NOTE: Psalm 110, as a messianic psalm, displays a note of triumph. Clearly, at His trial, Jesus did not appear triumphant. But His resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God would mark His triumph as Savior and King. And as Psalm 110:4 notes, the Messiah also would be a priest. As the true and better Priest, Jesus provided Himself as the perfect sacrifice for sin once for all time, triumphing over sin and death (Heb. 7:27; 9:12; 10:10; 1 Pet. 3:18).

LEADER NOTE: Jesus's answer to the high priest in Mark 14:62, telling him that he would see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, was not describing an event only in the distant future but the glory that awaited Jesus after the cross and the resurrection. In Daniel 7:13-14, the Son of Man is presented before the Ancient of Days to receive dominion over all. According to Philippians 2:9-11, Jesus has now been highly exalted so that one day all will bow at His name.

Jesus's true affirmation of His identity sealed His fate with the Sanhedrin—He would be condemned to death. But even though Jesus was on trial, He Himself is the true judge, and the Sanhedrin would be judged for their part in Jesus's humiliation and coming crucifixion (see Acts 2:36; 3:13-15).

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), and 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).

How might people today misunderstand the identity of Jesus Christ?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Because of the false claims against Jesus and His true claim to be the Messiah and the Son of God, Jesus was judged to be a blasphemer, deserving of death by crucifixion. Yet it was all part of God's plan that Jesus would die to be a substitute for our sin so that we may have salvation.

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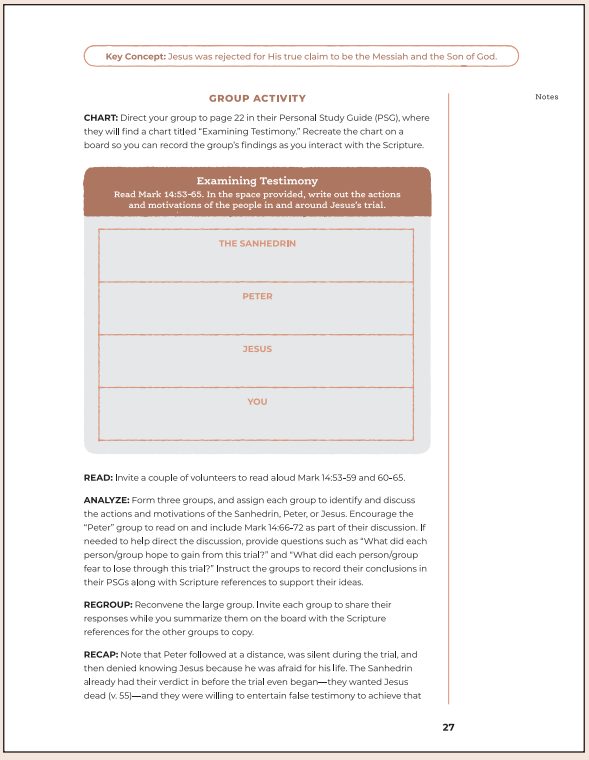
3) DIRECT THE GROUP EXPERIENCE

The Group Experience for each session includes an activity and interactive questions designed to be used in the group context to engage your group in active learning. The personal prep you and your group put into the days leading up to your group time will provide a richer discussion and more thoughtful theological applications to mutually encourage each other during your group time. The first page of the Group Experience will help you engage your group members as they arrive. Dialogue suggestions describe the context, transitions, and a recap of Bible readings or previous sessions to remind your group of what has already been studied or give a framework for where the lesson is heading. The second page gives a visual representation of the activity from the Personal Study Guide. A teaching outline helps guide your members through the activity and the debrief discussion.



Key Concept: Jesus was rejected for His true claim to be the Messiah and the Son of God.

GROUP ACTIVITY

Notes

CHART: Direct your group to page 22 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a chart titled "Examining Testimony." Recreate the chart on a board so you can record the group's findings as you interact with the Scripture.

Examining Testimony

Read Mark 14:53-65. In the space provided, write out the actions and motivations of the people in and around Jesus's trial.

THE SANHEDRIN
PETER
JESUS
YOU

READ: Invite a couple of volunteers to read aloud Mark 14:53-59 and 60-65.

ANALYZE: Form three groups, and assign each group to identify and discuss the actions and motivations of the Sanhedrin, Peter, or Jesus. Encourage the "Peter" group to read on and include Mark 14:66-72 as part of their discussion. If needed to help direct the discussion, provide questions such as "What did each person/group hope to gain from this trial?" and "What did each person/group fear to lose through this trial?" Instruct the groups to record their conclusions in their PSGs along with Scripture references to support their ideas.

REGROUP: Reconvene the large group. Invite each group to share their responses while you summarize them on the board with the Scripture references for the other groups to copy.

RECAP: Note that Peter followed at a distance, was silent during the trial, and then denied knowing Jesus because he was afraid for his life. The Sanhedrin already had their verdict in before the trial even began—they wanted Jesus dead (v. 55)—and they were willing to entertain false testimony to achieve that

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- **Group Activity**
- **Interactive Questions**
- **Theological Applications**

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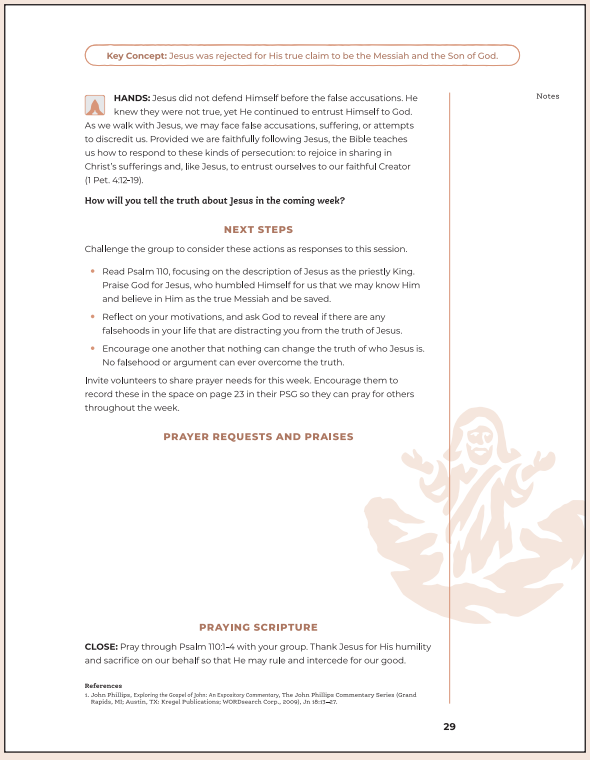
4) TAKE THE NEXT STEPS

After the recap of the activity, help your group take the next steps with the day's Scripture lesson by walking them through the Head, Heart, and Hands applications. Invite volunteers to share and discuss answers to the questions for their mutual benefit. Then take prayer requests and praises as you wrap up your group time. Space is provided to jot those down in your guide for prayer during the following week. And finally, guide your group to read and pray through the designated psalm, focusing your thoughts and words once more upon God's Word as you conclude the session.



Key Concept: Jesus was rejected for His true claim to be the Messiah and the Son of God.

Notes

HANDS: Jesus did not defend Himself before the false accusations. He knew they were not true, yet He continued to entrust Himself to God. As we walk with Jesus, we may face false accusations, suffering, or attempts to discredit us. Provided we are faithfully following Jesus, the Bible teaches us how to respond to these kinds of persecution: to rejoice in sharing in Christ's sufferings and, like Jesus, to entrust ourselves to our faithful Creator (1 Pet. 4:12–19).

How will you tell the truth about Jesus in the coming week?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Read Psalm 110, focusing on the description of Jesus as the priestly King. Praise God for Jesus, who humbled Himself for us that we may know Him and believe in Him as the true Messiah and be saved.
- Reflect on your motivations, and ask God to reveal if there are any falsehoods in your life that are distracting you from the truth of Jesus.
- Encourage one another that nothing can change the truth of who Jesus is. No falsehood or argument can ever overcome the truth.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 23 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 110:1–4 with your group. Thank Jesus for His humility and sacrifice on our behalf so that He may rule and intercede for our good.

References

1. John Phillips, Exploring the Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI; Austin, TX: Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp., 2009), Jn 18:13–27.

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- **Application Questions**
- **Scripture-Based Prayer**
- **Prayer Requests**

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THE SON HAS RISEN

By David Roach

It was the greatest comeback in NFL playoff history. On January 3, 1993, the visiting Houston Oilers faced the Buffalo Bills in an AFC Wild Card game. In the first half, the Oilers steamrolled the hapless Bills, mounting a 28–3 halftime lead. It got worse on the Bills' opening possession of the second half when an interception led to another Oilers touchdown: 35–3. At that point a Houston radio announcer famously said: "The lights are on here at Rich Stadium. They've been on since this morning. You could pretty much turn them out on the Bills right now."

He was wrong. Buffalo's backup quarterback Frank Reich, filling in for injured future-Hall-of-Famer Jim Kelly, led the Bills to outscore Houston 35–3 in the remainder of the second half, sending the game into overtime. Buffalo fans who had previously left the game in disgust swarmed back into the stadium. In overtime, a 32-yard field goal gave Buffalo the win: 41–38. The atmosphere was electric.[1]

As exciting as that comeback was, an even greater one occurred in Jerusalem two thousand years ago. Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, seemed defeated. Shamed and crucified, His dead body was laid in a tomb. But three days later, He emerged alive, igniting a movement of His followers that has swelled to billions worldwide. Now that's a comeback!

THE SON

Three years of public ministry in Judea and Galilee left Jewish leaders furious at Jesus. He drew the popularity they craved, so they rejected Jesus and invented false claims about Him to accuse Him (Mark 14:53-59). But what finally led them to deem Him deserving of death was His true claim to be the Messiah and the Son of God (vv. 60-65).

Jewish leaders delivered Jesus to the Roman governor, Pilate, who sentenced Him to death. After nailing Him to a wooden cross, nonbelievers mocked Jesus because they thought death would prove His claims false (15:29-32). But His death had a purpose they failed to recognize: Jesus died in the place of sinners to reconcile us to God and give us direct access to Him (vv. 33-39). That triumph, however, was not immediately evident. The cause of Jesus seemed lost.

The comeback began three days later when Jesus rose from the grave. A group of women learned the news first when they arrived at His tomb Easter morning to anoint His body with spices. An angel told them Jesus had risen (Matt. 28:6). Then Jesus revealed Himself to the women to reassure them. He commanded them to share the news of His resurrection with His disciples (vv. 9-10).

The many witnesses to Jesus after His resurrection reveal the truth of His identity as the Son of God and the Savior of the world.

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Because Jesus died, rose again, and sent us as His witnesses, we trust Him, live for Him, and share His gospel with others. His great comeback leads to our own.

Those women were not the only ones to see Jesus alive. Later that day, He appeared to His disciples, except for Thomas, who did not believe their good news that Jesus was alive. A week later, He appeared to them again, and Thomas saw for himself that Jesus truly is alive (John 20:19-29). The many witnesses to Jesus after His resurrection reveal the truth of His identity as the Son of God and the Savior of the world.

THE SON HAS RISEN

If the story ended there, it still would be the greatest comeback in history. But that was only part one of the comeback. Part two saw Jesus continue His work through His followers. After appearing on earth to them for forty days, He promised they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit and receive power. Then they were to spread the good news of Jesus to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:4-8). Following that pronouncement, Jesus ascended back to heaven (v. 9). The anticipated Holy Spirit arrived on a Jewish holiday called Pentecost (2:1-6). The Spirit—who, like Jesus and the Father, is fully divine—came to live within each believer. He empowered believers for works of service and emboldened them to speak the gospel (2:14-21).

About three thousand people placed their faith in Jesus at Pentecost (2:41). From that day forward, God worked through His people daily to glorify Himself and spread the gospel. Peter and John healed a lame man in Jesus's name, which led to an opportunity for proclaiming Jesus's death and resurrection (3:1-26).

Yet witnessing about Jesus was not easy. The more Jesus's disciples shared about Him, the more Jewish leaders persecuted them, just as they persecuted Jesus. Peter and John were arrested for healing and preaching in Jesus's name (4:1-22). Later, all the apostles were arrested and thrown in a public jail (5:18). But an angel freed them, and they remained steadfast in obedience to Christ, continuing to spread the message of redemption and forgiveness (5:19-32).

Persecution climaxed with the martyrdom of a brave evangelist named Stephen (Acts 6–7). God gave Stephen wisdom through His Spirit to endure persecution. Stephen demonstrated that believers need not fear death, for we know Jesus and heaven await us. But even the persecution of the early church only led to its growth as believers took the gospel wherever they scattered (8:1-4).

Because Jesus died, rose again, and sent us as His witnesses, we trust Him, live for Him, and share His gospel with others. His great comeback leads to our own. We were broken sinners, but through faith in Jesus, crucified and raised, now we are children of God and ambassadors of the King.

1. Timothy W. Smith, "PRO FOOTBALL: Bills and Eagles Turn Mountains Into Molehill; Buffalo Erases 32-Point Deficit," *New York Times*, Jan. 4, 1994, accessed Apr. 28, 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/1993/01/04/sports/pro-football-bills-eagles-turn-mountains-into-molehill-buffalo-erases-32-point.html.

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UNIT 28
THE FINAL DAYS

MATTHEW; MARK; JOHN

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Memory Verses

"Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and
look at my hands. Reach out your hand and
put it into my side. Don't be faithless, but believe.'
Thomas responded to him, 'My Lord and my God!'
Jesus said, 'Because you have seen me,
you have believed. Blessed are
those who have not seen and yet believe.'"

—John 20:27-29

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THE TRIAL

CORE PASSAGE: MARK 14:53-65

CONTEXT

Soon after instituting the Lord's Supper with His disciples, Jesus went out to pray in the garden of Gethsemane, where He was betrayed by Judas and delivered over to be killed. Jesus had predicted His betrayal on multiple occasions, so His disciples should not have been caught off guard, but still they were, and they abandoned Jesus in their fear. Jesus was betrayed, arrested, and initially tried by the Jewish leaders during the night. A real trial should have taken place during the daytime, but deception operates in the dark.

KEY CONCEPT

Jesus was rejected for His true claim to be the Messiah and the Son of God.

As you examine Mark 14:53-65:

- Note that those who reject Jesus reject the truth.
- Recognize that Jesus was branded a blasphemer because He spoke the truth about His identity.

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TIMELINE

- Jesus's Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem (Mark 11:1-11)
- Jesus Foretells the Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple (Mark 13:1-37)
- Jesus Institutes the Lord's Supper (Mark 14:12-26)
- Jesus Is Betrayed by Judas and Abandoned by the Disciples (Mark 14:27-52)
- **SESSION STUDY: Jesus Is Tried Before the Sanhedrin and Pilate (Mark 14:53–15:15)**
- Jesus Is Crucified and Buried (Mark 15:16-47)

Daily Readings

- ☐ **Day 1:** Mark 14:27-52
- ☐ **Day 2:** Mark 14:53–15:5
- ☐ **Day 3:** Matthew 26:31–27:14
- ☐ **Day 4:** Luke 22:31–23:12
- ☐ **Day 5:** John 18:1-38
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 110

Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

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Notes

SCAN ME

Bonus Content

Scan this QR code to learn more about the key figures in Jesus's trial.

JESUS SUFFERED REJECTION BECAUSE PEOPLE CHOSE TO DENY THE TRUTH (MARK 14:53-59).

Circle all the phrases that include the word "testimony" in this passage.

53 They led Jesus away to the high priest, and all the chief priests, the
elders, and the scribes assembled. 54 Peter followed him at a distance, right
into the high priest's courtyard. He was sitting with the servants, warming
himself by the fire. 55 The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were
looking for testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they could
not find any. 56 For many were giving false testimony against him, and
the testimonies did not agree. 57 Some stood up and gave false testimony
against him, stating, 58 "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple made
with human hands, and in three days I will build another not made by
hands.'" 59 Yet their testimony did not agree even on this.

Jesus had predicted that He would be delivered over to the Jewish leaders (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:32-34), and it happened. One of Jesus's own disciples, Judas Iscariot, betrayed Him to the Jewish leaders, who were seeking a way to destroy Him (11:18). Jesus then was put on trial by the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council under the leadership of the high priest. Trials should be concerned with finding the truth. Jesus's trial, however, focused on just the opposite. Mark used the word "testimony" five times in this passage, but the false witnesses who came forward to accuse Jesus could not keep their stories straight (14:56-59).

The charge that Jesus claimed He would destroy the temple in three days could not be corroborated either. Jesus had spoken to His own disciples about the future destruction of the temple in Mark 13, which would be destroyed in AD 70, so Judas might have shared this information with the Jewish leaders. And Jesus had made a similar claim in John 2:19, though not about destroying the temple Himself because He was talking about the temple of His body being raised from the dead (vv. 21-22). Jesus taught that He was greater than the temple (Matt. 12:6) because in Him, God's full presence dwelt among His people.

> **LEADER NOTE:** Jewish law required multiple witnesses to charge anyone with a crime (see Deut. 19:15). All the Jewish leaders were present at Jesus's trial, which would have been no less than seventy men along with the high priest. Yet even with that many men assembled, they could not get two testimonies to agree. Clearly the purpose of the trial was not to discern whether Jesus was innocent but to manufacture a way to have Him killed.

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Why is there wisdom in requiring multiple witnesses before passing judgment?

Not only was Jesus being rejected by the Jewish leaders, He also suffered a rejection by Peter. This most confident disciple who vowed never to deny Jesus (Mark 14:29,31) had "deserted" his Lord and was now following "at a distance" (vv. 50,54). Peter then sat with "the servants," who may have formed the mob that arrested Jesus (vv. 43-47). Furthermore, in the cool hours before daybreak, Peter was "warming himself by the fire" (v. 54). This is a striking scene. While Peter was concerned with personal comfort, his Lord was enduring a false trial.

> **LEADER NOTE:** The contrast in Peter's words before Jesus's arrest and his actions afterward is striking. Earlier, Peter said, "Even if everyone falls away, I will not" (v. 29). Now, Peter's distance was telling. He acted capable and brave, but he failed on multiple accounts. He could not stay awake to pray (v. 37), ran when Jesus was arrested (v. 50), and kept his distance instead of testifying in Jesus's defense (v. 54). Peter's shortcomings teach us to have no confidence in the flesh or our own strength.

How might the desire for personal comfort prevent you from faithfully following Jesus?

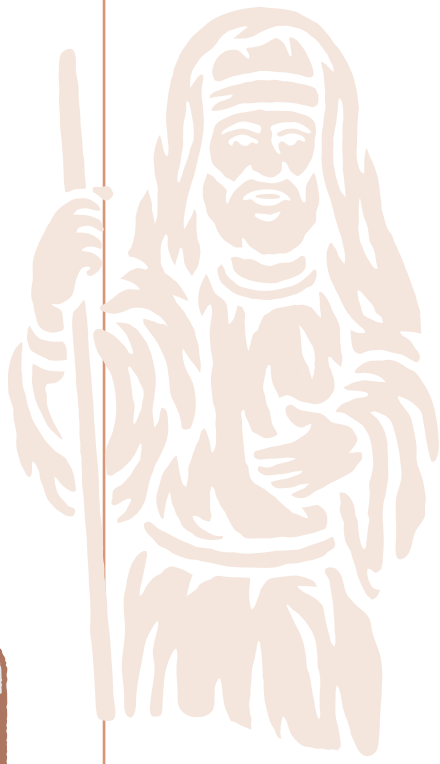

FIGURE STUDY

PETER: Simon, son of Jonah and brother of the apostle Andrew, was given the name Peter by Jesus (Matt. 16:18). Peter often was a study in contrasts. He walked on water in faith but sank when he took his eyes off Jesus (14:28-31). He confessed Jesus as the Messiah (16:16) but later denied knowing Him (Mark 14:71). Following Jesus's resurrection, the Holy Spirit emboldened Peter to proclaim Christ openly (Acts 2). Peter exemplifies that our past does not have to define our future. God can still use us.

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Notes

JESUS'S TRUE CLAIM TO BE THE MESSIAH AND THE SON OF GOD LED TO HIS DEATH (MARK 14:60-65).

Highlight Jesus's response to the high priest's question.

60 Then the high priest stood up before them all and questioned Jesus,
"Don't you have an answer to what these men are testifying against you?"
61 But he kept silent and did not answer. Again the high priest questioned
him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" 62 "I am," said
Jesus, "and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power
and coming with the clouds of heaven." 63 Then the high priest tore his
robes and said, "Why do we still need witnesses? 64 You have heard the
blasphemy. What is your decision?" They all condemned him as deserving
death. 65 Then some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to beat him,
saying, "Prophesy!" The temple servants also took him and slapped him.

In spite of all the false testimonies, Jesus chose not to defend Himself, which irritated the high priest. When we are falsely accused of any wrongdoing, we typically come to our own defense. We are quick to distance ourselves from incurring any punishment for something we have not done. Yet Jesus remained silent. He gave no defense. One reason may have been to fulfill Scripture. Isaiah 53:7 says: "Like a lamb led to the slaughter . . . he did not open his mouth." Another reason was Jesus entrusted His life to His Father. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus resolved Himself to do His Father's will no matter what (Mark 14:36).

What would it look like for you to entrust your life to God?

The high priest asked Jesus directly if He were the Messiah, a deliverer most Jews expected to come. Though Jesus had been silent before, He did respond to the high priest's question about His identity with two words that carried immense weight: "I am" (v. 62). This recalled how God revealed His name to Moses from the burning bush as "I AM WHO I AM" (Ex. 3:14). Jesus was not merely providing an affirmative response; He was equating Himself with God (John 8:58; 10:30-33; 14:9).

Jesus's next statement was no less powerful as He blended Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13 into a monumental declaration of His divinity and authority. Jesus said the Jewish leaders would see Him sitting at the right hand of God and coming with the clouds of heaven as God's appointed King, indicating that all who opposed Him would be trampled underfoot.

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LEADER NOTE: Psalm 110, as a messianic psalm, displays a note of triumph. Clearly, at His trial, Jesus did not appear triumphant. But His resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God would mark His triumph as Savior and King. And as Psalm 110:4 notes, the Messiah also would be a priest. As the true and better Priest, Jesus provided Himself as the perfect sacrifice for sin once for all time, triumphing over sin and death (Heb. 7:27; 9:12; 10:10; 1 Pet. 3:18).

LEADER NOTE: Jesus's answer to the high priest in Mark 14:62, telling him that he would see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, was not describing an event only in the distant future but the glory that awaited Jesus after the cross and the resurrection. In Daniel 7:13-14, the Son of Man is presented before the Ancient of Days to receive dominion over all. According to Philippians 2:9-11, Jesus has now been highly exalted so that one day all will bow at His name.

Jesus's true affirmation of His identity sealed His fate with the Sanhedrin—He would be condemned to death. But even though Jesus was on trial, He Himself is the true judge, and the Sanhedrin would be judged for their part in Jesus's humiliation and coming crucifixion (see Acts 2:36; 3:13-15).

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), and 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).

How might people today misunderstand the identity of Jesus Christ?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Because of the false claims against Jesus and His true claim to be the Messiah and the Son of God, Jesus was judged to be a blasphemer, deserving of death by crucifixion. Yet it was all part of God's plan that Jesus would die to be a substitute for our sin so that we may have salvation.

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ARRIVAL

INTERACT: As people arrive for the group experience, begin by asking this icebreaker question: "Did the dog ever eat your homework? What was the most ridiculous lie you ever told or someone asked you to believe?"

CONTEXT

SUMMARIZE: Display **Pack Item 3: Passion Week Map** and distribute copies of **Pack Item 4: Passion Week** to help you review the events of Jesus's week leading up to His trials and crucifixion, such as the triumphal entry, His teaching on end times, and His institution of the Lord's Supper (the subjects of the last three sessions from the previous quarter). Say: "Perhaps the greatest lie of all time is that Jesus had done anything worthy of punishment. Being fully God and fully man, Jesus stands alone as the only person to live a perfect, holy, sinless life. Even the religious leaders had to acknowledge that they couldn't find any legitimate reason to arrest Jesus. They had tried to trap Him in His own words numerous times, but failed every time. And when they did arrest Him, they did so under the cover of night, away from His adoring crowds. Only when Jesus told the truth directly and plainly did they feel they were justified in carrying out their execution plan."

RECAP

ASK: What stood out to you this week in your daily readings or personal preparation about Jesus's trial?

SUMMARIZE: It may seem astonishing to us that Jesus, who was filled with truth and presented to us the very truth of God, had to endure a biased trial in which He was accused of blaspheming against God. Even those accusing Him knew they could not present an honest witness to testify and that their accusations were false. Yet Jesus willingly endured this on our behalf, choosing to accept the shame and punishment that would lead to our salvation.

TRANSITION: Today we will take a closer look at those who were involved in the trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin and examine the various testimonies, both false and true, given regarding Jesus's identity.

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Key Concept: Jesus was rejected for His true claim to be the Messiah and the Son of God.

GROUP ACTIVITY

Notes

CHART: Direct your group to page 22 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a chart titled "Examining Testimony." Recreate the chart on a board so you can record the group's findings as you interact with the Scripture.

Examining Testimony

Read Mark 14:53-65. In the space provided, write out the actions and motivations of the people in and around Jesus's trial.

THE SANHEDRIN
PETER
JESUS
YOU

READ: Invite a couple of volunteers to read aloud Mark 14:53-59 and 60-65.

ANALYZE: Form three groups, and assign each group to identify and discuss the actions and motivations of the Sanhedrin, Peter, or Jesus. Encourage the "Peter" group to read on and include Mark 14:66-72 as part of their discussion. If needed to help direct the discussion, provide questions such as "What did each person/group hope to gain from this trial?" and "What did each person/group fear to lose through this trial?" Instruct the groups to record their conclusions in their PSGs along with Scripture references to support their ideas.

REGROUP: Reconvene the large group. Invite each group to share their responses while you summarize them on the board with the Scripture references for the other groups to copy.

RECAP: Note that Peter followed at a distance, was silent during the trial, and then denied knowing Jesus because he was afraid for his life. The Sanhedrin already had their verdict in before the trial even began—they wanted Jesus dead (v. 55)—and they were willing to entertain false testimony to achieve that

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Notes

verdict because they wanted to maintain their own authority. Jesus, on the other hand, remained silent during the rounds of false testimony, only speaking clearly and truthfully about His identity when asked directly, as if under oath. Jesus's true testimony secured His death warrant with the Sanhedrin.

CONSIDER: Now ask the group to take a moment and evaluate their own testimony regarding Jesus, recording their personal reflections in their PSG.

DEBRIEF

What are some ways people today can resemble the Sanhedrin, Peter, or Jesus in their testimony about Jesus?

How can we grow in our boldness to proclaim the truth about Jesus?

SUMMARIZE

Jesus was rejected for His true claim to be the Messiah and the Son of God. Today, people still reject Jesus's claims for the same reasons the Sanhedrin rejected Him. They prefer to repeat the lie that Jesus never claimed to be the Son of God or the Messiah, or they simply chalk up His death as a political hit. As believers, we can pray for the Holy Spirit to soften the hearts of those who reject Jesus so they will understand the truth and receive it with joy, even as we pray for the Spirit's help to make us bold and truthful as we share about Jesus.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 23). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Head** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.

HEAD: We have all faced situations in which we have been tempted to bear false witness or lie. The Bible places a premium on truth and how we bear witness to the truth. In John's Gospel, at His trial before Pilate, Jesus stated: "I was born for this, and I have come into the world for this: to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice" (John 18:37).

What truths should we remember when we are tempted to lie?

HEART: Peter hung out in the courtyard while Jesus was accused of blasphemy with many false witnesses. It was not uncommon in Peter's day for someone to speak up on behalf of the accused, but Peter remained silent.[1] Fear paralyzed Peter to the point that he denied the Lord (see Mark 14:66-72). Though we might think we could do better, fear often keeps us from speaking up when an opportunity arises to present the gospel.

How can the Spirit help you take a stand for truth when you are afraid?

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HANDS: Jesus did not defend Himself before the false accusations. He knew they were not true, yet He continued to entrust Himself to God. As we walk with Jesus, we may face false accusations, suffering, or attempts to discredit us. Provided we are faithfully following Jesus, the Bible teaches us how to respond to these kinds of persecution: to rejoice in sharing in Christ's sufferings and, like Jesus, to entrust ourselves to our faithful Creator (1 Pet. 4:12-19).

How will you tell the truth about Jesus in the coming week?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Read Psalm 110, focusing on the description of Jesus as the priestly King. Praise God for Jesus, who humbled Himself for us that we may know Him and believe in Him as the true Messiah and be saved.
- Reflect on your motivations, and ask God to reveal if there are any falsehoods in your life that are distracting you from the truth of Jesus.
- Encourage one another that nothing can change the truth of who Jesus is. No falsehood or argument can ever overcome the truth.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 23 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 110:1-4 with your group. Thank Jesus for His humility and sacrifice on our behalf so that He may rule and intercede for our good.

References

1. John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI; Austin, TX: Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp., 2009), Jn 18:13–27.

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THE CRUCIFIXION

CORE PASSAGE: MARK 15:16-20,29-39

CONTEXT

The cross of Christ is the centerpiece of the Christian faith. Without the cross, there is no forgiveness for sin. Throughout Mark's Gospel, he portrayed Jesus as the Servant-King who suffered for our salvation. After Jesus's trial before the Sanhedrin, He was spit upon, mocked, and beaten by the Jewish leaders. Pilate had Him flogged. And then the Roman soldiers made a mockery of His kingship, adorning Him with a purple robe and a crown of thorns. Finally, under the charge of being "The King of the Jews" (Mark 15:26), Jesus, the perfectly sinless One, was crucified between two criminals.

KEY CONCEPT

Jesus suffered persecution, humiliation, and death to reconcile us to the Father.

As you examine Mark 15:16-20,29-39:

- Ponder that Jesus was mocked on the cross because they thought death would prove His claims false.
- Praise the Lord that Jesus's death led to a new kind of relationship for humanity with God, one of reconciliation and direct access.

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TIMELINE

Jesus Institutes the Lord's Supper (Mark 14:12-26)

Jesus Is Betrayed by Judas and Abandoned by the Disciples (Mark 14:27-52)

Jesus Is Tried Before the Sanhedrin and Pilate (Mark 14:53–15:15)

SESSION STUDY:
Jesus Is Crucified and Buried (Mark 15:16-47)

Jesus Is Raised from the Dead on the Third Day (Mark 16:1-8)

Daily Readings

- ☐ **Day 1:** Mark 15:6-21
- ☐ **Day 2:** Mark 15:22-47
- ☐ **Day 3:** Matthew 27:15-66
- ☐ **Day 4:** Luke 23:13-56
- ☐ **Day 5:** John 18:39–19:42
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 22

Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

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Notes

JESUS ENDURED SUFFERING AS PART OF GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION FOR HUMANITY (MARK 15:16-20,29-32).

Underline the ways Jesus's adversaries mocked Him.

16 The soldiers led him away into the palace (that is, the governor's
residence) and called the whole company together. 17 They dressed him in
a purple robe, twisted together a crown of thorns, and put it on him. 18 And
they began to salute him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" 19 They were hitting
him on the head with a stick and spitting on him. Getting down on their
knees, they were paying him homage. 20 After they had mocked him, they
stripped him of the purple robe and put his clothes on him. They led him
out to crucify him. . . . 29 Those who passed by were yelling insults at him,
shaking their heads, and saying, "Ha! The one who would destroy the temple
and rebuild it in three days, 30 save yourself by coming down from the
cross!" 31 In the same way, the chief priests with the scribes were mocking
him among themselves and saying, "He saved others, but he cannot save
himself! 32 Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down now from the
cross, so that we may see and believe." Even those who were crucified with
him taunted him.

After His arrest, Jesus was dragged before several groups to be questioned and humiliated, and He suffered torture at the hands of those who did not believe Him. First, He was taken before the Sanhedrin. Then He was delivered over to Pilate, who turned Him over to Roman soldiers to be scourged. With striking irony, the Roman soldiers arrayed Jesus in kingly attire—a crown of thorns and a purple robe. Their bowing to Him, given any other situation, would look like worship, yet even this "homage" was a humiliation. The soldiers did not realize they were bowing before the One who was responsible for the creation of the very thorns and woven materials with which they mocked Him.

While it is heartbreaking, in truth, Jesus came to suffer. He reminded His disciples of this at least three times in Mark's Gospel (8:31; 9:31; 10:32-34). Yet when it came time for Jesus to die, His disciples were either distant or absent. Walking with Jesus means walking with Him through suffering, and not only when it is convenient. As believers in Christ, we too will face suffering and hardship—Jesus promised us as much (John 16:33).

> **LEADER NOTE:** Before this passage, Mark noted that Jesus was offered "wine mixed with myrrh," but He did not drink it (15:23). According to tradition, myrrh often was given to people condemned to die to dull the pain (cf. Ps. 69:21).[1] Jesus refused to drink it, showing His commitment to experience the full cup of God's wrath for us. Jesus would not take the easy road. He took on the fullness of the cross so that He could be our perfect high priest (cf. Heb. 5:7-10).

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Notes

How does Jesus's suffering relate to His call for disciples to take up their cross and follow Him (Matt. 16:24)?

Jesus was crucified on a cross and hung between two criminals. The inscription above His head read, "The King of the Jews" (Mark 15:26). Again, the irony is that Jesus is King, and He was being crucified by those He came to save. Contrary to popular belief, the Old Testament foretold a suffering Messiah (see Isa. 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13–53:12). Jesus fulfilled His purpose even as He hung on the cross.

Typically, the Romans crucified people in public places to warn others not to challenge the Roman government. As people passed by Jesus, they continued to mock Him, trying to prove His claims false. Again He was accused of saying He would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days (cf. John 2:19). Even Jesus's miracles were fuel for the crowd's mockery, as He had saved others, but here He was, dying and seemingly unable to save Himself. This scene reminds us that the world does not accept a suffering Savior. But Jesus came first to save us from our sins. He will come again one day as the conquering King.

> **LEADER NOTE:** While the crowds jeered at Jesus, they challenged Him to come down from the cross "so that we may see and believe" (Mark 15:32). The Jews demanded a sign for Jesus to prove His identity. Jesus, however, told them in Mark 8:12: "Why does this generation demand a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to this generation." Paul also commented on the Jewish proclivity to demand a sign (1 Cor. 1:22). The real sign they needed was right in front of them—Jesus on the cross, the Lamb of God dying for the sins of the world.

What kept Jesus on the cross when He could have saved Himself?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Jesus's suffering included humiliation, torture, mockery, and death. He endured it all for us. His mission of salvation was fulfilled through His sacrifice and resurrection to reconcile us to the Father and give us direct access to Him.

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Notes

JESUS DIED TO RECONCILE US TO GOD AND TO GIVE US DIRECT ACCESS TO HIM (MARK 15:33-39).

Circle the environmental effects surrounding Jesus's crucifixion.

33 When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in
the afternoon. 34 And at three Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "*Eloi, Eloi,*
lemá sabachtháni?" which is translated, "My God, my God, why have you
abandoned me?" 35 When some of those standing there heard this, they
said, "See, he's calling for Elijah." 36 Someone ran and filled a sponge with
sour wine, fixed it on a stick, offered him a drink, and said, "Let's see if Elijah
comes to take him down." 37 Jesus let out a loud cry and breathed his last.
38 Then the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.
39 When the centurion, who was standing opposite him, saw the way he
breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

After Jesus was crucified, Mark recorded that darkness came over the land. In Exodus 10:21-23, darkness over the land was a judgment of God on the Egyptians for Pharaoh's unwillingness to release God's people. At Jesus's crucifixion, the darkness was a sign of God's judgment on the sin of those who had crucified the Son of God—including ours.

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

"Before we can begin to see the cross as something done for us (leading us to faith and worship), we have to see it as something done by us (leading us to repentance)."[2]

–John Stott (1921–2011)

But darkness also existed over the whole earth before God created light in Genesis 1. So the darkness at the cross also hints at a reset toward God's new creation. Through the cross, Jesus was undoing what sin destroyed, reconciling His people as a new creation before our Father in heaven (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17).[3]

How might the theme of darkness help us understand what God was doing through Jesus on the cross?

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Notes

LEADER NOTE: Jesus cried out in Aramaic from the cross, quoting the opening phrase of Psalm 22: "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" (Mark 15:34). While Jesus was experiencing the fullness of God's wrath against sin on the cross in our place, He certainly appeared abandoned by God, but the psalm, which foretells numerous details of the crucifixion, ends with a declaration of praise because the Lord heard the psalmist's—and Jesus's—prayer.

Darkness preceded Jesus's death; afterward, the temple curtain tore in two. The word for "torn" in Mark 15:38 is only used one other time in Mark's Gospel. In Mark 1:10, the heavens tore open after Jesus's baptism, and a voice from heaven revealed Jesus's true identity. Similarly, after the curtain "was torn in two from top to bottom," the Roman centurion at the cross confessed Jesus's identity as "the Son of God!"

Hebrews 10:19-22 explains that Jesus has opened a new and living way for us to approach God through His flesh. The tearing of the temple curtain showed the inefficacy and obsolete nature of the temple now that Jesus offered Himself as the final sacrifice for sin. It also showed there was one new way for all to access God—"all the ends of the earth" could now enter God's presence through Jesus (Ps. 22:27-28). As the apostle Paul wrote, the blood of Jesus brought near all who were far off from God, allowing both Jew and Gentile to worship God together (Eph. 2:11-22). Through Christ, the church is one unified body of believers who all have access to our Father in heaven.

LEADER NOTE: The design and purpose of the temple curtain was prescribed in Exodus 26:31-33. It was placed between the holy place and the most holy place, where God was said to dwell, to demonstrate the separation between a sinful people and the holy God. The high priest alone went into the most holy place, and only once a year on the Day of Atonement, and never without first making a sacrifice to atone for his own sins.

What are some ways believers benefit from direct access to God through Jesus Christ?

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

CHRIST AS SACRIFICE: There are several signs, symbols, and pointers in the Old Testament that foreshadowed Christ as being the sacrificial Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. However, unlike the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, whose sacrifices were unable to take away sin (Heb. 10:4), Christ's sacrifice on the cross was able to permanently, "once and for all," take away sins.

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Notes



ARRIVAL

ENGAGE: As your group arrives, break the ice by asking this question: "When have you experienced something horrible—job loss, health diagnosis, relationship ending—that actually led to an unexpected blessing?"

CONTEXT

SAY: Jesus lived a perfect life in every way. Yet the religious leaders of His day, called the Sanhedrin, had Him arrested and then put through a bogus trial. Many witnesses were brought in to give false testimony about Him, but the trial's verdict had been decided before it even began: Jesus was found guilty and sentenced to death. The trial had not been a fair one by any measure, but God's redemptive plan was not going to be stopped by anyone. In fact, God would work even these egregious offenses for the good of all who trust in Jesus. *(Display* **Pack Item 2: Christ as Sacrifice***, and highlight some relevant points in the first two sections to show how Jesus's suffering and crucifixion were not surprises to God but were foretold as part of His perfect redemptive plan for humanity.)*

RECAP

ASK: What were some of the events leading up to the crucifixion that you recall from your personal preparation this week?

SAY: When we consider what it means to be a king, we might think of wealth and authority: lavish palaces, royal robes, submissive subjects, and a life of comfort and luxury. Yet as the true King of kings, Jesus showed us the opposite. He deserved all honor and praise but instead received suffering and humiliation. Jesus was willing to take our sin upon Himself, laying down His life for those He loves, so we might live in joy and freedom He so rightly deserves.

TRANSITION: As we arrived, we considered something devastating that turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Our intent today is to consider how the greatest human suffering led to the greatest gift any of us could ever receive.

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Key Concept: Jesus suffered persecution, humiliation, and death to reconcile us to the Father.

Notes

GROUP ACTIVITY

CHART: Direct your group to page 30 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a chart titled "Responses to the Savior." Recreate the chart on a board so you can record the group's findings as you interact with the Scripture.

Responses to the Savior

Read Mark 15:16-20,29-39. Briefly summarize how the groups listed below responded to the crucifixion of Jesus.

THE ROMAN SOLDIERS (vv. 16-20)	THE CROWDS AND CRIMINALS (vv. 29-32)
THE CENTURION (vv. 33-39)	
HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND?	

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Mark 15:16-20,29-32.

ANALYZE: Lead your group to identify and call out the ways the Roman soldiers and the crowds and criminals responded to Jesus's sentence of crucifixion. Ask: "How did the actions of these groups reflect their ideas about Jesus?" *(The Roman soldiers mocked the idea of a Jewish king by dressing Jesus in royal robes and a thorny crown to humiliate Him; the crowds mocked Jesus for the seeming incongruity of a Messiah who taught with authority and performed miracles now appearing powerless and defeated and unable to save Himself; the criminals on both sides of Jesus taunted Him as the supposed "King of the Jews" was being crucified as a criminal along with them.)* Record the group's responses from this discussion on the board.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Mark 15:33-39.

DISCUSS: Record the centurion's response to Jesus's death on the chart: "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (v. 39). Then lead your group to discuss why he might have come to that conclusion. *(The darkness may have set him up for*

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Notes

this significant conclusion; something about the way Jesus died opened the centurion's heart to Jesus's true identity.) Finally, ask the last question on the chart—"How Should We Respond?"—and record the responses on the board. *(We should agree with the Roman centurion about Jesus's identity; we should rejoice that Jesus laid down His life to save us from our sins; we should repent of our sin and strive for obedience in honor of Jesus's sacrifice; we should confront and correct any mocking of our Lord.)*

DEBRIEF

How is the centurion's response strikingly different from that of the others?

How have you responded to the crucifixion of Jesus, and what impact has it made in your life?

SUMMARIZE


JESUS'S SUFFERING

Many people at the crucifixion had different motives, yet Jesus willingly laid down His life for each of them and for us so that we might be reconciled to the Father. The actions that were taken against Jesus that day and the ones leading up to it were no surprise to God; they were part of His plan to destroy sin from before the creation of the world (Eph. 1:3-14). *(Distribute copies of* **Pack Item 5: Jesus's Suffering** *to show the ways Jesus suffered for us.)* Jesus willingly accepted the excruciating death, enduring the punishment and mockery that He did not deserve, so that we might be saved through His sacrifice.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 31). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Heart** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.

HEAD: Several people were involved in the crucifixion of Jesus, from powerful Roman governors and Jewish religious leaders to the everyday people who stood at the foot of the cross. Notably absent in Mark's Gospel were the disciples, though the women who followed Jesus stood at a distance to witness His suffering (Mark 15:40-41).

What common responses to Jesus's crucifixion might we encounter today?

HEART: We may never understand the full extent of Jesus's suffering and agony on the cross. While we might focus on the actions of the Romans or the Jews in His death, we should consider our own sins that demanded a sacrifice. Out of His love for us, Jesus paid the price that we could not so we could be reconciled to God.

Why should Jesus's suffering on the cross lead us toward repentance of sin and obedience to God?

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Notes

HANDS: In Mark's Gospel, Jesus exemplified the perfect Servant. He told His disciples that He came to serve rather than to be served and to give His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). The Son of God was humiliated, beaten, and killed so that anyone who repents and puts their faith in Him can receive forgiveness of sin and eternal life.

How will you follow Jesus's example and take up your cross this week, willing to suffer for the sake of Christ and others?

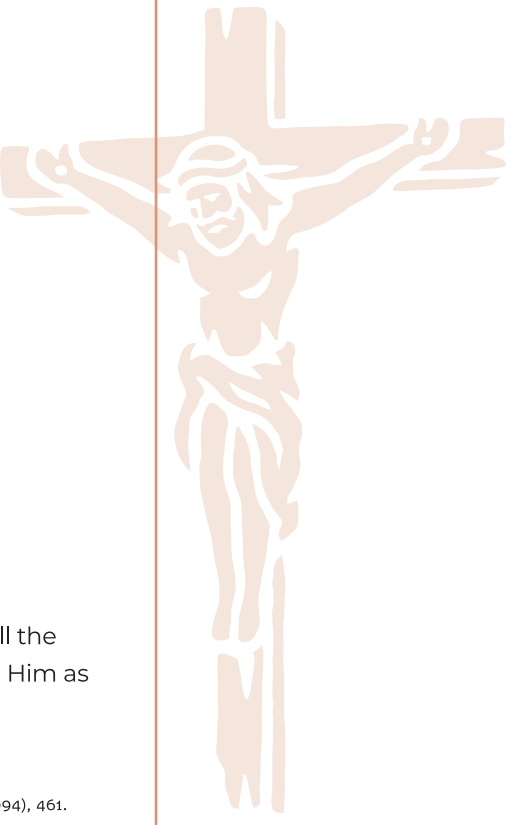
NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Read Psalm 22 along with the Gospels' crucifixion accounts, and reflect on how this psalm anticipated Jesus's sacrifice on the cross and how Jesus fulfilled prophecy.
- Spend time in focused prayer this week, praising God for His great love for you and confessing any sin that is present in your life.
- Spend time thanking Jesus that through the cross He has removed your shame and sin by taking them upon Himself.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 31 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 22:27-31 with your group. Thank God that all the ends of the earth will one day acknowledge Jesus's victory and worship Him as He deserves for the sacrifice He made on our behalf.

References

1. Bruce B. Barton, *Mark*, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), 461.
2. John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), Ch. 2 [ebook].
3. David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 286–287.

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THE RESURRECTION

CORE PASSAGE: MATTHEW 28:1-15

CONTEXT

The Gospel accounts of Jesus's crucifixion are full of various witnesses, some complicit in the murder of Jesus and others distraught by His condemnation. These men and women could truly testify to the death of Jesus. The crowds who jeered at Jesus, the women who looked on from a distance, and the centurion who proclaimed Jesus as the Son of God all saw Jesus die. And then He was buried in a tomb sealed by a stone and guarded by soldiers. Yet on Sunday morning, the angel proclaimed the good news that Jesus is alive.

KEY CONCEPT

We need to share the good news of Jesus's resurrection with all people.

As you examine Matthew 28:1-15:

- Recognize that the angel and the women were the first to tell of Jesus's resurrection.
- Note that even when confronted with the truth, some will still choose not to believe in the resurrected Jesus.

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TIMELINE

- Jesus Is Betrayed by Judas and Abandoned by the Disciples (Matthew 26:31-56)
- Jesus Is Tried Before the Sanhedrin and Pilate (Matthew 26:57–27:26)
- Jesus Is Crucified and Buried (Matthew 27:27-66)
- SESSION STUDY: **Jesus Is Raised from the Dead on the Third Day (Matthew 28:1-15)**
- Jesus Appears to His Followers (Matthew 28:16-20)
- Jesus Ascends into Heaven (Acts 1:4-14)

Daily Readings

- ☐ **Day 1:** Matthew 28:1-10
- ☐ **Day 2:** Matthew 28:11-15
- ☐ **Day 3:** Mark 16:1-8
- ☐ **Day 4:** Luke 24:1-12
- ☐ **Day 5:** John 20:1-10
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 68

Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

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Notes

THE NEWS OF JESUS'S RESURRECTION CAUSED FEAR AND JOY (MATTHEW 28:1-8).

Circle the emotional reactions mentioned in this passage.

1 After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary
Magdalene and the other Mary went to view the tomb. 2 There was a violent
earthquake, because an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and
approached the tomb. He rolled back the stone and was sitting on it. 3 His
appearance was like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. 4 The
guards were so shaken by fear of him that they became like dead men. 5 The
angel told the women, "Don't be afraid, because I know you are looking for
Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here. For he has risen, just as he said.
Come and see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples,
'He has risen from the dead and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee;
you will see him there.' Listen, I have told you." 8 So, departing quickly from
the tomb with fear and great joy, they ran to tell his disciples the news.

Matthew and the other Gospel writers indicated that Jesus's resurrection took place after the Sabbath, which was Saturday. The Sabbath itself was intended to be a day of rest, and on this day, Jesus's body lay undisturbed in the tomb. But as the new week began on Sunday, new life returned to the body of Jesus. This miracle would soon be announced to the women who went to the tomb to anoint Jesus's dead body with spices since they had not been able to prepare Jesus's body for burial due to the Sabbath restrictions (Luke 23:55-56).

The Bible records two earthquakes at this pivotal time in history, both signaling divine activity. The first occurred at Jesus's death (Matt. 27:51); the second occurred at His resurrection because an angel descended from heaven (28:2). When the women arrived, the angel was sitting on the stone that had been used to seal the entrance to the tomb, and with that out of the way, he told them the good news: The tomb is empty; Jesus is alive!

Why is the physical resurrection of Jesus a necessary part of the gospel?

LEADER NOTE: The crucifixion without the resurrection would be merely the death of another man. But with the empty tomb, we have divine proof that Jesus's death secured the forgiveness of sins for all who believe in Him. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15, without the resurrection, Christians should be pitied because we would still be in our sins, having wasted our lives believing otherwise. But since Christ has been raised from the dead, we are saved from sin and promised to be raised with Him forever (1 Cor. 15:17-22).

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Notes

Fear pervades this passage. If the earthquake weren't enough, the presence of the angel locked in that emotion for those who witnessed him. Ironically, Jesus, who was dead, now lived, and the guards tasked with protecting His tomb were "shaken by fear" and "became like dead men" at the sight of the angel (Matt. 28:4). Even the women needed to be counseled by the angel not to be afraid because fear is a natural response to seeing an angel. It's also natural to experience fear at a life-altering development that defies our understanding or affects what we expect out of the future.

The angel instructed the women first to look inside the tomb and see that Jesus's body was gone. Second, he told them to go tell the disciples what they had been told—Jesus has risen from the dead—and where Jesus was going. Though the fear remained, the women went and did as they were told with "great joy" (v. 8). The presence of fear need not keep us from sharing the good news of Jesus with great joy!

> **LEADER NOTE:** After the angel, the women were the first to tell of Jesus's resurrection, having been instructed by the angel to go and tell the good news to Jesus's disciples. It might not strike us as odd that women were the first human witnesses to the resurrection, but in first-century Judea, a woman's testimony was not considered reliable. That the Gospel accounts include women as the first witnesses actually increases the credibility of the accounts.

What reasons might you fear sharing the gospel with others?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Jesus's resurrection gives proof that He is the Son of God and has won the victory over sin and death, which means we too have victory over sin and death. This is good news to be shared.

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Notes

JESUS WILL REVEAL HIMSELF TO THOSE WHO TRULY SEEK HIM (MATTHEW 28:9-15).

Circle the two types of responses to Jesus's resurrection recorded in this passage.

9 Just then Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" They came up, took hold
of his feet, and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus told them, "Do not be afraid.
Go and tell my brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see me there." 11 As
they were on their way, some of the guards came into the city and reported
to the chief priests everything that had happened. 12 After the priests had
assembled with the elders and agreed on a plan, they gave the soldiers a
large sum of money 13 and told them, "Say this, 'His disciples came during
the night and stole him while we were sleeping.' 14 If this reaches the
governor's ears, we will deal with him and keep you out of trouble." 15 They
took the money and did as they were instructed, and this story has been
spread among Jewish people to this day.

Can you imagine what the sight of the resurrected Jesus stirred up in the hearts of these women? They saw Him crucified and buried, and now Jesus—full of life—greeted them on the road. Immediately, the women responded in worship. We might wonder why Jesus revealed Himself to the women just to repeat what the angel had instructed before they went back to the disciples. He did so to reassure them. The women still had a measure of fear (v. 8), so Jesus repeated the encouragement "Do not be afraid" (v. 10). Now they had witnessed firsthand all the facts. Jesus was not missing. He had risen from the dead, and they saw Him and touched Him!

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 Christ from the dead, and it will take place at the future return of Christ. Because Christ was the firstfruits of the resurrection, Christians can be assured that their resurrection will be similar in nature, meaning it will be both bodily and glorious (Phil. 3:20-21; Rom. 8:22-23). The hope of the future resurrection gives Christians confidence that death has been defeated in the death and resurrection of Christ.

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Notes

It is encouraging to note how Jesus viewed His disciples after His resurrection. Jesus called them "my brothers" (v. 10). Before His betrayal, Jesus told His disciples that all of them would fall away (26:31), and just as He said, the disciples fled when Jesus was arrested (v. 56). Though the disciples left Him in His most dire moment, Jesus called them brothers. Jesus did not deny them as they had denied Him. Jesus knew they would be weak in their faith, and He still died for them, and for us. Jesus does not disown us in our weakness; He calls His family home.

> **LEADER NOTE:** Just as Jesus's prayed to His heavenly Father, He instructed all His disciples to pray, "Our Father in heaven" (6:9). Through faith in Jesus, we are adopted into God's family as His children, "heirs of God and coheirs with Christ," our Brother (Rom. 8:14-17)! The disciples exemplified for us, however, that we can never live up to God's call of faith and obedience on our lives. We often are weak and faithless. Even then, Jesus remains faithful to His family, interceding for us, covering our sins, and raising us up again (2 Tim. 2:11-13).

How does it encourage you to know that Jesus does not abandon us in our weakness?

The news of the empty tomb evoked different responses in people. While the women rejoiced and then worshiped the resurrected Jesus, the Roman guards and the Jewish leaders plotted, terrified of what this news would mean for them. Their solution involved deception: make up an explanation backed by some false witness. All that was required was some money and influence, and the result was an effective lie. Even when confronted with the truth, some will still choose not to believe. But no matter how effective the lie, the truth always remains and will win out in the end. Our job as believers in Jesus is faithfulness to share His good news; it is God's job to produce the fruit.

> **LEADER NOTE:** The Jewish leaders bribed the Roman guards with a considerable amount of money (Matt. 28:12). The Greek word for "money" here also means "silver pieces" and is the same word used to describe the payment given to Judas to betray Jesus in Matthew 26:15. Money is a great tempter, whether for betrayal or deception or any other number of sins. The two events highlighted here add weight to Jesus's words that "You cannot serve both God and money" (6:24).

How do we affirm the truth of the resurrection when many people are skeptical of truth claims?

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Notes

ARRIVAL

ENGAGE: As the group arrives, ask them to describe seeing something unexpected that they just had to share with someone else. Examples might include meeting a celebrity, witnessing a spontaneous proposal, or other event.

CONTEXT

SAY: The events leading up to Jesus's resurrection were not pleasant. In fact, some of the most emotionally painful sections of Scripture are found in the events surrounding the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus. Yet even these events in the story constitute part of the good news because the Gospel accounts do not end with Jesus's death. Today we'll look at the rest of the story.

RECAP

ASK: What specific ideas stood out to you this week in your personal preparation for this session?

SAY: Jesus commands His followers to share the good news of His crucifixion and resurrection whenever and wherever we have opportunity. And why would we not want to? The very first people to share the good news of the resurrected King were a group of women who were expecting to put spices on His dead body that morning. After the tragic events of the death of Jesus that led to the tomb, these women anticipated another sad day but instead discovered the joy of seeing their resurrected Savior.

TRANSITION: Our intention today is to learn the joy that comes when we share the good news of the empty tomb, the risen Savior, and the message that continues to change hearts and lives today.

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Key Concept: We need to share the good news of Jesus's resurrection with all people.

GROUP ACTIVITY

Notes

CASE STUDY: Direct your group to page 38 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a case study activity titled "Stolen or Raised?" Recreate the chart on a board so you can record the group's findings as you interact with the Scripture.

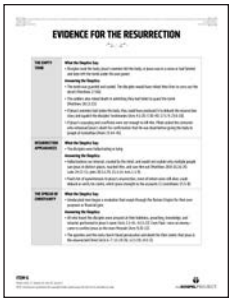
Stolen or Raised?

Read Matthew 28:1-15. Consider how believers might respond to the Jewish leaders' deception surrounding Jesus's resurrection.

CASE STUDY: THE ROMAN SOLDIERS GUARDING JESUS'S TOMB, IN LEAGUE WITH THE JEWISH LEADERS, HAVE SAID, "[JESUS'S] DISCIPLES CAME DURING THE NIGHT AND STOLE HIM WHILE WE WERE SLEEPING" (Matthew 28:13).	
HOW MIGHT THE WOMEN AND JESUS'S DISCIPLES HAVE TRIED TO COUNTER THIS DECEPTION BY THE JEWISH LEADERS?	HOW MIGHT BELIEVERS TODAY TRY TO ANSWER SUCH AN OBJECTION FROM AN UNBELIEVING SKEPTIC?

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 28:1-15.

ANALYZE: Divide your group into smaller groups of 3-4 to discuss the case study and how the women and disciples might have tried to counter the Jewish leaders' deception surrounding Jesus's resurrection. Direct the groups to try to keep their responses to the details from the passage. After a few minutes, call for some responses from the groups, recording these on the board along with the relevant Scripture references. *(An angel told the women that Jesus had risen from the dead [vv. 5-6]; the women saw the risen Jesus and touched Him [v. 9]; the risen Jesus said He would meet the disciples in Galilee, just as He had told them before [vv. 7,10; cf. 26:32]; the soldiers saw the angel yet took a bribe to lie about what had happened at the tomb [28:4,11,15].)*



DISCUSS: Pass out copies of **Pack Item 6: Evidence for the Resurrection**. Lead the group to discuss how believers today might respond to such an objection from an unbelieving skeptic. *(The first witnesses to Jesus's resurrection were women, who were not considered credible witness in ancient times, which*

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Notes

lends credibility to the Gospel account that it wasn't fabricated; follow the money, which shows the Jewish leaders were corrupt and willing to pay to achieve their ends of Jesus's betrayal and crucifixion and a false report of what happened to His body; we have records of some disciples giving their lives for the truth that Jesus rose from the dead, which seems unlikely if they had simply stolen His body; Christians across the ages have staked their whole faith on the testimony that Jesus really did rise physically from the dead.)

DEBRIEF

What is the believer's role in answering the potential objections of skeptics to Jesus's resurrection?

SUMMARIZE

Before His death on the cross, Jesus had taught that He would rise from the dead on the third day (16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19). He also made it clear that people would still find reasons to doubt and disbelieve the truth (12:39-41; Luke 16:31). The women who went to His tomb were granted the first declaration and glimpse of the resurrected Jesus, good news which they shared with Jesus's disciples. The Roman soldiers and Jewish leaders who knew about the angel at the tomb still rejected the truth. This tells us that even if we could confront people with the truth and answer their every question and objection, some people will still find reasons to reject Jesus. But that is not a weight we ought to bear. Our responsibility as Jesus's followers, even 2,000 years removed from His resurrection, is to tell the truth and proclaim His gospel to all. We leave the results in the hearts of others in the perfect and capable hands of God.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 39). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Hands** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.

HEAD: In our culture, people may reject Christianity for a number of reasons. One reason might be the nature of the resurrection. For some, it simply seems impossible, given our experience in the world. People normally do not rise from the dead. But Jesus did, and He promises His followers will too.

What presuppositions and beliefs keep people from believing in Jesus's resurrection from the dead?

HEART: The women's response to the resurrection involved fear, joy, and worship. Likely, we all have shared these feelings as we have reflected on the cross and resurrection. Yet sometimes the circumstances of life can distract us from the worship we owe our resurrected Savior.

What keeps you from joy in and worship for the resurrected Jesus, and why?

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Key Concept: We need to share the good news of Jesus's resurrection with all people.

Notes

HANDS: The resurrection of Jesus Christ is good news that Jesus calls us to share with the world. Because of the resurrection, we know Jesus has forgiven our sin and promises us eternal life. Because of the resurrection, we have hope for the future. Because of the resurrection, we know for certain that God does not abandon those who belong to Him. These are all blessings that others can share in if they believe the gospel.

What steps will you take to share the good news of Jesus's resurrection with others this week?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this week's session.

- Read Psalm 68 and reflect on how this psalm exclaims the truth of the resurrection.
- Set aside time this week to praise God that Jesus is alive, that He has defeated sin and death, and that He has promised us resurrection and eternal life through faith in Jesus.
- Share with others the great gift that is ours in Jesus. Through His resurrection, we too can live with the hope of eternal life.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 39 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 68:19-20 with your group, thanking Jesus for the victory He gives over sin and death through His cross and resurrection.

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ARTICLE

RESURRECTION IN FIRST-CENTURY JEWISH THOUGHT

Adapted from an article by Warren McWilliams

Jesus's discussion with His disciples at Caesarea Philippi was a turning-point in His ministry. When Jesus asked them who they thought He was, Simon Peter correctly acknowledged Him as "the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). Then Jesus announced He would eventually be killed and raised on the third day (v. 21). I wonder what the twelve apostles believed about the possibility or probability of the resurrection of the dead. Did the typical Jew believe in bodily resurrection? If so, did the Jews believe the Messiah would die and that God would raise Him from the dead?

JEWISH BELIEF IN THE FIRST CENTURY

The majority of Jews in the first century believed in a future resurrection of the dead. Jesus's disciples would not have been startled by His mention of this doctrine. Some Jews, however, rejected such belief. When the apostle Paul appeared before the Sanhedrin, he recalled that the Pharisees and the Sadducees, two of the major Jewish religious groups, disagreed on this issue. Paul stressed he was on trial for his preaching about the resurrection, and a loud argument broke out. Describing this event, Luke commented, "The Sadducees say there is no resurrection, and neither angel nor spirit, but the Pharisees affirm them all" (Acts 23:8).

The Sadducees' rejection of the resurrection of the dead impacted their relationship with Jesus. For instance, they told Jesus a story about a woman being married over time to seven brothers. When the woman finally died and was raised from the dead, to whom would she be married? Since the Sadducees did not accept bodily resurrection, they apparently thought this story highlighted the foolishness of the doctrine. Jesus, however, replied that they did not understand their own Scriptures or God's power (see Matt. 22:23-32).

When the early Christians proclaimed Jesus's resurrection in Jerusalem, the Sadducees led the persecution (Acts 4:1-2). One reason they opposed the Christians was their own rejection of anyone's resurrection. Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian, confirmed the New Testament's report of the disagreement between the Sadducees and Pharisees. Josephus described the major Jewish religious groups of his time. He stated that the Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead, but the Sadducees insisted that human souls and bodies both died.[1]

Although the religious leaders debated this belief, what would the typical first-century Jew have known? We can find some clues in other New Testament stories. Jesus's conversation with Martha after the death of her brother, Lazarus, points to a common affirmation of this doctrine. Martha had hoped Jesus would arrive in time to keep Lazarus from dying. When Jesus announced that Lazarus would be raised from the dead, Martha replied, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (John 11:24). Martha was clearly familiar with the idea of a future resurrection. Yet Jesus explained to her, "I am the resurrection and the life" (v. 25).

When Jesus cleansed the temple in Jerusalem, He compared His own body to the temple and explained that His body would be raised from the dead. We do not know how well His disciples understood this comparison at that time, but after His resurrection, they saw Jesus's point clearly (2:19-22).

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The two on the road to Emmaus moved from puzzlement to a recognition of their risen Savior (Luke 24:30-35). They did not ask, "Is resurrection possible?" Their hearts burned within them to share the news, and they went on to agree with the disciples, who said, "The Lord has truly been raised" (v. 34).

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

Why did the Pharisees and Sadducees disagree on the resurrection of the dead? Part of the answer is that the Sadducees accepted only the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch, as the Word of God. When Jesus responded to their story about the woman and her seven spouses, He quoted from Exodus to prove that even the Scriptures they accepted affirmed God is the God of the living (Ex. 3:6,15-16).

In contrast, the Pharisees accepted the full Old Testament that Christians use today. Probably the strongest case for resurrection is Daniel 12:2-3, which pointed to the future destiny of the righteous, who receive eternal life, and the wicked, who experience eternal contempt. Psalm 49:9-15 also points to life beyond the grave. Isaiah 26:19 states, "Your dead will live; their bodies will rise."

In early Hebrew thought, the common belief was that all the dead went to Sheol, the realm of the dead. Job thought of this place as "a land of darkness and gloom . . . gloomy and chaotic, where even the light is like the darkness" (Job 10:21-22). Job, however, also anticipated the bodily resurrection: "Even after my skin has been destroyed, yet I will see God in my flesh" (19:26). Although Bible students debate the interpretation of this verse, some see it as an affirmation of the future bodily resurrection.

Some Bible students see Hosea 6:2 as an anticipation of belief in bodily resurrection. Also, Jesus compared Jonah's experience in the belly of the fish to His own death, burial, and resurrection (Matt. 12:40).

A RESURRECTED MESSIAH

The New Testament reflects the diversity of Jewish thought about the resurrection of the dead. Bible readers do not typically find pointed references to a Jewish belief in a dying and resurrected Messiah in the Old Testament. The first-century Christians, however, quickly affirmed Jesus was the Anointed One promised by God and that He was their resurrected Lord and Savior, based on the Old Testament Scriptures. When the risen Jesus encountered the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, Jesus was able to show them that He was the One for whom they had hoped. Jesus used the teachings of the Law of Moses and the Hebrew prophets to reassure them He was the risen Savior (Luke 24:25-27). Early Christian sermons often linked Old Testament texts and Jesus's resurrection (Acts 2:30-31; cf. Ps. 16:10; Acts 13:34; cf. Isa. 55:3).

Although contemporary Christians might want to read the minds of first-century Jews and Christians about their beliefs in the possibility of the resurrection of the dead, what ultimately matters is the reality of Jesus's resurrection. The two on the road to Emmaus moved from puzzlement to a recognition of their risen Savior (Luke 24:30-35). They did not ask, "Is resurrection possible?" Their hearts burned within them to share the news, and they went on to agree with the disciples, who said, "The Lord has truly been raised" (v. 34). And ever since, Jesus's resurrection has become one central belief for our faith today (1 Cor. 15:12-22).

1. Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 477.

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THE APPEARANCES

CORE PASSAGE: JOHN 20:19-31

CONTEXT

The apostle John explicitly stated the reason he wrote his Gospel—so that readers would believe that Jesus is the Messiah and receive life in His name (John 20:31). Everything in John's Gospel served this purpose, from John's reflection on the Word's preexistence to seven signs Jesus performed and seven "I am" statements that revealed His identity and purpose. Naturally, Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection also point to this end. Yet so do Jesus's appearances to His followers after His resurrection. These interactions revealed His glory and prepared the disciples for their mission, which we share as believers today.

KEY CONCEPT

The appearances of the resurrected Jesus reveal He is the Messiah, the Son of God.

As you examine John 20:19-31:

- Recognize that seeing Jesus alive resulted in joy for His followers.
- Contemplate what it means to be blessed as one who has not seen the resurrected Jesus and still believes.

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TIMELINE

- Jesus Is Betrayed by Judas (John 18:1-11)
- Jesus Is Tried Before the Sanhedrin and Pilate (John 18:12–19:16)
- Jesus Is Crucified and Buried (John 19:17-42)
- Jesus Is Raised from the Dead on the Third Day (John 20:1-10)
- SESSION STUDY: **Jesus Appears to His Followers (John 20:11–21:23)**
- Jesus Ascends into Heaven (Acts 1:4-14)

Daily Readings

- ☐ **Day 1:** John 20:11-18
- ☐ **Day 2:** Luke 24:13-49
- ☐ **Day 3:** John 20:19–21:25
- ☐ **Day 4:** Matthew 28:16-20
- ☐ **Day 5:** Luke 24:50-53
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 108

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Notes

JESUS'S RESURRECTION RESULTS IN JOY AND OUR RECEIVING THE HOLY SPIRIT (JOHN 20:19-25).

Highlight Jesus's commission of His disciples in this passage.

19 When it was evening on that first day of the week, the disciples were
gathered together with the doors locked because they feared the Jews.
Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, "Peace be with you."
20 Having said this, he showed them his hands and his side. So the disciples
rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be
with you. As the Father has sent me, I also send you." 22 After saying this, he
breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins
of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."
24 But Thomas (called "Twin"), one of the Twelve, was not with them when
Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples were telling him, "We've seen the
Lord!" But he said to them, "If I don't see the mark of the nails in his hands,
put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will
never believe."

Jesus appeared to the women at the empty tomb, and then He appeared to His disciples, who were in hiding. We might wonder why they were afraid. The Jewish leaders had conspired to kill Jesus, and they succeeded. What might the Jewish leaders have done to them, Jesus's followers? After all, Judas may have given their names to the religious leaders as well when he betrayed Jesus. Or perhaps someone else might have recognized the disciples and handed them over for conspiring with Him.

Jesus would not leave His closest companions in their fear, however. He would show them that everything He had taught them about His death and resurrection had come to pass. When Jesus miraculously appeared in the locked room, He gave them the peace that He had promised to His followers, which would come, in part, through the gift of the Holy Spirit (14:26-27). At the sight of the resurrected Jesus, the fear melted away and peace reigned.

> **LEADER NOTE:** In this passage, Jesus told the disciples to receive the Holy Spirit. Many readers may question the nature of this event in relationship with the events of Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit fell on all of the believers in the upper room at Pentecost. In John's Gospel, we see that the giving of the Holy Spirit is linked to Jesus's glorification (7:37-39). Previously, Jesus told His followers that God would send the Spirit to them. Now, Jesus breathed on them to give them the Spirit, similar to how God breathed the breath of life into Adam (Gen. 2:7), showing that Jesus also has the authority to give the Spirit to His followers.[1]

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How does knowing the truth of the resurrection help us not to fear?

Notes

As the disciples experienced that day when they proclaimed, "We've seen the Lord!" (John 20:25), seeing Jesus results in joy. This declaration to Thomas was perhaps their first obedience to Jesus's commission: "As the Father has sent me, I also send you" (v. 21). Though Christians today have not seen Jesus face to face as the disciples did, we know that we will see Jesus one day. On that day, we will experience the same joy the disciples experienced at Jesus's resurrection. There is a link between seeing Jesus and having joy in Jesus. Though we may not see Jesus now, we can look to Him and hope in Him in faith (Heb. 12:1-2).

> **LEADER NOTE:** The Great Commission is the title Christians have for Matthew 28:18-20, where Jesus sent His followers into all the world to preach the gospel. Matthew emphasized Jesus's authority, the disciples' task to make disciples, and His promise to always be with them. John addressed the concept of the believer's commission here in John 20:19-23, where Jesus empowered the fledgling church with the Holy Spirit and the responsibility to confer or withhold forgiveness based on people's response to the gospel. These aren't competing ideas or accounts but complementary ones.

Poor Thomas, however, did not experience that joy. For whatever reason, Thomas wasn't there when Jesus appeared. Despite what his friends told him, Thomas insisted he would never believe until he could see and touch Jesus's wounds for himself (John 20:25).

What are some practical ways you can have assurance in your faith?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

The many witnesses to Jesus after His resurrection reveal the truth of His identity as the Son of God and the Savior of the world. Jesus was sent by the Father and now sends us to spread the gospel through the power of the Holy Spirit.

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Notes

EVERYTHING JESUS DID WAS TO SHOW US THAT HE IS THE MESSIAH, THE SON OF GOD (JOHN 20:26-31).

Circle the purpose statement for John's Gospel, and underline an example of what success for this Gospel looks like in this passage.

26 A week later his disciples were indoors again, and Thomas was with them.
Even though 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 look at my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Don't be
faithless, but believe." 28 Thomas responded to him, "My Lord and my God!"
29 Jesus said, "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are
those who have not seen and yet believe." 30 Jesus performed many other
signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. 31 But
these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son
of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Thomas doubted the women and the disciples had seen the risen Lord. Thankfully, Jesus did not leave him in his doubt. Clearly unhindered by the locked door once again (v. 19), Jesus appeared to Thomas and the disciples a week later. And after once again pronouncing peace upon His disciples, Jesus spoke directly to Thomas, offering His scarred hands and side to reverse Thomas's skepticism. Jesus said, "Don't be faithless, but believe" (v. 27). Thomas's doubts evaporated as he responded: "My Lord and my God!" (v. 28).

Thomas's story shows us that even believers can struggle in faith, and even with doubts, those who truly seek Jesus will find Him. God promises that those who seek Him will find Him if they seek Him with their whole heart (Jer. 29:13). Yet Jesus's blessing for those who believe without seeing is a gift of grace for all throughout church history who have put their faith and trust in Him based on the testimony of God's Word through God's people.

> **LEADER NOTE:** In 1 Corinthians 15, the apostle Paul explained the foundations of the gospel message he preached. Jesus's physical appearance to His disciples, to Paul himself, and to others was an important factor in Paul's message. Christianity is not merely a message of "blind faith." There is plenty of evidence to believe the accounts of the Gospel writers, Paul, and the Bible as a whole. The empty tomb, the post-resurrection appearances, and the dramatic transformation of the disciples support the truth of the resurrection.

What does it look like to seek Jesus with your whole heart?

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Notes

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

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

First Peter 1:8-9 echoes Jesus's words in John 20:29: "Though you have not seen him, you love him; though not seeing him now, you believe in him, and you rejoice with inexpressible and glorious joy, because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls." The first disciples witnessed the resurrection of the Lord, and Jesus continued to appear to many after His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:3-11). Their testimony, along with other evidences of the resurrection, continues to be preached today. For now, we walk by faith. One day, our faith will be sight.

Who or what has helped you through seasons of doubt in your faith?

John waited until the end of his Gospel to state his purpose clearly. John wrote his Gospel so that any reader would see the power of God at work through Jesus's miracles and teachings and thus believe that He is the Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus's ministry, including His miracles, healings, preaching, and especially His crucifixion and resurrection, revealed His divine identity and His purpose and power to save.

> **LEADER NOTE:** In our culture, people often mold Jesus into their own image. Some treat Jesus as a good teacher, a moral leader, or simply an ideal example of humanity. However, neither the Bible nor Jesus give us the option of seeing Jesus as a mere teacher or example. As stated in John 20:31, the Bible presents Jesus as the Messiah, the divine Son of God, who died and rose again to save us from our sins.

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ARRIVAL

ENGAGE: As your group arrives, ask them to imagine they have lost something important. Ask: "When you have lost something important, what process do you go through to try to find it?"

TRANSITION: We have all frantically looked for things and found them in strange places. Have you ever looked for something that was never really lost? Likely. Sometimes things go "missing" because we don't stop to consider where we left them last, or perhaps they were just covered over right before our eyes. In today's passage, we will see that those who thought they had lost everything discovered it right in front of them.

CONTEXT

REVIEW: Remember Jesus taught His disciples that He would suffer and die and then rise again on the third day (Luke 9:22). Yet the women who had gone to the tomb were terrified to see two angels there instead of Jesus, and when they rushed to tell what they had seen and heard, the disciples didn't believe their story (24:1-11). Though Jesus had foretold these events, as had Moses and the Prophets (vv. 25-27), surprisingly, the disciples didn't truly understand what it all meant until the resurrected Jesus literally stood right in front of them.

RECAP

ASK: Say: "The days including and following the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus were anything but idle." Ask: "What are some accounts and details of Jesus's appearances after His resurrection that you remember from your personal preparation and the daily readings?" Record responses on the board or a large sheet of paper.

TRANSITION: The resurrection of Jesus is the most important event that has ever happened. As we consider a couple of appearances of Jesus to the apostles, we celebrate this turning point of history: Jesus was dead and is now clearly and unmistakably alive!



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GROUP ACTIVITY

CHART: Direct your group to page 46 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a chart titled "Fear and Doubt to Faith." Recreate the chart on a board so you can record the group's findings as you interact with the Scripture.

Fear and Doubt to Faith

Read John 20:19-31. Write down the emotions and actions of the disciples and Jesus's responses in the columns below.

	DISCIPLES (vv. 19-23)	THOMAS (vv. 24-29)
EMOTIONS AND ACTIONS		
JESUS'S RESPONSE		
OUR TAKEAWAY		

READ: Invite two volunteers to read aloud John 20:19-23 and 24-29.

ANALYZE: Lead your group to answer the following questions for the first two rows on the chart, recording answers and relevant Scripture references on the board: "What were the actions and accompanying emotions of the disciples and Thomas that drove these moments?" *(gathered behind lock doors; fear; sadness; declaration of proof needed before believing; doubt; confusion; pride)* "How did Jesus respond to these emotional actions and conclusions?" *(a blessing of peace; patience; comfort; provision of the Holy Spirit; a commissioning; His personal, physical appearance; reassurance; rebuke)* "What do these responses teach us about how Jesus meets people where they are emotionally and spiritually?" *(Answers will vary.)*

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud John 20:30-31.

DISCUSS: Say: "This passage states John's purpose for his Gospel and the accounts contained therein, such as these encounters of the disciples and

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Notes

Thomas with the resurrected Jesus. In light of this passage and purpose, what should be our takeaways from these accounts? Specifically, how should we respond to our own experiences of fear and doubt?" Instruct groups of 3-4 to discuss how people today ought to respond to their own struggles with fear and doubt, recording their conclusions in the final row on the chart in their PSG. After a few minutes, call for responses, recording insights on the chart on the board.

DEBRIEF

Why is our faith in Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, not a blind faith but one based in evidence?

How does this passage encourage us to share the truth of Jesus with others?

SUMMARIZE



Display **Pack Item 7: Believe**. Say: "Time and time again, Jesus will always prove to be worthy of our faith. His appearances to the disciples and to so many others remain as proof that He is truly alive and is still active and working in hearts and lives even today. He is just as real now as He was then, and He knows and loves each of us. With our unseeing faith placed firmly in Christ, we never need to doubt or be afraid. But when we do struggle with fear or doubt, we can always bring those to Jesus, who hears us and reassures us of His faithfulness for us."

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 47). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Hands** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.

HEAD: Like Thomas, people often have intellectual doubts about the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus did not reject Thomas for his questions; rather, Jesus showed Thomas the proof of His resurrection. In the same way, we should not fault people for having intellectual doubts about the Christian faith. We should pray for them to hear the good news and believe.

How can we encourage people who have intellectual doubts to keep pursuing truth and seeking Jesus?

HEART: We have all walked through seasons of life where our faith has been tested or stretched. We are often like the man who cried out "I do believe; help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24). Sometimes, our life circumstances, intellectual questions, or emotional struggles cause us to question our faith or doubt God.

How can we continue to strengthen our faith when circumstances, doubts, or struggles lead us to doubt God?

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Notes

HANDS: Though Thomas started out doubting the good news of Jesus's resurrection, a week later he responded in faith. Looking upon the resurrected Christ, observing the glorified wounds of our Savior, he exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). From that point, Thomas believed in Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, and he went on to live his life in light of that fact and faith, proclaiming the good news to others.

How will you live this week so that people know that Jesus is your Lord and God?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Prayerfully read through Psalm 108, focusing on God's faithfulness to us and our response to Him.
- Ask God to reveal areas in your life where you struggle with fear and doubt, and ask Him to replace those with His peace.
- Make an effort to consider who in your life might need the same patience Jesus showed Thomas and how can you offer that same kind of grace.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 47 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 108:1-6, praising God for His love and salvation. Pray that as you go through this week, God will be exalted in your praise and witness to the ends of the earth.

References

1. Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12–21*, vol. 25B, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 309.

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UNIT 29
POST-RESURRECTION

ACTS

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Memory Verses

"Peter and the apostles replied, 'We must obey God rather than people. The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had murdered by hanging him on a tree. God exalted this man to his right hand as ruler and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.'"

–Acts 5:29-32

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JESUS SENDS US

CORE PASSAGE: ACTS 1:4-14

CONTEXT

The book of Acts is the second volume in a two-part work by Luke, a missionary companion of the apostle Paul. The two volumes are a single, continuous story with a slight overlap and expansion from the end of Luke to the start of Acts. While Luke's Gospel described "all that Jesus began to do and teach" during His earthly ministry (Acts 1:1), Acts presented all the Holy Spirit continued to do and teach through the church following Jesus's ascension. Luke reiterated that Jesus died, rose again, and "presented himself alive" to His followers "over a period of forty days" (v. 3) to set the stage for what Jesus would do next through His apostles.

KEY CONCEPT

Believers are empowered by the Holy Spirit to continue Christ's mission until His return.

As you examine Acts 1:4-14:

- Recognize that believers are baptized with the Holy Spirit.
- Contemplate the importance and blessing of believers being united in prayer as we wait for Christ's return.

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TIMELINE

Jesus Is Tried Before the Sanhedrin and Pilate and Herod (Luke 22:63–23:25)

Jesus Is Crucified and Buried (Luke 23:26-56)

Jesus Is Raised from the Dead on the Third Day (Luke 24:1-12)

Jesus Appears to His Followers (Luke 24:13-49)

SESSION STUDY:
Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit and Ascends into Heaven (Acts 1:4-14)

The Holy Spirit Fills the Disciples at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-41)

Daily Readings

- ☐ **Day 1:** Acts 1:1-3
- ☐ **Day 2:** Acts 1:4-11
- ☐ **Day 3:** Acts 1:12-14
- ☐ **Day 4:** Acts 1:15-20
- ☐ **Day 5:** Acts 1:20-26
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 48

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Notes

WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT'S POWER, BELIEVERS SPREAD THE GOSPEL TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH (ACTS 1:4-8).

Circle the actions the Holy Spirit takes to help believers.

4 While he was with them, he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem,
but to wait for the Father's promise. "Which," he said, "you have heard me
speak about; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with
the Holy Spirit in a few days." 6 So when they had come together, they asked
him, "Lord, are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?" 7 He said to
them, "It is not for you to know times or periods that the Father has set by his
own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come
on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria,
and to the ends of the earth."

Effective Christian ministry requires God's direction and empowerment because God has said so. Jesus, God the Son, provided both during His earthly ministry. Following Jesus's departure to heaven, God the Holy Spirit would provide those vital tools to Jesus's disciples in His absence. Therefore, Jesus instructed them to wait in Jerusalem for the outpouring of the Spirit, whom the Father promised in Old Testament passages such as Isaiah 44:3: "I will pour out my Spirit on your descendants and my blessing on your offspring."

In addition to Old Testament promises of the Spirit, Jesus had spoken previously of the Spirit's empowerment (Luke 24:49; John 15:26; 16:13-14). John the Baptist also spoke of the Spirit's outpouring with words nearly identical to those of Jesus (see Luke 3:16). John immersed those who repented in water to signify cleansing from sin and preparation for the Messiah's coming. Baptism with the Holy Spirit refers to the covering of a believer's life in the Spirit's power as a sign the Messiah—Jesus—has come. All believers are baptized with the Holy Spirit.

> **LEADER NOTE:** The book of Acts describes a transitional time in God's plan of salvation, when Jesus's disciples had placed their faith in Him and received salvation but had not yet been baptized with the Holy Spirit. They experienced the promised baptism with the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2). Some were baptized with the Spirit at their conversion (10:44-48), while others in Acts experienced baptism with the Spirit after their conversion (cf. 8:4-17; 19:1-7). Following this transitional era, however, baptism with the Spirit was expected for every believer at the moment of salvation. Paul referred to this in 1 Corinthians 12:13, where he wrote, "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body." Today, no true believer lacks baptism with the Holy Spirit.

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Notes

What comfort do you receive in knowing that the Holy Spirit is with us as we complete Christ's mission?

Jesus's ascension to heaven was not the end of God's plan, though the disciples expected otherwise. God promised in the Old Testament to rule the world from Jerusalem at the end of time (Isa. 2:2-4). The disciples wanted to know if that was about to occur (Acts 1:6). Jesus responded not with a direct yes or no but by redirecting their focus. The timing of history's end is not for humans to know. It is the Father's business (v. 7).

Instead, as believers, our business is to carry out Christ's mission while we await the end. Our God-given mission is to spread the gospel everywhere with the help of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. The Spirit gives believers power to speak boldly as they recount the works and words of Jesus. The Spirit also gives believers power to speak broadly, taking the gospel "to the ends of the earth" through intra-cultural and cross-cultural missions (v. 8).

> **LEADER NOTE:** The gospel's advance throughout the earth requires believers' cooperation with each Person of the Trinity, a necessity evident in the opening chapter of Acts. The Holy Spirit was promised by the Father (v. 4) to fill believers' lives with God's presence (v. 5) and to empower their witness (v. 8). The Son dictates the message believers are to speak, highlighted by Jesus's statement that "you will be my witnesses" (v. 8). The mission's completion will be signaled only by the Son's return (v. 11). Every effective witness to the gospel will know, worship, and pray to the triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

What are some ways believers help to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to empower us to continue His mission, knowing He would ascend into heaven and one day return.

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AS WE WAIT FOR JESUS'S RETURN, WE LIVE UNITED IN PRAYER WITH OTHER BELIEVERS (ACTS 1:9-14).

Underline details in the passage highlighting the believers' unity.

9 After he had said this, he was taken up as they were watching, and a cloud
took him out of their sight. 10 While he was going, they were gazing into
heaven, and suddenly two men in white clothes stood by them. 11 They said,
"Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven? This same Jesus,
who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way that
you have seen him going into heaven." 12 Then they returned to Jerusalem
from the Mount of Olives, which is near Jerusalem—a Sabbath day's journey
away. 13 When they arrived, they went to the room upstairs where they
were staying: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew,
Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of
James. 14 They all were continually united in prayer, along with the women,
including Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

The final act of Jesus's earthly ministry was His ascension, a work of God as highlighted by the passive phrase "He was taken up" (v. 9). The cloud that accompanied Him signified divine glory, like the cloud in the wilderness after the exodus (Ex. 16:10) and the cloud at Jesus's transfiguration (Luke 9:34). The presence of two angels also underscored the glorious triumph of this moment. The Father had accepted Jesus's work and received Him to rule from heaven.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

GOD THE SON: Jesus was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion. He ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God, where He is the One Mediator, fully God, fully man, in whose Person is effected the reconciliation between God and man. Jesus will return in power and glory to judge the world and to consummate His redemptive mission.

The angels' question, "Why do you stand looking up into heaven?" (Acts 1:11), constituted a mild rebuke of the disciples for not getting started on their mission. This was not a time to linger or to procrastinate but to trust and obey until Jesus returns. So the angels provided details about Christ's return. It will occur "in the same way that you have seen him going into heaven" (v. 11). One day Jesus will return visibly, bodily, gloriously, and from heaven to earth.

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LEADER NOTE: Jesus's ascension and second coming are like two bookends of "the last days" of human history (Acts 2:17; cf. Joel 2:28). The Old Testament saw the last days as a single event, like a mountain range in the distance where multiple peaks appear close together. Among those peaks were the Messiah's coming, His ascension, the outpouring of God's Spirit, and judgment day. Living under the new covenant inaugurated by Jesus is like arriving at the mountains and realizing the peaks actually sit miles apart. The last days begin with Christ's reign from heaven as His kingdom advances through the witness of His people. The last days end with Christ's return to conquer His enemies and repair fully this broken world.

How can believers help one another prepare for Jesus's return?

The disciples began their mission well with obedience to Jesus's command not to leave Jerusalem (see Acts 1:4). They left the Mount of Olives to return to Jerusalem and retired to an upstairs room there. The Greek tense of the word "staying" (v. 13) suggests they met there regularly, a reflection of their unity. They were eleven ordinary men about to be used for an extraordinary task.

Yet the assembly included more than the eleven remaining disciples (Judas Iscariot had committed suicide after betraying Jesus [Matt. 27:3-10; cf. Acts 1:18]). They were joined by women, including Mary, Jesus's mother, and by Jesus's brothers, the sons of Mary and Joseph (v. 14). These people focused not on themselves; rather, they focused on God and each other. Prayer together was their habitual practice, indicated by the phrase "were continually united in prayer" (v. 14). Like those early disciples, we must live united in prayer as we carry out Christ's mission and wait for Christ's return.

LEADER NOTE: Jesus explained why prayer makes a difference in the world: "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done for you" (John 15:7). Effective prayer begins with learning Jesus's will through His Word. Then we begin to desire what He wants and to ask for it in prayer. The Lord gladly grants such prayers because they reflect His heart. Prayer according to the pattern of John 15:7 serves as a powerful tool for unleashing boldness to share the message of Jesus.

What results have you experienced from ongoing unified prayer with a group of fellow believers?

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ARRIVAL

ENGAGE: As the group gathers, ask: "How do you prefer to pass the time when you must wait in the doctor's office, airport, or during a long commute?"

TRANSITION: Waiting is baked into much of our lives, which often conflicts with our desire for instant gratification. We may find ourselves waiting passively or impatiently, but with respect to Jesus's return, believers are called to wait actively, not keeping our eyes on the sky but our eyes on Christ and fulfilling our part of the mission He has given us.

CONTEXT


JESUS'S EXALTATION

SAY: The disciples were witnesses to all that Jesus did and endured, both in His ministry and His death. After everything He suffered, Jesus displayed His rightful authority and power as He was exalted by God in His resurrection and ascension. *(Distribute copies of* **Pack Item 8: Jesus's Exaltation** *and briefly review the ways Jesus was exalted, even in His crucifixion.)* Jesus's departure from the earth also marked a critical turning point for Jesus's followers. Now the gospel mission that Jesus began would be gifted into their hands, just as God would gift them with His Holy Spirit to carry out that mission.

RECAP

RECAP: Ask: "What stood out to you in Jesus's final commands to the disciples in your personal preparation this week?"

TRANSITION: The disciples, who may not have fully understood Jesus's reference to baptism with the Holy Spirit, were no doubt eager to see Jesus restore the kingdom to Israel. Instead, they were quickly assigned an undefined waiting period, but not to idleness. Jesus commanded them to carry the gospel near and far, to the ends of the earth. Note that while Jesus had successfully completed His earthly mission, the disciples' biggest challenges and tasks still lay ahead.

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GROUP ACTIVITY

CHART: Direct your group to page 56 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a chart titled "Parting Instructions." Recreate the chart on a board so you can record the group's findings as you interact with the Scripture text.

Parting Instructions

Read Acts 1:4-14. For the verses below, briefly summarize the message of each. If the message has been fulfilled or obeyed, check the box.

SCRIPTURE	MESSAGE	FULFILLED?
Acts 1:4		☐
Acts 1:5		☐
Acts 1:6-7		☐
Acts 1:8		☐
Acts 1:11		☐

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Acts 1:4-14.

ENGAGE: Instruct your group to examine the verses highlighted in the chart and to identify and summarize the message conveyed in them *(may be an instruction for the disciples to obey or an action God Himself would take)*. Allow multiple people to offer summaries of each passage so the group can refine their summary as best as possible. Record the summarized message in the chart on the board, and instruct the group to record the summary in their PSG.

ANALYZE: Working through the last column on the chart, lead the group to discuss whether or not each message was fulfilled or obeyed in the disciples' day. Further, ask: "What part of this message is applicable for believers today?" It is possible that directives for the disciples were obeyed in their day and still applicable for believers today to see to completion, as far as our part goes.

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DISCUSS: Say: "Most of the message communicated to the disciples was direct, detailed, and at first glance, not really difficult." Ask: "What part of the message may have been challenging for the disciples? Which instructions do you consider unclear or challenging today? Which instructions carry the idea of waiting as a part of their fulfillment?"

CLARIFY: Note that waiting often implies passivity or a lack of action. Lead the group to decide if that definition of waiting fits the messages from Acts 1. Say: "The phrase 'hurry up and wait' may be an apt understanding of waiting for Jesus's followers because we have been commanded to embrace our mission with passion and urgency while also assuming a posture of waiting on Jesus for guidance and ultimately for His return."

DEBRIEF

How are disciples today like the disciples after Jesus's ascension?

Why would prayer, even prayer with other believers, be a good use of your time whenever you are in a waiting period?

SUMMARIZE

The key takeaways from this passage remain relevant for followers of Jesus Christ today. We still need the Holy Spirit, we are still waiting on Christ's return, and we still have a mission that requires both internal and external activity as we take steps to share Christ with people whom God has placed around us. Prayer and witnessing remain important to completing this mission, and both require faith and willingness to step out in obedience.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 57). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Head** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.



HEAD: Jesus promised that believers in Him would receive power from the Holy Spirit to be His witnesses. This empowerment comes in the form of awareness of opportunities to share the gospel, boldness to proclaim Christ in spite of opposition or awkwardness, and wisdom to know where to go and what to say. But that's not all the Spirit does. He also works in the hearts of unbelievers to soften them to the message of Christ and to convict them of their sin, which prepares them to see Jesus as the Savior they need.

Why do we need the Holy Spirit to accomplish the mission Jesus has given His disciples?



HEART: The disciples were told to wait for the Holy Spirit, to wait for the full restoration of the kingdom, and to wait for Jesus's return. The Holy

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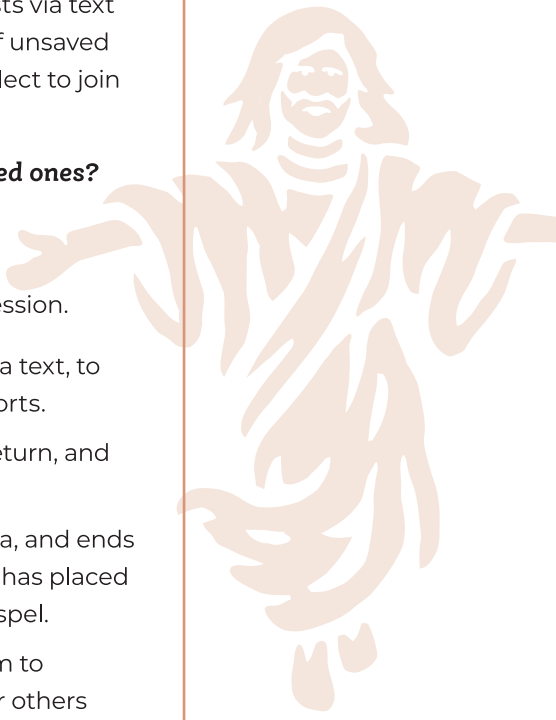
Spirit was given, as promised, ten days later, but we all are waiting for the end when Jesus comes again. Like the disciples, we could just stare expectantly at the sky while needing to get on with our mission. But more likely, Jesus's eventual return simply escapes our attention. We could even live for the mission while missing the goal—to see our God and Savior face to face when He comes.

How can we live, serve, and share the gospel while being mindful to wait expectantly for Jesus's return?

HANDS: Like the disciples, who united in prayer before they were sent out as witnesses, we should unite in prayer with fellow believers for the souls of our friends and family. Uniting in prayer can take various forms. We can meet in person with a group to pray. We can share prayer requests via text message. We can create a private group online to share the names of unsaved loved ones and pray for them to receive Christ in faith. However we elect to join in prayer, we ourselves must offer such prayers in faith.

How will you pray with others this week for the salvation of lost loved ones?



NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Organize a prayer time for the group, either in person or online via text, to pray specifically for Spirit-empowered, individual evangelistic efforts.
- Consider what it will look like for you to actively wait for Jesus's return, and plan your steps this week to that end.
- Suggest that the group map their own Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and ends of the earth by identifying the spheres of influence in which God has placed you. Challenge the group to reach out to these areas with the gospel.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 57 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 48:9-14 with your group. Pray for those around the world who spread the gospel of God's love in Christ to advance the kingdom. Pray for courage to boldly proclaim the gospel in your own community.

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THE SPIRIT FILLS US

CORE PASSAGE: ACTS 2:1-6,14-21

CONTEXT

Before ascending to heaven, the risen Jesus gave His followers a mission to be His witnesses "in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). But before their mission began, they were instructed to remain in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit empowered them. As they waited, the disciples prayed together on a regular basis (v. 14). Peter emerged as their leader, and they chose a man named Matthias to replace Judas as the twelfth apostle (vv. 15-26). The stage was set for the day of Pentecost as Jesus's disciples awaited the extraordinary outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

KEY CONCEPT

The Holy Spirit empowers and emboldens His people for kingdom mission.

As you examine Acts 2:1-6,14-21:

- Praise God that the Holy Spirit fills believers in Christ to empower us for works of service.
- Recognize that the Spirit's work in our lives calls us to and guides us on God's mission of salvation.

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TIMELINE

Jesus Is Crucified and Buried (Luke 23:26-56)

Jesus Is Raised from the Dead on the Third Day (Luke 24:1-12)

Jesus Appears to His Followers (Luke 24:13-49)

Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit and Ascends into Heaven (Acts 1:4-14)

SESSION STUDY:
The Holy Spirit Fills the Disciples at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-41)

Peter and John Heal a Beggar and Preach About Jesus (Acts 3:1-26)

Daily Readings

- ☐ **Day 1:** Acts 2:1-13
- ☐ **Day 2:** Acts 2:14-21
- ☐ **Day 3:** Acts 2:22-36
- ☐ **Day 4:** Acts 2:37-41
- ☐ **Day 5:** Acts 2:42-47
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 134

Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

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Notes

THE HOLY SPIRIT EMPOWERS US TO BE KINGDOM PEOPLE
(ACTS 2:1-6).

Highlight the descriptions of the coming of the Holy Spirit.

1 When the day of Pentecost had arrived, they were all together in one place.
2 Suddenly a sound like that of a violent rushing wind came from heaven,
and it filled the whole house where they were staying. 3 They saw tongues
like flames of fire that separated and rested on each one of them. 4 Then
they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different
tongues, as the Spirit enabled them. 5 Now there were Jews staying in
Jerusalem, devout people from every nation under heaven. 6 When this
sound occurred, a crowd came together and was confused because each
one heard them speaking in his own language.

The Holy Spirit fills all believers to empower us for works of service. That became a reality for every follower of Jesus starting on the day of Pentecost, a Jewish harvest festival fifty days after Passover and, in this particular event, ten days after Jesus ascended to heaven (see 1:3). The Spirit is God, the Third Person of the Trinity, and a gift from God. The wind that the disciples heard signified God's presence (see 2 Sam. 22:16; Job 37:10).

Fire also accompanied God's presence, as when He appeared to Israel in the wilderness as a pillar of fire (Ex. 13:21). It was fitting, then, that at the Holy Spirit's coming, Jesus's followers saw "tongues like flames of fire" over each believer (Acts 2:3). The fire's resemblance to tongues foreshadowed the supernatural speaking in other languages that was about to occur.

> **LEADER NOTE:** The Holy Spirit's coming in Acts 2 was not the beginning of either His existence or His ministry on earth. As the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is eternal and possesses all the divine attributes of the Father and the Son. He participated in creation (Gen. 1:2), an action reserved for God alone. He empowered various Old Testament believers for service (Num. 11:17; Judg. 3:10; 6:34; 13:25; 1 Sam. 16:13). The Holy Spirit also led and empowered Jesus during His earthly ministry (Luke 4:1,14). Pentecost was simply the beginning of a new era in the Spirit's work, in which He would live within each of God's people and cause them to obey the Lord from the heart (Ezek. 36:27).

Why might we overlook the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives?

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Notes

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE LIFE OF THE CHRISTIAN: The Spirit's work in the life of a Christian begins with the work of salvation in bringing a person to faith in Christ and is continued through the work of sanctification in helping the Christian to become progressively more like Christ throughout the course of his or her life. He also empowers and indwells believers, intercedes on their behalf, and equips them with special gifts for the service of God's kingdom. He is the Comforter to the believer and aids us in properly interpreting the Bible.

The supernatural signs of God's presence were followed by the disciples' being "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4), the Spirit's empowering for godly living and ministry. While the gift of the Holy Spirit is granted to all believers, and the Spirit gives all believers new spiritual life and dwells within them, being filled with the Holy Spirit is not automatic but must be pursued daily by trusting and obeying the Lord (Eph. 5:18).

After the believers at Pentecost were filled with the Holy Spirit, they spoke in languages they had never learned (Acts 2:4). Passersby from more than a dozen regions heard the speech in their own languages. The disciples' message was about "the magnificent acts of God" (v. 11). This was the first of many instances in Acts when filling with the Holy Spirit led to equipping for the church's mission. Still today, the power of the Holy Spirit helps us fulfill our mission to spread the gospel.

> **LEADER NOTE:** In Acts 2, the disciples' speaking in tongues clearly involved intelligible speech in foreign languages previously unknown to them. The disciples spoke clearly, boldly, and loudly enough that passersby perceived the message in their native tongues. The point of tongues in this passage was not individual communion with God but proclamation of God's message to the nations—just what Jesus said would happen when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples (Acts 1:8). In essence, Pentecost was a reversal of God's judgment at the tower of Babylon, or Babel (Gen. 11:1-9).

How have you experienced the Holy Spirit's empowerment for works of service or sharing the gospel?

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Notes

SCAN ME

Bonus Content

Scan this QR code to learn more about Peter's life before and after Pentecost.

THE HOLY SPIRIT EMBOLDENS US TO SPEAK SO PEOPLE MAY HEAR THE GOSPEL, BELIEVE IT, AND BE SAVED (ACTS 2:14-21).

Highlight the statement that explains how people will be saved.

14 Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and proclaimed to them,
"Fellow Jews and all you residents of Jerusalem, let this be known to you,
and pay attention to my words. 15 For these people are not drunk, as you
suppose, since it's only nine in the morning. 16 On the contrary, this is what
was spoken through the prophet Joel: 17 And it will be in the last days, says
God, that I will pour out my Spirit on all people; then your sons and your
daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, and your old men
will dream dreams. 18 I will even pour out my Spirit on my servants in those
days, both men and women and they will prophesy. 19 I will display wonders
in the heaven above and signs on the earth below: blood and fire and a
cloud of smoke. 20 The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to
blood before the great and glorious day of the Lord comes. 21 Then everyone
who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Peter's actions at Pentecost put to rest any doubts about the Holy Spirit's ability to embolden former cowards. A few weeks earlier, Peter denied Jesus three times for fear of the Jews (Luke 22:54-62). Now Peter preached Jesus to those same Jews (Acts 2:23). His life surrendered to Jesus, Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit. The juxtaposition of wine and the Spirit, both behavior-influencing, underscores that the Spirit emboldens those He fills (vv. 13,15; cf. Eph. 5:18).

Peter quoted the Old Testament prophet Joel beginning in Acts 2:17. In its original context, Joel's prophecy called Israel to repent following a locust invasion that foreshadowed further judgment. Yet God promised His Spirit would renew His people following their judgment (cf. Joel 2:28). That renewal of cleansing from sin and newness of life began at Pentecost (see Ezek. 36:25-29). Furthermore, the Spirit's indwelling presence is available to all people regardless of gender, age, or social status (Acts 2:17-18).

> **LEADER NOTE:** The Holy Spirit's emboldening power is a recurring theme in Acts. Peter "was filled with the Holy Spirit" after being arrested (Acts 4:8), and he preached Jesus so boldly that it confounded his persecutors (4:13-14). Stephen was "full of the Spirit" (6:3,5,8,10) before preaching a courageous sermon that led to his martyrdom (Acts 7). Saul, whom we know as Paul, was "filled with the Holy Spirit" (9:17) before engaging in a years-long ministry of sacrifice. For followers of Jesus, the path to godly courage always includes trusting and obeying God's Spirit.

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Who are some believers you admire as examples of Spirit-empowered boldness for Christ?

The part of Joel's prophecy quoted in Acts 2:19-20 may have had a double meaning for Luke. The future "day of the Lord" describes a time when the present structure of the cosmos will end and God will judge humanity. Yet the same imagery describes details surrounding Jesus's death (the heavens darkened supernaturally; Luke 23:44-45) and His ascension (the disciples saw wonders in the sky; Acts 1:9). Both facets of the double meaning point to the same conclusion: The Spirit's work guides us toward salvation. God's judgment is coming, and we are saved by Jesus's death.

Salvation is available only in Jesus. Joel's original prophecy referred to "the name of the LORD" (Joel 2:32). The name "LORD" in all capital letters is the traditional way of translating the name of God—Yahweh. Peter applied Joel's phrase to Jesus, equating Jesus and Yahweh. Jesus is the covenant Lord, the only way of salvation. Acts 2:21 is both a promise and an invitation to believe.

> **LEADER NOTE:** The Holy Spirit's work of guiding people to salvation occurs in conjunction with a human witness. Paul underscored this point beginning in Romans 10:13, also quoting Joel 2:32, and then noting that gospel preachers must be sent for anyone to call on the name of the Lord (Rom. 10:14-15). Scripture itself may be the human communication the Spirit uses to draw readers to Christ, but the overwhelming pattern of the Spirit is to use human messengers carrying the message of the gospel from the Word of God to share that message with sinners in need of salvation. So when we share the gospel, we can trust the Spirit's guiding power to shepherd men and women to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

How can we recognize when the Holy Spirit is drawing someone to receive salvation in Christ?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

God's plan was always to redeem and rescue His people, filling them with His Spirit and calling them His own so that they may go out and bless the nations through the gospel of salvation.

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ARRIVAL

SURVEY: Write the following words on a board: whistle, tinkling glass, shout, dimmed lights, horn, music, flashing sign, silence. As the group arrives, invite them to draw a tally mark next to the word or phrase that would most likely get their attention in a crowded room. Ask: "In your experience, have you ever had to get the attention of a large group of people? How did you do so?"

CONTEXT

REFRESH: Remember that last week we focused on Jesus's instructions to His followers before His ascension along with the promise of the Holy Spirit, who would empower His followers for kingdom ministry. Today's passage provides the fulfillment of Jesus's promise precisely ten days later.

TRANSITION: Point to the variety of responses to the opening survey. Note that while some may be somewhat effective, none that were listed fall into the category of astonishing or spellbinding. Suggest that these measures pale in comparison to the way the Holy Spirit announced His presence in a crowded room.

RECAP

ASK: As you prepared this week, what stood out to you about the way the Holy Spirit empowered the disciples?


THE PROPHETS TESTIFY

IDENTIFY: Pass out copies of **Pack Item 9: The Prophets Testify** and review the first row about how the prophecy of Joel was fulfilled in this passage in Acts. Lead the group to identify significant sets of threes that are highlighted in the passage: (1) the three manifestations of the Holy Spirit as He arrived to indwell the believers *(wind, fire, tongues)*; (2) the three ways the prophet Joel indicated that the Spirit would be poured out on the people *(sons and daughters prophesy, young men's visions, and old men's dreams)*; and (3) the three indicators of the work of the Holy Spirit in verses 18-21 *(prophesying, signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, and salvation of all who call on Jesus's name)*.

TRANSITION: Let's delve deeper into the arrival of the Holy Spirit in the disciples' lives and how this remains a defining moment in the life of every believer.

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Key Concept: The Holy Spirit empowers and emboldens His people for kingdom mission.

GROUP ACTIVITY

Notes

LIST: Direct your group to page 64 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a list titled "Filled by the Spirit." Recreate the list on a board so you can record the group's findings as you interact with the Scripture text.

Filled by the Spirit

Read Acts 2:1-6,14-21. Record the Scripture references and the significance pertaining to the words and phrases below.

TOGETHER IN ONE PLACE	WIND
FIRE	TONGUES/LANGUAGES
PEOPLE FROM EVERY NATION	PETER WITH THE ELEVEN
MY SPIRIT	ALL PEOPLE
EVERYONE WHO CALLS	THE LORD

EXPLAIN: Point out that while the Holy Spirit arrived at Pentecost in a burst of wind and fire, the lasting impact of His presence in believers' lives today is equally significant.

READ: Invite two volunteers to read aloud Acts 2:1-6 and 14-21.

DIVIDE: Form two groups. Assign one to work together through the five words/phrases in the first column and the second to work through the second column. Guide the groups to identify the Scripture references related to each word or phrase to help them understand the significance of each word or phrase.

REPORT: Walk through the activity together so that the groups may take notes from each other to complete the activity.

CONSIDER: Guide the group to consider the dramatic arrival of the Holy Spirit. Ask: "Why might the manner of the Spirit's arrival be important in light of the monumental and significant task that Jesus left to His followers?"

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COMPARE: Lead the group to consider how the bold behavior of Peter and the other disciples compares to the courage of believers today. Ask: "How does the Spirit's outpouring on the disciples resemble God's encounters with people in the Old Testament? How does the Spirit's coming relate to Christ and His teachings? Why was it important for the Holy Spirit to appear with divine symbolism?"

DEBRIEF

How should seeing the work of the Spirit in the early church embolden your faith and your obedience?

SUMMARIZE

While the arrival of the Holy Spirit in a rush of wind and fire and prophetic words was a stand-alone event, His presence remains as strong, powerful, and unyielding today if we give Him free reign in our lives. Christians have a purpose and mission given to us by God through Jesus, and as with the disciples at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit provides believers today with the power to accomplish it.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 65). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Heart** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.



HEAD: Like the early disciples, believers today can perceive indications that the Holy Spirit is working in them. The apostle Paul noted some of the most important indications, calling them the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). When a Christian is filled with the Spirit and empowered for service, these fruits are evident.

What evidence of the Spirit do you detect in your own life right now?



HEART: It is inspiring to read about Peter's boldness in sharing Jesus. Yet it can be scary to respond in faith when we have opportunities to share Jesus boldly. Thankfully, the same Holy Spirit who emboldened Peter still grants believers boldness for proclaiming the gospel. We can pray for faith to overcome our fear of speaking up about Jesus among friends, family, and coworkers.

In what situations do you hesitate to speak about Jesus and need the Holy Spirit's help?



HANDS: Believers filled with the Holy Spirit go on mission for Christ. They serve in Jesus's name, extending compassion and help by meeting needs in their cities, states, nations, and around the world. Such Spirit-empowered

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service can begin in your Bible study group. As a group, consider seeking volunteer opportunities in your church, local service projects, or even mission trips you might take together. Such ministries are tangible expressions of the Spirit's work within you.

What are some ways your group could serve together in your church and community?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this week's session.

- To evaluate whether you are employing Spirit-given boldness and speech as a believer, make a list of the times you have shared Christ with someone else over the last year.
- If your evaluation suggests that you need to be more intentional about your mission of sharing the gospel, create another list of people you would love to see accept Jesus, along with ways you can deliberately spend some time with them to create an opportunity to be His witness.
- Identify other ways you can be bold in your faith, such as speaking out on social media, establishing a prayer group or Bible study at your workplace, or leveraging an affinity group to share your passion for Christ.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 65 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 134 with your group. Lead the group in prayer for all of their fellow servants and followers of Jesus that they too will use their time wisely and be faithful to the gospel mission.

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KEY DOCTRINE ARTICLE

THE HOLY SPIRIT

By Chad Meeks

We've all been in situations in which we needed help. Our human nature imposes upon us a dependence on others. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, but it is our lot in life. Physical and emotional help is one thing, but what are we to do when we are in need of spiritual help? Where do we turn when we need care for our souls? Scripture allots that role to the Holy Spirit, who also provides for our physical and emotional needs, often through the ministry of other believers.

In John 14:16-17, Jesus says: "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever. He is the Spirit of truth." This promised Counselor is the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity. His role within the economy of salvation is instrumental in the spread of the gospel and the renewal of the soul. Understanding the Person and role of the Holy Spirit is crucial to grasping the grandeur of the salvation God offers.

A PERSON, NOT A FORCE

Over the centuries, Christians have developed ways of articulating the distinct roles of the Godhead based upon the testimony of Scripture. Distinguishing these roles, however, in no way means the Holy Spirit is subservient to any other Person of the Trinity. Furthermore, claiming the Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Godhead doesn't mean the Holy Spirit is third in rank. The Holy Spirit is God just as the Father and Son are God. The Holy Spirit created the world just as the Father and Son created the world. And just as the Father and Son are eternal, without beginning or end, so the Holy Spirit is eternal. The term "Third Person" explains the relationship between the Persons of the Trinity. The distinctions between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not references to rank or priority. The Athanasian Creed expresses this perfectly: "The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; And yet they are not three Gods, but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Spirit Lord; And yet they are not three Lords but one Lord."[1]

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit is not some impersonal force. At the very least, the personhood of the Holy Spirit implies a relational disposition. The Holy Spirit is not an indifferent entity wielding unfettered power over the universe; rather, He cares for and nurtures the souls of all believers.

THE SPIRIT'S DIVINE ROLE

Many of the distinctions between the Persons of the Godhead have to do with the way Scripture describes their roles in the plan of salvation. That's not to say that God's redemptive plan is rigidly parsed out among the three Persons of the Trinity. Ultimately, the operations of the Trinity are inseparable, meaning the Persons of the Trinity work as one undivided Being. Yet in helping humankind understand the way God disseminates His grace and works His salvific plan, Scripture identifies certain responsibilities as belonging to distinct Persons of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit performs several specific and significant responsibilities within the plan of salvation.

For one, Scripture states the Holy Spirit draws us to God. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit "will convict the world about sin, righteousness, and judgment" (John 16:8). By this we understand that it is the Holy Spirit who convicts hearts and opens eyes to the need for God. Thus, the Holy Spirit is the One speaking to the hearts of the lost, calling them to repent and believe. God's pursuit of sinners is

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Claiming the Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Godhead doesn't mean the Holy Spirit is third in rank. The Holy Spirit is God just as the Father and Son are God.

initiated and instigated by the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit did not convict us of our sin, then we would never turn to God seeking forgiveness.

Another essential role of the Holy Spirit is regeneration. In John 3:6, Jesus states that which "is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit." Regeneration is the act of being born again. Scripture testifies that the Holy Spirit renews and cleanses our souls from sin (Titus 3:5). This is a complete and total work of God. This isn't something human beings do; this is something God does alone. As *The Baptist Faith and Message* states, the Holy Spirit "calls men to the Saviour, and effects regeneration. At the moment of regeneration He baptizes every believer into the Body of Christ."[2] Thus, the Holy Spirit initiates one's Christian life; apart from this, no one would desire to come to God or know Him.

The Holy Spirit initiates one's Christian life; apart from this, no one would desire to come to God or know Him.

We also see that the Holy Spirit is instrumental in guiding the church, that is, the Holy Spirit protects and leads the Bride of Christ. As an encouragement to the disciples, Jesus said: "The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you" (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit guides the church to understand and uphold the teachings of Jesus. This, of course, doesn't mean that all questions about Scripture will be answered or that all mysteries will be solved. It does mean, though, that the Spirit will keep the church from losing what Jesus gave: the gospel truth.

1. Rick Brannan, ed., "Athanasian Creed," *Historic Creeds and Confessions*, electronic ed. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2001) [Logos].
2. "II.C God the Holy Spirit," *The Baptist Faith and Message* (Nashville: Southern Baptist Convention, 2025), https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#ii.

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GOD EMPOWERS US

CORE PASSAGE: ACTS 3:1-16

CONTEXT

The church was born at Pentecost by the Holy Spirit. In the weeks that followed, believers established what daily life entailed for Spirit-filled disciples of Jesus. They visited one another's houses, met one another's material needs, and participated in both large- and small-group church meetings. Prayer and studying the apostles' teachings were central (Acts 2:42-47). Miraculous displays of God's power occurred among the church through the apostles (v. 43). The first of more than a dozen miracles in Acts was accomplished through Peter and John in Acts 3.

KEY CONCEPT

God works through His people for His glory and the spread of the gospel.

As you examine Acts 3:1-16:

- Recognize that our response to God's work in our lives should be praise.
- Consider how faith in Christ heals and perfects us, if not physically in this life, certainly spiritually.

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TIMELINE

Jesus Is Crucified and Raised from the Dead on the Third Day (Luke 23:26–24:12)

Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit and Ascends into Heaven (Acts 1:4-14)

The Holy Spirit Fills the Disciples at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-41)

SESSION STUDY: **Peter and John Heal a Beggar and Preach About Jesus (Acts 3:1-26)**

The Apostles Are Persecuted for Preaching About Jesus (Acts 4:1–5:42)

Daily Readings

- ☐ **Day 1:** Acts 3:1-10
- ☐ **Day 2:** Acts 3:11-26
- ☐ **Day 3:** Acts 4:1-4
- ☐ **Day 4:** Acts 4:5-22
- ☐ **Day 5:** Acts 4:23-31
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 9

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Notes

GOD'S WORKS LEAD US AND OTHERS TO PRAISE AND GLORIFY HIM (ACTS 3:1-10).

Circle the actions the beggar took after being healed.

1 Now Peter and John were going up to the temple for the time of prayer
at three in the afternoon. 2 A man who was lame from birth was being
carried there. He was placed each day at the temple gate called Beautiful,
so that he could beg from those entering the temple. 3 When he saw Peter
and John about to enter the temple, he asked for money. 4 Peter, along
with John, looked straight at him and said, "Look at us." 5 So he turned to
them, expecting to get something from them. 6 But Peter said, "I don't have
silver or gold, but what I do have, I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of
Nazareth, get up and walk!" 7 Then, taking him by the right hand he raised
him up, and at once his feet and ankles became strong. 8 So he jumped
up and started to walk, and he entered the temple with them—walking,
leaping, and praising God. 9 All the people saw him walking and praising
God, 10 and they recognized that he was the one who used to sit and
beg at the Beautiful Gate of the temple. So they were filled with awe and
astonishment at what had happened to him.

Peter and John went to the temple for the afternoon prayer, a daily Jewish practice, demonstrating that early Christians continued to engage with their Jewish neighbors. At a gate into the temple complex, they encountered a man with deep needs. A lifelong condition left him unable to walk, unable to work, and likely the subject of ridicule (see John 9:1-2).

PLACE STUDY

THE TEMPLE: The church that began in Jerusalem was comprised of Jewish followers of Christ. They met together in the temple (Acts 2:46) and participated in prayer times at the temple (3:1). But they did not rely on temple sacrifices to atone for their sins. Jesus's followers relied on His sacrificial death alone to atone for their sins (Heb. 10:1-18). Meeting in the temple would have been a convenient space for gathering as well as to engage others with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The man thought his greatest need was for money, but God knows what we need more than we do, so He supplied the man's greatest need. In spite of a lack of money, Peter healed the man in Jesus's name. This was not a

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Notes

magical incantation; such triviality proved impotent against spiritual forces (see Acts 19:11-17). To heal in Jesus's name was to heal by Jesus's authority.

> **LEADER NOTE:** Peter's act of healing does not devalue financial assistance for the needy. In the Old and New Testaments, God commands His people to assist the poor (Prov. 19:17; 1 John 3:17-18). But more than money, believers have the gospel for eternal life. Material support can complement our gospel witness, but it cannot take the place of calling people to repentance and faith in Jesus.

What helpful methods have you discovered for recognizing and meeting people's true needs?

The lame man's hand, extended initially with the hope of money, received something far more valuable. Peter grasped the man by the hand and raised him up by instantaneous healing in Jesus's name. Our response to God's work in our lives should be praise, and the formerly lame man did just that. Along with Peter and John, he entered the temple worshiping and using his newfound mobility in active praise.

It is unclear whether the man placed his faith in Christ, though Acts 3:16 may suggest he did. Either way, the largely Jewish crowd in the temple saw him "walking and praising God" (v. 9). They recognized who he was, and consequently, they were astonished. No doctor could cure a man lame from birth. Only humanity's Creator could do that, and He did so through His servants Peter and John. God brought a needy man to them so they could bring him into the worship of God.

> **LEADER NOTE:** The temple crowd's reaction of "awe and astonishment" (v. 10) underscores the need for gospel witness to accompany our acts of ministry, lest praise be directed toward us instead of God (cf. 14:8-18). Believers do well to minister to people in ways that reflect God's power and compassion, yet that ministry can lead to salvation only if accompanied by the gospel (Rom. 10:17).

What works of God have you witnessed that led you to praise and glorify Him?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

When God works in the world through His people, He desires that it leads to faith in Christ, understanding that salvation is through Christ alone.

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ALL MIRACLES AND ACTS OF GOD SHOULD POINT TO CHRIST AND THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL (ACTS 3:11-16).

Underline the statements Peter made about the crowd's sins, and circle the statements Peter made about faith in Christ.

11 While he was holding on to Peter and John, all the people, utterly
astonished, ran toward them in what is called Solomon's Colonnade.
12 When Peter saw this, he addressed the people: "Fellow Israelites, why
are you amazed at this? Why do you stare at us, as though we had made
him walk by our own power or godliness? 13 The God of Abraham, Isaac,
and Jacob, the God of our ancestors, has glorified his servant Jesus, whom
you handed over and denied before Pilate, though he had decided to
release him. 14 You denied the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a
murderer released to you. 15 You killed the source of life, whom God raised
from the dead; we are witnesses of this. 16 By faith in his name, his name
has made this man strong, whom you see and know. So the faith that comes
through Jesus has given him this perfect health in front of all of you.

The man remained near Peter and John as they moved from the temple gate into Solomon's Colonnade, an open meeting area. When the amazed crowd gathered around the trio, Peter used the occasion to share the gospel of Jesus. The power for such a miracle, Peter confessed, would not be found in the apostles but in the One these very people had crucified just weeks before and who had been raised from the dead.

Our good works should point to Christ and the gospel, so Peter focused his explanatory sermon on Jesus. By invoking the patriarchs, Peter alluded to God's covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3), declaring that all of God's promises are and will be fulfilled in Jesus. But instead of trusting Jesus, "the Holy and Righteous One" (Acts 3:14), the crowd "denied" Him, a mistake evident even to the Roman governor Pilate (v. 13).

> **LEADER NOTE:** Jesus's fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant is a recurring theme in the New Testament. Its opening verse declares Jesus "the Son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1). The New Testament's final book pictures a "multitude from every nation" before God's throne (Rev. 7:9), a fulfillment of God's promise to bless all nations through Abraham's family (see Gen. 12:1-3). All who believe in Jesus are Abraham's spiritual children and recipients of God's covenant promises to the patriarchs (Rom. 4:11; Gal. 3:7,27-29).

What should we learn from Peter's preaching to this guilty crowd?

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Our faith in Christ heals and perfects us, perhaps not physically in this life but certainly spiritually, and physically in eternity. But before someone can be healed, they must realize they are sick. Peter sought to convince the crowd of their spiritual sickness. The Jews in Jerusalem denied Jesus and asked Pilate to release in His place a murderer named Barabbas, which he did (Luke 23:18-25). That made the Jewish crowd complicit in killing "the source of life" (Acts 3:15). Yet Jesus was raised to life again, and now He offers salvation to all who trust in Him.

Faith is the way we receive this salvation. The lame man's physical healing illustrated this reality. Jesus's name, meaning His personal authority and power, "made this man strong" (v. 16), not any faith he or the apostles exercised. "Faith in his name" was the conduit, however, through which the healing came, though it is unclear whether verse 16 references Peter's faith or the man's faith. Either way, faith is like a drinking straw though which the water of life flows.

> **LEADER NOTE:** Pilate's release of Barabbas pictured the way Jesus's death saved His people. Barabbas "had been thrown into prison for a rebellion that had taken place in the city, and for murder" (Luke 23:19). If anyone deserved crucifixion, it was Barabbas. But Pilate released the guilty and instead punished the innocent—Jesus—though Pilate "found in him no grounds for the death penalty" (23:22). We find ourselves in the same predicament: guilty of sin and deserving death (Rom. 3:23; 6:23a). But God sent His Son to bear the punishment we deserve and offers release from eternal punishment in hell to any sinner who trusts Jesus as Lord and Savior (Rom. 5:7-9).

If someone asked you how Jesus has changed your life, what would you say?

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH: The church is a sign and instrument of the kingdom of God, a people united by faith in the gospel announcement of the crucified and risen King Jesus. The mission of the church is to go into the world in the power of the Spirit and make disciples by proclaiming this gospel, calling people to respond in ongoing repentance and faith, and demonstrating the truth and power of the gospel by living under the lordship of Christ for the glory of God and the good of the world.

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ARRIVAL

ENGAGE: Write these questions on a board for the group to read and reflect upon as they arrive: "What was the most memorable good work openly credited to Christ that you participated in? Which one was a missed opportunity?" Provide time for some volunteers to share their experiences.

CONTEXT

REMIND: *(Recall* **Pack Item 2: Christ as Sacrifice***, and highlight the details in "The Once-for-All Sacrifice" section.)* While some time had passed since Jesus's crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and Pentecost in our passage today, the disciples were finding a new normal in a zealous, Spirit-empowered ministry and had resumed the practice of regular temple prayer. They knew that Jesus had fulfilled the requirements for a sin offering, so they went to the temple at regular times not for atonement but to pray and share the gospel.

RECAP

OUTLINE: Lead the group to recount the main points of the story by identifying: (1) the main people mentioned, (2) where the story took place, (3) the words and actions of the people, and (4) what happened as a result. Highlight Peter's command to the beggar and the way he leveraged the event to confront the people in the temple with the gospel of Christ.

TRANSITION: Let's further break down what happened at the Beautiful Gate and Solomon's Colonnade to understand the takeaways we should apply to our own interactions with others.

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GROUP ACTIVITY

Notes

CHART: Direct your group to page 74 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a chart titled "Point to Christ." Recreate the chart on a board so you can record the group's findings as you interact with the Scripture text.

Point to Christ

Read Acts 3:1-16. Identify the hook(s) Peter and John used to engage the beggar and the people in the temple and how they pointed them to Christ.

THE BEGGAR	THE PEOPLE
THE HOOK	
THE CONNECTION TO CHRIST	

READ: Invite two volunteers to read aloud Acts 3:1-10 and 11-16.

INSTRUCT: Assign groups of 3-4 to review the passage for precise words or phrases that were used for the hook to capture the attention of the audience for the larger purpose of glorifying Christ. Assign some groups to examine the story as it relates to the beggar (see especially Acts 3:2-7) and the other group to analyze the story as it relates to the people (see especially Acts 3:11-15).

REPORT: After a couple of minutes, invite group representatives to spell out how Peter and John got the beggar's attention for their miracle and message. *(Peter and John called for eye contact; they used the beggar's need for money to fulfill a deeper need)* Ask the groups how the apostles connected this interaction to Christ. Record responses on the board. Discuss: "Looking at Acts 3:16, whose faith would you say contributed to the miracle: Peter and John's, the beggar's, or all of them?"

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ANALYZE: Direct the groups that examined the people's experience to pinpoint what captured their attention. *(The miracle; Peter's question; both?)* Ask: "How did Peter connect what happened to Christ?" *(Peter took care to make sure he did not accept gratitude that rightfully belonged to Christ.)* Record responses on the board.

DISCUSS: What are some obstacles we may experience to directing attention to Christ for our good deeds? How might we navigate doing good deeds in the public view versus doing good deeds in secret?

DEBRIEF

What are some ways we can give glory to Christ along with our good deeds?

Should a sense of awkwardness caution us from doing so? Why or why not?

SUMMARIZE

As Jesus taught in Matthew 5:16 and this passage so aptly demonstrates, Christians have a mandate to do good works so that others will observe them and glorify our Father in heaven. Likely we aren't curing people of paralysis on the way to church, but we do support people and meet their tangible needs through a myriad of opportunities. When doing so, may we be mindful to identify people's greatest need and to point to the only solution—to be forgiven of their sins by trusting in Jesus.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 75). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Hands** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.



HEAD: Sometimes we live like we don't expect God to intervene in the world with power. When friends are sick, we send a card but neglect to ask God for healing. When a coworker's family life is crumbling, we offer a kind word but stop short of asking them to receive salvation from the God who repairs broken families. Reflect on Acts 3:1-16 as a reminder that God's power still works in the world today.

Why do you think we are tempted to live like God no longer intervenes in the world?



HEART: In our culture, it might feel awkward to attribute our good deeds to Jesus. That might be due to a reticence to appear holier-than-thou, which is a worthwhile concern. But we should beware the presence of pride that could be behind that same conclusion. Yet neither the fear of man nor the desire for self-glorification should keep us from giving Christ His due.

What is the state of your heart toward giving Jesus the glory He deserves?

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HANDS: We are surrounded by people with needs. Widows need help with jobs around the house. Young families need babysitting. Kids need tutoring in school or coaching in sports. People battling severe illness need a card or a visit. When we meet those needs with ministry in Jesus's name, we may spur someone to praise God for the help they received. We also may open a door to share the gospel.

How will you serve others this week and show you are motivated by a desire to share Jesus's love?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Review the ways that you serve in your church or community. Consider how you share Christ or ensure that He gets the glory from your service.
- If you have not taken seriously the command to do good works with the intention of Christ getting glory from them, consider what you can do immediately, regularly, and joyfully to fulfill that command.
- Brainstorm a project that your group can accomplish together to help others and point them to Christ. Focus on how to get the attention of the unchurched or unsaved and what you will do to ensure Christ gets the glory.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 75 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 9:1-2 with your group, thanking God for His righteous and merciful work in the world through His people.

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GOD PROTECTS US

CORE PASSAGE: ACTS 5:17-32

CONTEXT

After Pentecost, the message about Jesus spread rapidly. Three thousand people were saved the day the church was born (Acts 2:41), and new believers were added to the church daily (v. 47). But the fury of opponents spread rapidly too. To some the gospel was "an aroma of death leading to death" (2 Cor. 2:16). That was true of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. When Peter and John healed a man lame from birth and followed the healing with preaching about Jesus, they were arrested by the Jewish authorities (Acts 3:1–4:22). Once released from imprisonment, however, their gospel witness intensified, as did the persecution.

KEY CONCEPT

Though persecution may come, God's people must remain diligent in spreading the gospel.

As you examine Acts 5:17-32:

- Observe that through our perseverance in persecution, others may see God's work and glory.
- Recognize that suffering often serves as a tool for spreading the message of redemption and forgiveness.

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TIMELINE

Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit and Ascends into Heaven (Acts 1:4-14)

The Holy Spirit Fills the Disciples at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-41)

Peter and John Heal a Beggar and Preach About Jesus (Acts 3:1-26)

SESSION STUDY: The Apostles Are Persecuted for Preaching About Jesus (Acts 4:1–5:42)

Stephen Is Martyred for Preaching About Jesus (Acts 6:1–7:60)

Daily Readings

- ☐ **Day 1:** Acts 4:32-37
- ☐ **Day 2:** Acts 5:1-11
- ☐ **Day 3:** Acts 5:12-16
- ☐ **Day 4:** Acts 5:17-32
- ☐ **Day 5:** Acts 5:33-42
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 143

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Notes

GOD'S MISSION IN SPREADING THE GOSPEL WILL NOT BE THWARTED (ACTS 5:17-24).

Underline each person or group in the passage that sought to thwart the apostles' witness for Jesus.

17 Then the high priest rose up. He and all who were with him, who belonged to the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. 18 So they arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. 19 But an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail during the night, brought them out, and said, 20 "Go and stand in the temple, and tell the people all about this life." 21 Hearing this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach. When the high priest and those who were with him arrived, they convened the Sanhedrin—the full council of the Israelites—and sent orders to the jail to have them brought. 22 But when the servants got there, they did not find them in the jail; so they returned and reported, 23 "We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing in front of the doors, but when we opened them, we found no one inside." 24 As the captain of the temple police and the chief priests heard these things, they were baffled about them, wondering what would come of this.

As the apostles preached and performed miracles in Jesus's name, their reputation grew around Jerusalem. That angered the Jewish leaders, who sought their own acclaim and power. Chief among those angered were the high priest and his cohorts, who were members of a Jewish sect known as the Sadducees. The Sadducees believed God's Word comprised only the five books of Moses (Genesis–Deuteronomy). They rejected the belief in angels or the notion of a bodily resurrection and were skeptical of supernatural claims. These leaders arrested the twelve apostles to underscore their control over religious life.

God alone, however, has the authoritative word over the religious life that pleases Him. So He thwarted the Jewish leaders' plans with a supernatural jailbreak. An angel "opened the doors of the jail during the night" and "brought them out" (Acts 5:19). Then the angel instructed the apostles to return to the temple and continue preaching, which they did. Though persecution will occur, God's people must remain diligent to proclaim the gospel of Jesus.

> **LEADER NOTE:** This is the first of three supernatural prison narratives in Acts. Later, Peter was rescued from jail by an angel (12:3-19), and God freed Paul and Silas by an earthquake, which led to their jailer coming to faith in Christ (16:16-34). But Stephen was stoned to death (7:54-60) and James was executed by Herod (12:1-2). And at the close of Acts, Paul remained imprisoned in Rome. Two lessons emerge from these prison narratives. First, no earthly

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government can stop the witness of God's church. Second, God's priority is advancing the gospel, and He opens and closes prison doors based on what will expand His kingdom most effectively.

When have you seen a follower of Jesus remain diligent in their witness through persecution?

Through our perseverance under persecution, others may see God's work and glory, just as they did with the apostles. As soon as the temple opened the next morning, they returned and "began to teach" (5:21), as the angel instructed. The Jewish ruling council, on the other hand, convened with every available member present in a stately show of political power to judge the apostles who were supposed to be in the jail. But the prisoners could not be found to stand trial. God had trumped the Sanhedrin's political power.

Details of the prison break are slim. Somehow doors were relocked behind the escaped apostles, and the guards were unaware anything happened. The befuddlement of the Jewish leaders is understandable. For one, a secure jail had been breached. More significantly, the Sadducees, who generally disbelieved claims of supernatural intervention, were defeated supernaturally. They wondered what would come of the Christian movement. Like a trick birthday candle, it rekindled each time they tried to snuff it out.

LEADER NOTE: This account drips with irony. Simultaneous with a meeting of the full Jewish council intended to cower the believers into silence, the apostles preached openly outside the meeting hall. Strongmen at the jail doors were oblivious that no one was detained behind them. Those who thought they were in complete control were baffled to find they understood nothing about what they were facing.

What results have you seen from a follower of Jesus remaining diligent in their witness through persecution?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

God's people spread the good news of Jesus Christ because that was Jesus's mission, that all may repent and know salvation through Him. But as with Christ, faithfulness can come with the cost of persecution and suffering. Yet we continue sharing because of our love for people and obedience to God with the help of the power of the Holy Spirit.

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GOD'S PEOPLE REMAIN STEADFAST IN OBEDIENCE TO HIM (ACTS 5:25-32).

Circle the apostles' bold response to the threat of the Sanhedrin.

25 Someone came and reported to them, "Look! The men you put in jail are
standing in the temple and teaching the people." 26 Then the commander
went with the servants and brought them in without force, because they
were afraid the people might stone them. 27 After they brought them
in, they had them stand before the Sanhedrin, and the high priest asked,
28 "Didn't we strictly order you not to teach in this name? Look, you have
filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty
of this man's blood." 29 Peter and the apostles replied, "We must obey God
rather than people. 30 The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you
had murdered by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted this man to his right
hand as ruler and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.
32 We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has
given to those who obey him."

The apostles exhibited striking boldness as they stood in the temple and taught the people. Why? Because the Sanhedrin forbade Peter and John from doing precisely that (4:18). That's why the apostles were in jail in the first place, but they chose to obey the Lord, no matter the consequences.

The apostles once again were called before the Sanhedrin. The commander, afraid of the people listening to the apostles, brought them in "without force" (5:26) because the apostles went willingly. Believers combat persecution with force of a different variety. Though others may try to sway us off course, we continue to obey in evangelism with boldness through the Spirit. The apostles, standing in the same spot as Jesus the day He was crucified (Luke 22:66), chose to fill Jerusalem with the gospel and call all to repentance of their sin.

> **LEADER NOTE:** The Jewish leaders did not employ hyperbole when they said the apostles "filled Jerusalem with [their] teaching" (Acts 5:28). Everyone knew about it. Baptisms were public events, likely in pools near the temple complex. The three thousand people baptized on the day of Pentecost must have been quite a spectacle. "Multitudes of both men and women" followed the Lord in baptism during subsequent weeks (v. 14). God was rewarding the apostles' obedience in evangelism with extraordinary results.

What obstacles sway you off course in your quest to be Jesus's witness?

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THEOLOGY CONNECTION

EVANGELISM: It is the duty and privilege of every Christian and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to make disciples of all nations. The new birth of man's spirit by God's Holy Spirit means the birth of love for others. Missionary effort on the part of all thus rests upon a spiritual necessity of the regenerate life and is expressly and repeatedly commanded in the teachings of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ has commanded the preaching of the gospel to all nations. It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle.

Believers submit to governing authorities unless those authorities contradict God. In such instances, believers "must obey God rather than people" (v. 29). The Sanhedrin's opposition to Jesus was tragic because Jesus fulfilled the Jews' salvation history (v. 30). Jesus is the Son of Abraham who blesses all nations and the Son of David who reigns over God's people eternally (Matt. 1:1). But instead of embracing Jesus, the Jewish leaders murdered Him.

Thankfully, neither Jesus nor the apostles suffered for nothing. By the work of the Holy Spirit, suffering serves as a tool for spreading the message of redemption. The Jewish leaders thought the apostles pointed out their sin as an act of vengeance. In reality, this was a call to "repentance" and "forgiveness" through Jesus's death (Acts 5:31), even to those who were guilty of His murder. The apostles endured suffering to be witnesses for Jesus, a ministry aided by the Holy Spirit (v. 32).

How have you seen suffering serve as a tool for spreading the good news?

LEADER NOTE: Modern explanations of the gospel almost always include Jesus's death and resurrection. Rarely do they mention His ascension, but this too is part of the gospel. The apostles highlighted that very point when they said, "God exalted this man to his right hand as ruler and Savior" (v. 31). In addition to the resurrection, the ascension further vindicated Jesus as the innocent and powerful Savior and the rightful ruling King over all creation. It also inaugurated the era of the Holy Spirit indwelling all believers. No wonder Peter included the ascension in his gospel presentation at Pentecost (2:33-36; cf. 3:21).

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ARRIVAL

DISCUSS: Focus the group's attention with this question: "When it comes to the objective and how to play the game, what do football, soccer, and hockey all have in common?"

TRANSITION: In football, soccer, and hockey, opposing teams try to reach a zone to score points while evading the other team's defense. In a similar way, disciples of Jesus carrying His gospel come against opposition on the way to their goal of sharing the gospel and bringing glory to Christ.

CONTEXT

REVIEW: Engage your group to retrace briefly the progression of the book of Acts through Jesus's ascension, Pentecost, and Peter's Spirit-empowered healing followed by his preaching the gospel. Note that in today's session, the disciples have now arrived at the point of persecution for the sake of the gospel.

RECAP



LOCATE: Display **Pack Item 10: Gospel on the Move Map**. Note that the setting for this session, like the previous one, was the temple in Jerusalem because that was a gathering place for believers and a location for taking the message of the gospel directly to the Jews.

IDENTIFY: Instruct the group to recall the emotions ascribed to the people in the passage: the high priest and the Sadducees *(jealousy)*; the captain and the chief priests *(baffled; wondering)*; the commander and the servants *(fear)*. Ask: "While there was not a description of how the disciples felt during all these extraordinary happenings, what emotion would you ascribe to them? Why?"

TRANSITION: Let's take a deeper look into the importance of keeping our eye on the goal as we consider the disciples' faithfulness in their quest of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth.

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GROUP ACTIVITY

Notes

CHART: Direct your group to page 82 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a chart titled "Winning Others to Christ." Recreate the chart on a board so you can record the group's findings as you interact with the Scripture.

Winning Others to Christ

Read Acts 5:17-32. Using a sports analogy, consider what evangelism entailed for the early church and what it entails for believers now.

	THEN	NOW
PARTICIPANTS		
OBJECTIVE		
OPPONENTS		
OBSTACLES		
SPECTATORS		

SAY: Sharing Christ is not a game because it has life-and-death consequences. But just as the Scriptures employ the metaphor of an athlete or a race to describe the Christian life, sometimes sports analogies help us understand the challenges of sharing our faith.

READ: Invite two volunteers to read aloud Acts 5:17-24 and 25-32.

INSTRUCT: Guide the group to divide into small groups of 3-4 to break down the sports analogy for evangelism. Add explanatory statements for each of the rows in the chart by dissecting the session passage, referring to earlier passages in Acts, and drawing from other relevant Scriptures to fill in the blanks. For the "Then" column, the group should focus on the story and passage in Acts 5. For the "Now" column, encourage the group to consider what the church and believers face in contemporary society and culture.

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Notes


JESUS'S SUFFERING

REPORT: Once completed, call for the groups to share their findings verbally, recording in their own charts gleanings from other teams.

DISCUSS: Ask: "How might sports teams respond to overwhelming obstacles on their path to victory? How did the apostles respond to their imprisonment after they were freed by the angel?" Stress that the angel's instructions for the apostles to return to the temple to teach was a direct rebuke of the high priest's intentions to put an abrupt end to their teachings by arresting and jailing them. Recall **Pack Item 5: Jesus's Suffering**; ask: "How did the apostles suffer like Jesus in this passage? How did they follow Jesus's example in their response?"

DEBRIEF

What gave the disciples such peace and purpose in the face of persecution?

Why was it important for Peter to boldly confront the opposition to the gospel? How should we respond to opposition today?

SUMMARIZE

In a football game, players expect to get knocked down and to get back on their feet and push forward with the goal of making it into the end zone with the ball. As Christians, we can expect to experience persecution. We may not always anticipate its form, but our goal remains the same. Our goal is to be faithful witnesses to the life-changing power of Jesus Christ and to encourage one another in the faith as we stand strong, pointing to the Spirit as the source of our strength.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 83). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Head** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.

HEAD: Persecution for our faith can make us feel lonely. We need reminding that not only did Bible heroes stand strong amid persecution but believers today also stand strong in nations like North Korea, Iran, Nigeria, Cuba, and China. Even fellow believers in the West stand for Christ daily against cultural pressure to compromise. Make a list of persecuted believers who stand strong for Christ and pray for them, and allow their witness to encourage you when you feel lonely amid persecution.

Why do testimonies of faithfulness amid persecution encourage us to be bold witnesses?

HEART: God uses prayer to sustain persecuted believers. When we pray for fellow Christians being pressured to abandon their faith, God advances the gospel by answering those prayers. Sometimes He removes the

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Notes

persecution. Other times He strengthens persecuted believers to be faithful under pressure, even unto death. As members of one body, we should pray and lift up our brothers and sisters experiencing persecution.

How might God use our prayers for persecuted believers to strengthen our own faith?

HANDS: Sometimes we fail to tell others about Jesus because we fear the consequences. Yet Jesus said to count the cost of being His disciples (Luke 14:25-33). We must remain steadfast, commit to costly obedience, and remember that God sustains His faithful witnesses. Think of a person with whom you are fearful to share the gospel. Pray for that person as well as for yourself. Then make an appointment to share Jesus with them, perhaps over coffee or a meal.

What steps will you take to address your fear of sharing Jesus with others?

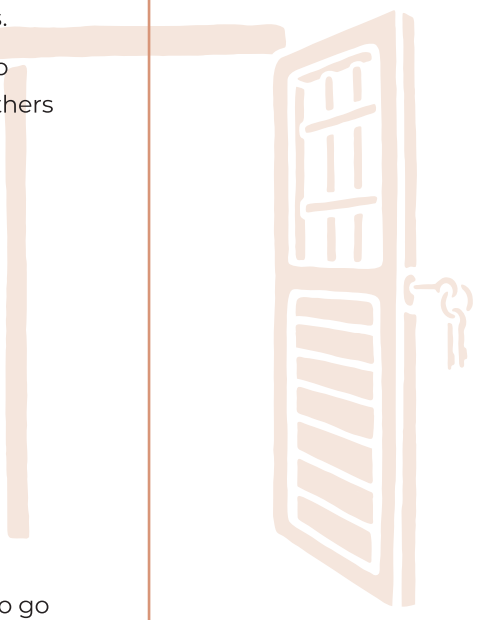
NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Identify personal experiences with persecution and write them down, along with ways you participate in the gospel mission.
- If lists from the above exercise remain short or non-existent, examine your heart for how seriously you take the mission that Christ has left to His followers.
- Consider your role on the sidelines when someone else is carrying the ball or perhaps in the spotlight of persecution. Think about ways you can actively encourage that person to keep going, despite the obstacles.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 83 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 143:7-10, asking God for wisdom on where to go and for strength to face obstacles to the gospel boldly. Praise God that nothing can thwart His plan.

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THE WORLD HATES US

CORE PASSAGE: ACTS 6:8-15; 7:54-60

CONTEXT

Jesus warned His followers they would be persecuted (Matt. 24:9). That warning became a reality with intensifying waves of opposition. First, Peter and John were imprisoned for preaching Jesus and then threatened and released (Acts 4:1-22). Later, all twelve apostles were arrested, flogged, and released (5:17-40). Now a servant full of the Holy Spirit—Stephen—was about to face the most severe persecution to that point.

KEY CONCEPT

Believers persevere against persecution as we live like Christ to the very end.

As you examine Acts 6:8-15; 7:54-60:

- Recognize that as we follow Christ, opposition will arise, including lies and false accusations against us.
- Marvel that even during persecution, Stephen lived like Jesus, with love and forgiveness.

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TIMELINE

- Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit and Ascends into Heaven (Acts 1:4-14)
- The Holy Spirit Fills the Disciples at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-41)
- Peter and John Heal a Beggar and Preach About Jesus (Acts 3:1-26)
- The Apostles Are Persecuted for Preaching About Jesus (Acts 4:1–5:42)
- **SESSION STUDY:** **Stephen Is Martyred for Preaching About Jesus (Acts 6:1–7:60)**
- The Church in Jerusalem Scatters Due to Persecution, Taking the Gospel to Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1-40)

Daily Readings

- ☐ **Day 1:** Acts 6:1-7
- ☐ **Day 2:** Acts 6:8-15
- ☐ **Day 3:** Acts 7:1-16
- ☐ **Day 4:** Acts 7:17-53
- ☐ **Day 5:** Acts 7:54–8:3
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 140

Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

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Notes

GOD WILL GIVE US WISDOM THROUGH HIS SPIRIT TO ENDURE PERSECUTION (ACTS 6:8-15).

Circle words and phrases that describe Stephen's character and actions.

8 Now Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders
and signs among the people. 9 Opposition arose, however, from some
members of the Freedmen's Synagogue, composed of both Cyrenians and
Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, and they began to argue with
Stephen. 10 But they were unable to stand up against his wisdom and the
Spirit by whom he was speaking. 11 Then they secretly persuaded some men
to say, "We heard him speaking blasphemous words against Moses and
God." 12 They stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; so they came,
seized him, and took him to the Sanhedrin. 13 They also presented false
witnesses who said, "This man never stops speaking against this holy place
and the law. 14 For we heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy
this place and change the customs that Moses handed down to us." 15 And
all who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at him and saw that his
face was like the face of an angel.

Stephen was a Hellenistic Jew, meaning he had a Greek background. He also was a Spirit-filled servant of the church whose first role was to wait on tables and bring unity to the fellowship (vv. 1-6). Yet he also performed miracles and proclaimed the gospel, empowered by the Holy Spirit and his godly character. But Stephen did not please everyone. Members of a certain Hellenistic synagogue, likely drawn to Jerusalem by zeal for their Jewish faith, felt betrayed by those who claimed Jesus was the Messiah.

The Hellenists' conflict with Stephen began with debate. Though they could not rebut his arguments, they refused to place their faith in Christ, but they didn't stop there. When following Christ, opposition will arise, including lies and false accusations. Stephen experienced this when his opponents accused him of "speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God" (v. 11), which may reflect a perception that Christians denigrated the Mosaic sacrificial system by relying on Christ's death for atonement rather than temple sacrifices.

> **LEADER NOTE:** Standing for Jesus is about more than winning arguments. Stephen's arguments won the day, but his opponents refused to believe. Similarly, Jesus confounded His opponents (Matt. 22:15-46; cf. John 8:21-29), but rather than believing in Him, they crucified Him. Opposition to Jesus and His gospel is, at its root, a moral problem, not an intellectual one. The "fool" denies belief in God because he is "corrupt" and does "vile deeds" (Ps. 53:1), not because the evidence for God is insufficient. So unbelievers need more than truth—they need the work of the Spirit to hear the truth.

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Notes

What responses, positive or negative, have you received as you share the gospel?

In pride and unbelief, the opponents incited a crowd of Jews to rise up against Stephen and seize him and drag him before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council. Presenting "false witnesses" against Stephen, the Jewish opponents violated Old Testament law (Acts 6:13; cf. Ex. 20:16), but they didn't care. Blinded by zeal for temple rituals and reverence for Jerusalem, they failed to see that Jesus is the fulfillment of all the Old Testament promises, people, and events.

The mistreatment of Stephen mirrored what Jesus experienced. Persecutors accused Stephen of repeating a statement falsely attributed to Jesus at His trial: that He would destroy the temple (Acts 6:14; see Matt. 26:60-61). Yet when the Sanhedrin members looked at Stephen, "his face was like the face of an angel" (Acts 6:15). His peaceful appearance evidenced God's presence with him, underscoring Stephen's innocence and that his words were truthful. By the Spirit, God will give believers wisdom and His presence to endure persecution.

> **LEADER NOTE:** Stephen was among at least three biblical figures whose faces became radiant: Moses's face radiated with God's presence after receiving the Ten Commandments (Ex. 34:29-35), and Jesus's "face shone like the sun" at the transfiguration (Matt. 17:2). In those cases, the radiance reflected God's presence, which led to Spirit-inspired speech. Moses wrote the Pentateuch, and Jesus is the Word of God incarnate (John 1:1,14). Likewise, Stephen's radiance indicated the speech he was about to give was inspired by God. Just when Stephen needed it, he experienced the Holy Spirit giving him the words to say (Luke 12:12). Similarly, God works in His children so they will "shine like stars in the world" (Phil. 2:13-15).

When has the Holy Spirit given you strength to endure a difficulty that seemed insurmountable?

CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus endured persecution and suffering yet without sin and calls His followers to do the same, living with integrity and forgiveness for all so that others may see Christ in us.

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Notes

BELIEVERS NEED NOT FEAR DEATH FOR WE KNOW HEAVEN AND JESUS AWAIT US (ACTS 7:54-60).

Circle words and phrases that suggest the peace and comfort Stephen had even at his death.

54 When they heard these things, they were enraged and gnashed their teeth at him. 55 Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven. He saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56 He said, "Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" 57 They yelled at the top of their voices, covered their ears, and together rushed against him. 58 They dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. And the witnesses laid their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 While they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" 60 He knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" And after saying this, he fell asleep.

The high priest asked Stephen if the accusations against him were true (v. 1). This was followed by the longest speech in Acts as Stephen showed how the people of Israel repeatedly failed to honor godly leaders and to believe God's promises, just as his accusers were doing (vv. 2-53). They were "resisting the Holy Spirit" and had even killed the Messiah, "the Righteous One" (vv. 51-52). This, of course, "enraged" the Jewish leaders (v. 54), but Stephen wasn't done. He declared not only what he knew but also what he saw: "the glory of God, and Jesus [the Son of Man] standing at the right hand of God" (vv. 55-56).

The Sanhedrin members covered their ears, meaning they regarded Stephen's words as blasphemy unfit to be heard. The "blasphemy"? First, that Jesus shares God's glory. Second, that Jesus stands in judgment on humanity. Calling Jesus "the Son of Man" identified Him with the figure in Daniel 7:13-14, who will exercise dominion over all people. But while these human judges concluded Stephen's witness was blasphemy and deserving of death, the divine Judge of all the earth stood for His faithful servant who was enduring to his end.

> **LEADER NOTE:** Stephen's vision of "Jesus standing at the right hand of God" (v. 55) departs from the usual posture Jesus is depicted as assuming in heaven. In Psalm 110:1 and Luke 22:69, the Lord is portrayed as seated at God's right hand. The repetition of "standing" in verses 55 and 56 underscores the word's importance. To rise from a seated position suggests being poised for action. Rather than watching as an idle spectator, Jesus actively received Stephen's witness and prepared to receive him into heaven.

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What spiritual practices can help us build courage to share the gospel with people who oppose it?

Notes

In their rage, the Jewish leaders dragged Stephen outside the city to stone him. Death was near. Yet believers should not be afraid to face death because we know Christ. That was Stephen's experience. His exclamation, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" (Acts 7:59), was a final affirmation of his trust in Jesus. The exclamation also affirmed that death is not the end of existence. The moment he died, Jesus would receive his spirit.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

LIFE AFTER DEATH: The Bible teaches that when a Christian dies, he or she immediately is with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8; Luke 23:43). This is what some people call an intermediate state, given that the final state for believers takes place at the future resurrection (Rev. 6:10-11). For those who are not in Christ, life after death results in being separated from Christ in a state of suffering, even though future judgment remains (Luke 16:19-31).

Before the end, Stephen "knelt down"—perhaps from injury, perhaps in prayer—and asked Jesus to forgive his assailants (v. 60). Remarkably, Stephen died like Jesus, with a plea of forgiveness on his lips (see Luke 23:34). Even through persecution, up to the end, believers live as Jesus would, with love and forgiveness. And Stephen's prayer to forgive his attackers was answered when "a young man named Saul," who "agreed with putting him to death" (Acts 7:58; 8:1), later trusted Christ and became the world's greatest missionary.

> **LEADER NOTE:** We can trust Jesus through persecution because He is God. Some of Stephen's last words underscored that point: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" (v. 59). This generally is regarded as the first prayer to Jesus in the New Testament. Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Our Father in heaven" (Matt. 6:9). Here, Stephen attributed the same reverence to Jesus. He prayed to "Lord Jesus" in heaven. Jesus shares God's glory (Acts 7:55) and possesses all power to help His people. Stephen's prayer also reflects Jesus's care. The all-powerful Lord in heaven is also the comforter who receives the spirits of His people at death.

Why do we find it so difficult to love and forgive those who have wronged us?

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Notes

ARRIVAL

BRAINSTORM: Greet the group with this ice-breaker question: "When have you seen disagreements spiral into outright hostility?" Be prepared to share an example from your own experience.

TRANSITION: It doesn't take long for disagreements—even valid disagreements—to spiral out of control if we allow them to fester. Stephen's disagreement with the Hellenists was based on the truth of Scripture, but instead of accepting the truth, his attackers reacted with animosity.

CONTEXT


THE CHURCH'S PERSECUTION

SUMMARIZE: Pass out copies of **Pack Item 11: The Church's Persecution** and review what the early church experienced. Say: "After the apostles were arrested and miraculously freed from prison, a respected Pharisee named Gamaliel stood up in the Sanhedrin and argued against killing the disciples. Gamaliel said: 'If this plan or this work is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You may even be found fighting against God' (Acts 5:38-39). The Sanhedrin was persuaded. The apostles were flogged, but their lives were spared. Yet the apostles left jubilant, 'rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be treated shamefully on behalf of the Name' (v. 41). But not every believer endured persecution with their lives."

RECAP

ENGAGE: Ask your group what stood out to them this week in the daily Bible readings or their personal preparation. Suggest that Stephen's story may be considered a study in contrasts. Lead the group to compare the attitude of Stephen's opponents with Stephen's own demeanor. Ask: "What empowered Stephen both before and during the suffering he endured?" Stress that in the end, Stephen focused on the powerful image of Christ receiving him in heaven rather than the earthly pain he endured.

TRANSITION: Stephen is a study of the remarkable focus required to live up to Christ, even to the point of suffering and death. In today's activity, we are going to take a deeper look at what it might look like to suffer—or even die—with a dignity that transcends earthly shame.

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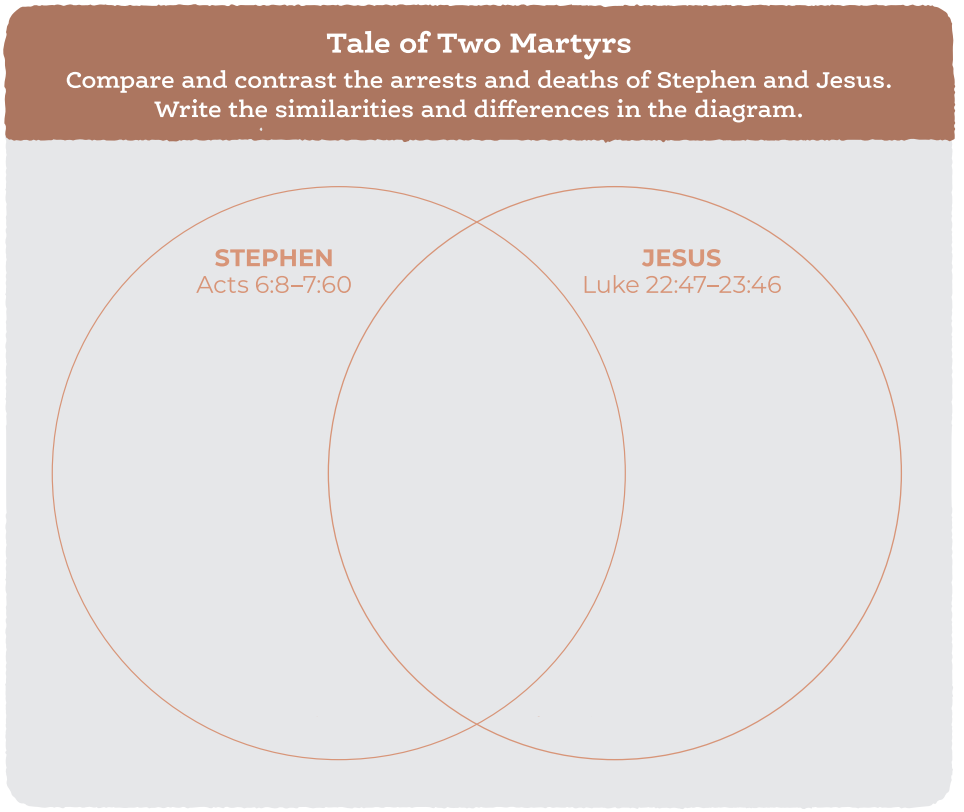
Key Concept: Believers persevere against persecution as we live like Christ to the very end.

GROUP ACTIVITY

Notes

DIAGRAM: Direct your group to page 90 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a Venn diagram titled "Tale of Two Martyrs." Recreate the diagram on a board so you can record the group's findings as you interact with the Scripture text.



READ: Invite two volunteers to read aloud Acts 6:8-15 and 7:54-60.

IDENTIFY: Lead the group to identify the most significant details from the passages, even from 7:1-53 *(ex. Stephen gave a lengthy sermon in response to the accusations against him)*. List responses on the board separate from the diagram, and include the Scripture references. Then instruct the group to skim over Luke 22:47–23:46 and to call out distinct and similar details from Jesus's arrest, trial, and execution. Again, list responses on the board separate from the diagram, and include Scripture references.

ANALYZE: Guide the group to compare and contrast the two lists and to suggest placements for details in the diagram while you record their conclusions. Note that some similarities between Jesus and Stephen exist outside of Luke 22–23, such as performing miracles and refuting opponents. Encourage some group members to find relevant Scripture references for these.

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Notes

–Stephen: Servant of the early church (Acts 6:1-6); gave a sermon to explain that God's plan for Israel was fulfilled in Jesus (7:1-53); saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God (7:55-56)

–Jesus: Son of God; arrested at night and brought before the high priest, Pilate, and Herod (Luke 22:52-54,66; 23:1,7); mocked and beaten before His sentence (22:63-65); silent before His captors (23:9)

–Both: Performed signs and wonders (Acts 6:8); their enemies could not refute their arguments (Luke 20; Acts 6:10); falsely accused of blasphemy (Luke 22:70-71; Acts 6:11-14); asked God to receive their spirit and forgive the ones who killed them (Luke 23:34,46; Acts 7:59-60)

DISCUSS: Why do you think Luke, the Spirit-inspired author of the Gospel and Acts, wanted his readers to see the similarities between Jesus, the Savior, and Stephen, the first Christian martyr?

DEBRIEF

How can we, like Stephen, emulate Christ's trust in the Father and forgiveness for persecutors, even if we were to face death?

SUMMARIZE

Stephen's death is important because he gave up his life to share the truth of Jesus Christ. He was faithful to his calling, and as a comfort in his suffering, he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father. Not everyone is chosen for a martyr's crown, but every believer should be prepared to love people enough to share Christ with them and even to suffer for it because that's what Jesus did for our salvation.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 91). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Heart** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.

HEAD: If believers do not expect persecution for our faith, the world's opposition will confuse us and challenge what we believe about God and His care for us. Memorize Jesus's words to persevere through persecution: "If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20) and "You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world" (16:33).

How can expecting persecution for following Jesus help us to endure it faithfully?

HEART: Unless Jesus returns first, we all will die. Despite its universality and inevitability, death can be frightening. Even though followers of Jesus have been promised heaven with Him, many details remain a mystery. Prayer

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Notes

can help us build faith to overcome our fear. Thank God that Jesus dwells at His right hand and is prepared to receive us into heaven. Trust Him to receive your spirit when you depart this life (Acts 7:59).

What are some ways we can help one another approach death with peace and comfort and faith?

HANDS: Though life-threatening persecution is a reality in many nations around the globe, persecution in the Western world generally is more subtle, though no less pernicious. Identify someone you know who is facing persecution for their faith. Write them a text message, email, or card of encouragement. Pledge to pray for them regularly.

What encouragement will you give fellow believers to help them remain faithful to Christ?

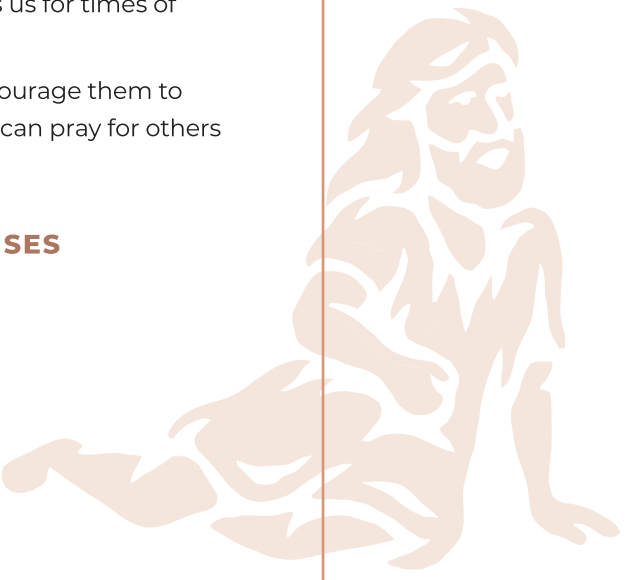
NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- This week, read these Scriptures about how to achieve strength under pressure: Proverbs 3:5-6; Luke 12:25-34; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10; Philippians 4:6-9.
- Church history is filled with stories of people who gladly faced death for the cause of Christ. Meditate on Stephen's suffering this week as well as biographies of other Christian martyrs.
- Renew your focus on heaven through prayer and study. As a believer, understanding that "to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21) prepares us for times of persecution and even death.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 91 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 140:9-13 with your group. Thank the Lord for bringing justice to fellow believers who are persecuted.

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UNIT 30
THE GOSPEL SPREADS

ACTS

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Memory Verses

"He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that through his name everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins."

—Acts 10:42-43

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THE GOSPEL IS UNDERSTOOD

CORE PASSAGE: ACTS 8:26-39

CONTEXT

Before His ascension into heaven, Jesus told His followers that upon receiving the Holy Spirit, they would be His "witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The apostles filled Jerusalem with the message of the gospel, but it took the persecution that began with Stephen's death to expand that boundary. Philip, one of the servants along with Stephen, took Jesus's commission to heart and shared the gospel in Samaria. He then was open and obedient to the prompting of the Holy Spirit to share Jesus with someone from the ends of the earth.

KEY CONCEPT

We are called to help others understand the Scriptures and see Christ in and through them.

As you examine Acts 8:26-39:

- Recognize that God will lead us to opportunities to spread the gospel, but we still must obey.
- Identify how people who believe the gospel of Jesus Christ should respond to this good news.

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TIMELINE

The Apostles Are Persecuted for Preaching About Jesus (Acts 4:1–5:42)

Stephen Is Martyred for Preaching About Jesus (Acts 6:1–7:60)

The Church in Jerusalem Scatters Due to Persecution, Taking the Gospel to Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1-4)

Philip Preaches the Gospel in Samaria (Acts 8:5-25)

SESSION STUDY:
Philip Shares the Gospel with an Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-40)

Daily Readings

- ☐ **Day 1:** Acts 8:1-8
- ☐ **Day 2:** Acts 8:9-13
- ☐ **Day 3:** Acts 8:14-25
- ☐ **Day 4:** Acts 8:26-31
- ☐ **Day 5:** Acts 8:29-40
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 43

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Notes

GOD GIVES US OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE THE GOSPEL, SO WE MUST OBEY (ACTS 8:26-31).

Circle each action of Philip in this passage.

26 An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip: "Get up and go south to the road
that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is the desert road.) 27 So he
got up and went. There was an Ethiopian man, a eunuch and high official of
Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of her entire treasury.
He had come to worship in Jerusalem 28 and was sitting in his chariot on
his way home, reading the prophet Isaiah aloud. 29 The Spirit told Philip, "Go
and join that chariot." 30 When Philip ran up to it, he heard him reading the
prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you're reading?" 31 "How
can I," he said, "unless someone guides me?" So he invited Philip to come up
and sit with him.

Philip received specific instructions from an angel to go south to a certain desert road (v. 26), which would have taken him the opposite direction from his initial flight from Jerusalem's persecution of believers. He immediately obeyed and found an official of high status in the queen of Ethiopia's court. Riding in a chariot on his way home and reading the prophet Isaiah aloud (vv. 27-28), the eunuch needed help to see the truth of the gospel through the Scripture.

> **LEADER NOTE:** Philip, along with Stephen, was one of the seven Hellenist believers chosen to serve the widows in the church in Acts 6. These servants were qualified by their good reputation, wisdom, and Spirit-filled lives (Acts 6:3). When persecution increased in Jerusalem, Philip went to Samaria, preaching the gospel and performing signs by the power of the Holy Spirit (vv. 3-8).

God the Spirit then spoke to Philip, telling him, "Go and join that chariot" (v. 29). So Philip took off running! Keeping pace with the moving chariot, he asked, "Do you understand what you're reading?" (v. 30). Maybe out of breath, but Philip was not going to let the opportunity to talk about Jesus pass him by! The eunuch must have been pleasantly surprised because he was confused about the meaning of what he was reading. Recognizing his need for a guide in the Scriptures, he invited Philip to ride with him (v. 31).

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

"He was not ashamed to confess his ignorance and implored to be taught. Therefore, to him who became a learner, the grace of the Spirit was given."[1]

–Athanasius (c. 293–373)

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Notes

LEADER NOTE: The Bible does not provide much background for the Ethiopian eunuch, other than the fact that he served as a "high official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians" and was in charge of her treasury (v. 27). In ancient times, men who served in royal courts, particularly for queens, often were castrated. The eunuch likely was a Jewish convert because the Scripture says he was returning home from worshiping in Jerusalem (vv. 27-28). In the book of Isaiah, God promised that those foreigners and eunuchs who join themselves to the Lord will receive blessing and salvation (Isa. 56:3-8).

How does the Spirit's role in preparing both Philip and the official encourage you as you carry the gospel into your community?

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

CLARITY OF SCRIPTURE: Because God gave us His Word as authoritative in all matters related to life and faith, we believe His Word was written in a way that can be understood with the help of the Holy Spirit. Believing the Scriptures are clear does not mean that every part is equally easy to interpret, neither does it mean we will never make mistakes in our interpretation. It does mean that with God's help, people are capable of understanding the biblical text for themselves as they employ correct methods of interpretation.

Philip immediately obeyed God's instructions and met the eunuch where he was, riding and reading. With boldness and confidence in the Lord's direction, Philip asked a question to quickly evaluate the eunuch's spiritual condition. From there he would capitalize on the eunuch's circumstances to share the truth of Jesus Christ from the Scriptures.

This scenario can be experienced by us as well. God will lead us to opportunities to spread the gospel, but it is still our responsibility to obey. God uses us to show others the truth of the gospel through Scripture. In fact, it is our calling from Christ as His disciples to make more disciples by sharing the good news (Matt. 28:18-20).

Why is our obedience to the Spirit so vital for the cause of evangelism?

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Notes

ALL SCRIPTURE POINTS TO GOD'S REDEMPTION OF HUMANKIND THROUGH THE SAVIOR (ACTS 8:32-39).

Highlight each reference to Jesus in Acts 8:32-33.

32 Now the Scripture passage he was reading was this: "He was led like a
sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb is silent before its shearer, so he does
not open his mouth. 33 In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who will
describe his generation? For his life is taken from the earth." 34 The eunuch
said to Philip, "I ask you, who is the prophet saying this about—himself or
someone else?" 35 Philip proceeded to tell him the good news about Jesus,
beginning with that Scripture. 36 As they were traveling down the road, they
came to some water. The eunuch said, "Look, there's water. What would
keep me from being baptized?" 38 So he ordered the chariot to stop, and
both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized
him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried
Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him any longer but went on his
way rejoicing.

> **LEADER NOTE:** Verse 37 is not included in most modern Bible translations, except perhaps as a footnote. The manuscript evidence seems to indicate this verse was a later addition to Acts, not original to Luke's authorship. This addition attempted to spell out what was already implied in the narrative, that the eunuch expressed saving faith in Jesus.

The eunuch was reading what we know as Isaiah 53. The prophet Isaiah wrote about a coming Servant who would be despised and rejected by men but would suffer on their behalf to take away their sickness, pain, and sin (vv. 2-6). The particular passage that puzzled the eunuch described the Suffering Servant as a sheep led to the slaughter, silent before His judge (vv. 7-8). Rightly interpreting the Scripture, Philip pointed the eunuch to Jesus Christ, who died on the cross and rose again to atone for the sin of the world (1 John 2:2).

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

"The instrument that Philip uses is the Word of God, not such an indescribable and imaginary word—as some 'angelic' and fanatic theologians dream—but the very same word that is contained in the Scriptures. For out of these must come all sermons, and the whole doctrine of salvation is taken."[2]

–Rudolf Gwalther (1519–1586)

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Notes

As a Jew who chose to follow Jesus, Philip recognized that all Scripture points to God's redemption of humankind through Jesus, our Savior. No doubt Philip explained that Jesus was "pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities" (Isa. 53:5). Because Jesus lived a sinless life and died on the cross, the "punishment for our peace was on him, and we are healed by his wounds." And it seems Philip did not stop with Isaiah 53 but continued, going on to other passages to "tell him the good news about Jesus" (Acts 8:35).

How does Philip's interaction with the eunuch encourage you to read the whole Bible through the lens of Christ?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

The good news of salvation can be found throughout Scripture, so as we tell the story, those who respond in faith can live in obedience and joy.

As they rode in the chariot, the eunuch heard the Messiah proclaimed from the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit convicted the eunuch's heart regarding sin and the Savior sent for our salvation (John 16:8-11). Then the man was able to comprehend the gospel and to respond in faith. He was saved in that moment!

> **LEADER NOTE:** We do not know what led the Ethiopian eunuch to the moment when he gladly received the gospel and believed. Sometimes it takes decades of faithful witness, prayer, and petition for a loved one's heart to finally soften to gospel truth. For some listeners, life circumstances have so thoroughly tilled the soil of the heart that they hear and believe immediately. The result of our obedient witness is not up to us. The Holy Spirit is the One who works in our hearts for our salvation.

Having believed in Jesus, the eunuch saw some water and asked to be baptized. The desire for baptism was evidence of the eunuch's true faith in and salvation through Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection, mirrored in the act of baptism. After baptizing the eunuch, the Holy Spirit miraculously carried Philip away, and the eunuch continued on his journey rejoicing (Acts 8:39). God used Philip to help the eunuch understand the gospel embedded in all of Scripture, and He desires to do the same for others through each of us.

Why is baptism an important step of faith for the new believer in Jesus Christ?

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Notes

ARRIVAL

ENGAGE: As people arrive, ask them to respond to this ice-breaker question: "How have you responded to someone of a different background who seemed interested in your faith?"

CONTEXT



REVIEW: Recall **Pack Item 10: Gospel on the Move Map**, and point out Philip's ministry locations throughout the following. Say: "Acts 6–8 focuses on Stephen and Philip, two of the seven men chosen to assist the apostles with a ministry to Christian widows. They are remembered not only for their benevolence ministry but also for their faithful testimony for Jesus. When Stephen testified about Jesus, his opponents incited a crowd that stoned him to death. Philip, on the other hand, encountered willing hearers in Samaria, such that the church in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to investigate what was happening. Through the affirmation of the apostles, Philip's ministry was validated as the Holy Spirit came down on the believing Samaritans. But then God sent Philip the opposite direction so that he might meet an audience of one for another sharing of the gospel."

RECAP

ASK: What was your initial reaction to Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian official as you prepared this week? What was one detail that came up in your daily reading that you had not considered before?

SAY: Considering this week's Scripture passage, put yourself in Philip's sandals. You've followed the instruction of the angel to travel along the road from Jerusalem toward Gaza, a city near the Mediterranean Sea on the way to Africa. Along the way, the Spirit tells you to walk beside a chariot, where you hear the stranger reading a passage from the prophet Isaiah that you recognize is about Jesus! How would you respond? Would you dismiss the situation because you don't know the man? Would you be intimidated by his status or the possible presence of guards? Would you let differences in race and religion be barriers to a testimony for Christ? Or would you, like Philip, obey the Spirit's leading and initiate a conversation that might result in changing this person's life forever?

TRANSITION: Today we'll consider how we can overcome barriers to sharing the gospel with others so they might believe in Jesus and be saved.

Listen to session-by-session training every week on
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Key Concept: We are called to help others understand the Scriptures and see Christ in and through them.

GROUP ACTIVITY

Notes

LIST: Direct your group to page 100 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a listing activity titled "Overcoming Barriers to the Gospel." Recreate the chart on a board so you can record the group's findings as you interact with the Scripture.

Overcoming Barriers to the Gospel

Read Acts 8:26-39. Write down the barriers to the gospel, how the Holy Spirit helped overcome those barriers, and the results of Philip's obedience.

BARRIERS TO THE GOSPEL	THE HOLY SPIRIT'S HELP	RESULTS OF PHILIP'S OBEDIENCE

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Acts 8:26-31.

ANALYZE: Guide your group to look in the text for barriers to the gospel. *(The Ethiopian was a man of great social standing; Philip was a Hellenistic Jew; there may have been a language or cultural barrier.)* Write down their ideas on the board with the Scripture references, and encourage your group to write them in their PSGs. Ask: "How did the Holy Spirit help Philip overcome these barriers?" *(The Holy Spirit guided Philip to join the chariot just as the Ethiopian man needed to understand a crucial part of Isaiah's message; any class or social barriers did not matter when the Ethiopian asked Philip to sit with him.)*

READ: Invite another volunteer read Acts 8:32-39.

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GROUP EXPERIENCE

Notes


THE ETHIOPIAN'S ENCOUNTER

ANALYZE: Distribute copies of **Pack Item 12: The Ethiopian's Encounter** and highlight some of the connections the Isaiah passage makes with Jesus. Guide the group to consider how the Scripture from Isaiah opened the door for Philip's witness about Jesus. Ask participants to identify Scriptures that might help them share Jesus effectively. Ask: "What were the results of Philip's obedience in both approaching the Ethiopian and explaining the meaning of Isaiah's prophecy about Christ?" Write the responses on the board.

APPLY: Distribute some note cards and pens/pencils. Encourage your group to think through how they can share the gospel with others. Say: "Who do you know that needs to be saved? Write that person's name on the card. Under their name, write potential barriers you may have to overcome to share Christ with this person. Use the card this week to pray for wisdom to overcome these barriers and to ask the Spirit to give you opportunities to share the gospel."

DEBRIEF

How might we follow Philip's evangelistic example with someone we know or meet this week?

SUMMARIZE

In any given day, we encounter people who may be open to a faith conversation. Are we willing to step outside our comfort zone to share God's Word with them? What might be the result if we followed Philip's example? As believers, we are called to help others understand the Scriptures and to see Christ in and through them. The good news is that we do not have to do it alone. The Holy Spirit prepares the hearts of the lost while at the same time growing us in faithful obedience to share the good news with those around us.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 101). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Head** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.

HEAD: As we study the Scriptures, we will see that all Scripture points to God's redemption of humankind through the Savior. As we grow in our knowledge of God's Word, we also will grow in our ability to share the gospel from every part of the Bible.

How are you intentionally growing in your knowledge of the Bible?

HEART: Those who have been redeemed by Jesus have hope in hopeless times. Scripture instructs us to be ready at any moment "to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet. 3:15). Philip was ready and eager to share the hope of the gospel. Chasing the chariot, his heart chased the opportunity to tell the eunuch about Jesus.

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What keeps you from being ready to give a reason for the hope that is in you?

Notes

HANDS: Philip is an example for us to follow of immediate obedience to the Spirit's prompting. Philip did not delay; instead, "he got up and went" (Acts 8:27), and when God spoke to him again, he ran after the chariot (vv. 29-30). We too must be aware and ready to seize opportunities for gospel conversations that God puts in our path.

What steps do you need to take this week to carry out a task the Holy Spirit is prompting you to do?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Read Romans 6:1-11. Consider the story of Philip and the Ethiopian in light of Paul's instructions about the meaning of baptism.
- Reflect on your profession of faith and baptism. How might others observe congruence between your faith experience and your witness for Christ?
- Respond to the Holy Spirit's prompts to share the good news about Christ this week. Prepare in advance by studying the Scriptures and praying for wisdom.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 101 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 43:3-4 with your group. Thank God for sending His light and truth to lead us into faith in Jesus.

References

1. Athanasius, Festal Letter, 19.5, quoted in Acts, ed. Francis Martin, with Evan Smith, vol. 5 in Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament (Downers Grove: IVP, 2014) [Logos].
2. Rudolf Gwalther, Homily 61, Acts 8:32-35, quoted in Acts, eds. Esther Chung-Kim and Todd R. Hains, vol. 6 in Reformation Commentary on Scripture: New Testament (Downers Grove: IVP, 2016) [Logos].

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KEY FIGURE ARTICLE

THE SERVANT PHILIP

By Jere Phillips

There's joy taken in a guy named Phillips writing about the biblical Philip. My family name is actually derived from "Philip's Son." The name Philip in Greek means someone who loves horses. My first experience with one, however, involved being kicked in the leg by a pony when I was ten.

The New Testament describes two men named Philip. The first was an apostle from Bethsaida who introduced his friend Nathanael to Jesus (John 1:43-51). The second Philip was a man of many ministries. He was one of seven Hellenistic (Greek) men chosen to lead the church's ministry to its Gentile widows (Acts 6:1-6). Later he preached among the Samaritans (8:4-8). And he was led by the Holy Spirit to evangelize a man from Ethiopia (8:28-40). He also was a girl dad (21:8-9). Let's get to know him.

SELECTED SERVANT

Although Scripture does not use the term *deacon* to describe the seven men chosen to serve in Acts 6:1-6, many see the prototype of deacon ministry in their assignment. Deacons not only serve but also help resolve church disputes.

Conflict had arisen within the fledgling church because the Greek-speaking Jews in Jerusalem felt their widows were being neglected in the church's benevolence ministry, or "the daily distribution" and "wait[ing] on tables" (vv. 1-2). These believing widows needed the provision of food because they likely did not have family to care for them. Philip and six others, all Jews with Greek names, were chosen to serve all the widows, helping to ensure the widows were treated fairly.

At this point, we are not told much about Philip other than his qualifications. He had a good reputation and was full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom (v. 3). Philip and the other six servant-leaders had the confidence of the congregation, since they were selected by the entire church. These are good qualities for all believers, not just those who hold special offices.

POWERFUL PREACHER

Philip's ministry changed when persecution of the church by Saul of Tarsus forced many believers to scatter throughout the region (8:1-4). Philip went to Samaria, north of Judea, where his ministry focus shifted from tables to preaching the Word and performing miracles. The Jews usually avoided interaction with the Samaritans. Ethnic enmity between the two groups made Philip's ministry very unusual. However, his Spirit-filled message, loving manner, and wonder-working power overcame their reluctance (vv. 5-8).

The power of the Holy Spirit was evident in Philip's ministry. First, God gave him the ability to heal people and to cast out demons. Second, Philip's preaching resulted in many Samaritans believing the gospel and becoming followers of Jesus.

God uses all kinds of motivations to get us where we need to be for use in His kingdom. Difficulties, like persecution, push us into areas we might not normally go. Spirit-filled love draws us to people we might not normally engage. If, like Philip, we are obedient to the Spirit's leading, we may not preach, heal, or cast out demons, but we can be used to minister effectively in Christ's name.

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If, like Philip, we are obedient to the Spirit's leading, we may not preach, heal, or cast out demons, but we can be used to minister effectively in Christ's name.

EFFECTIVE EVANGELIST

Few people choose to leave a successful work. Philip was seeing amazing results among the Samaritans as he preached Jesus and performed miracles. But then the Lord, through an angel, led him to travel many miles to the south-west. On the road to Gaza, a city near the Mediterranean Sea, Philip saw an Ethiopian in a chariot. He may not have known the man was a high official for the queen of the Ethiopians, but he could tell this was someone important.

Rather than be intimidated, Philip followed the Spirit's prompting to approach the chariot. As he got closer, he heard the Ethiopian reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah about the Messiah as the Suffering Servant. Using a question to arouse the man's interest, Philip soon found himself sitting with the man in his chariot, and he used that opportunity to teach the official about Jesus as they traveled together. Philip used this Old Testament passage from Isaiah 53:7-8 to explain the gospel of Christ, and God opened the man's heart to believe in Jesus and be baptized. Then, instead of staying to enjoy his success, Philip was "carried" away by the Spirit to preach the gospel in other towns (Acts 8:39-40).

Eventually Philip settled in Caesarea, where he raised four godly daughters "who prophesied" (21:9). There he hosted Paul and his companions on Paul's final fateful journey to Jerusalem before his arrest and transfer to Rome for trial. One of the original seven servants in Acts had now become known simply as Philip the evangelist (v. 8).

As we are sensitive to the Holy Spirit, we will experience unexpected encounters with people who need Jesus. Relying on the Spirit's power and guidance, we can share our faith stories in light of God's Word, trusting that some will sense the Spirit's movement and place their faith in Christ as Lord and Savior.

As we are sensitive to the Holy Spirit, we will experience unexpected encounters with people who need Jesus.

Jere Phillips is Professor Emeritus from Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary and has retired as pastor at Peterson Lake Baptist Church in Collierville, Tennessee. Jere and his wife, Glenda, have two married daughters and seven grandchildren. He holds a MDiv and a PhD from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He is also the author of *Pastoral Ministry for the Next Generation*.

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UNIT 30 • SESSION 2

THE GOSPEL TRANSFORMS LIVES

CORE PASSAGE: ACTS 9:1-16

CONTEXT

Saul was a leading figure in the persecution of the early church. He may have been a member of the Sanhedrin or simply a zealous Jew, but he was a disciple of Gamaliel, a prominent Pharisee and rabbi in the Sanhedrin (Acts 22:3). In Philippians 3:5-6, Saul described himself as "a Hebrew born of Hebrews," zealous for the law and for the persecution of the church. He witnessed and supported the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58; 8:1). Saul then attacked the church and would "enter house after house" to "drag off men and women, and put them in prison" (v. 3). But even this persecutor of Jesus's church was a target for Jesus's redemption.

KEY CONCEPT

We are called to help people find salvation through Christ, no matter who they are.

As you examine Acts 9:1-16:

- Praise God that Jesus will call all people to hear the gospel, even His enemies.
- Recognize that God uses the church, His people, to spread His message of salvation and to welcome all believers into His family.

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TIMELINE

Stephen Is Martyred with the Approval of Saul (Acts 6:1–7:60)

Saul Persecutes the Church, Scattering Believers Outside Jerusalem (Acts 8:1-4)

SESSION STUDY:
Saul Encounters the Risen Jesus on the Road to Damascus and Is Baptized (Acts 9:1-19)

Saul Proclaims Jesus in Damascus and Escapes a Threat upon His Life (Acts 9:20-25)

Saul Proclaims Jesus in Jerusalem and Escapes a Threat upon His Life (Acts 9:26-30)

Daily Readings

- ☐ **Day 1:** Acts 9:1-9
- ☐ **Day 2:** Acts 9:10-19
- ☐ **Day 3:** Acts 9:20-25
- ☐ **Day 4:** Acts 9:26-31
- ☐ **Day 5:** Acts 9:32-43
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 123

Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

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Notes

SCAN ME

Bonus Content

Scan this QR code to learn more about Saul's life before and after his Damascus road experience.

JESUS CALLS ALL TO HIMSELF SO THAT THEY MAY SEE HIM AND KNOW SALVATION (ACTS 9:1-9).

Highlight the signs of Jesus's divinity; circle His connection with the church.

1 Now Saul was still breathing threats and murder against the disciples
of the Lord. He went to the high priest 2 and requested letters from him
to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any men or women
who belonged to the Way, he might bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem.
3 As he traveled and was nearing Damascus, a light from heaven suddenly
flashed around him. 4 Falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him,
"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" 5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul said.
"I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting," he replied. 6 "But get up and go
into the city, and you will be told what you must do." 7 The men who were
traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the sound but seeing no one.
8 Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see
nothing. So they took him by the hand and led him into Damascus. 9 He was
unable to see for three days and did not eat or drink.

Saul was consumed with hatred for the followers of Jesus. As a Jew zealous for the traditions of his faith, he counted himself as an enemy of Christ. He took it upon himself to request authorization to hunt those who were a part of this religious minority, commonly known at that time as "the Way," and bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment (vv. 1-2). He was the most unlikely of candidates for conversion.

> **LEADER NOTE:** Early Christians called their group "the Way," a term taken from Isaiah 40:3: "Prepare the way of the LORD in the wilderness; make a straight highway for our God in the desert." The book of Acts also described sharing the gospel with people as instructing them in the "way of salvation" (Acts 16:17), "the way of the Lord" (18:25), and "the way of God" (18:26). Patrick Schreiner noted of Saul, "Soon he who persecuted the Way will be smoothing hills and making straight paths for the ascended Lord."[1]

As Saul traveled down the Damascus Road for the purpose of persecution, he was struck by a bright light and heard a voice from heaven ask, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (9:3-5). Recognizing the voice from heaven had to be the Lord, Saul asked for clarification. Jesus made it clear that persecution against His followers was truly persecution against Him. Jesus then commanded Saul to go into Damascus and await further instructions (v. 6). Saul obeyed the voice of the One he had sought to persecute, relying on the help of his confused companions because he had been blinded by Jesus's light (vv. 8-9).

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LEADER NOTE: It is interesting to note that while some people experience the same event, they may not experience it the same way. The men who were with Saul heard the voice from heaven, but they did not see anything (Acts 9:7). Similarly, after the triumphal entry, Jesus predicted His crucifixion, saying He had come for this hour, and He prayed for the Father to glorify His name through Jesus's obedience. "Then a voice came from heaven: 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again'" (John 12:27). The crowd heard the sound, but some thought it was thunder or the voice of an angel, to which Jesus said, "This voice came, not for me, but for you" (v. 30).

When has the Lord stopped you in your tracks and called you to do His will?

Saul had been filled with hatred and pride, stuck in sin, and spiritually blind. Saul had been an enemy of Jesus, yet God still called him. On the Damascus Road, Jesus made it so that Saul's physical experience matched his spiritual reality—Saul was blind and powerless. Before the Holy Spirit stirs our hearts, we are stuck in sin and blind to the truth of the gospel. Yet no one is too far from Jesus or beyond His reach, even those who are among His enemies.

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Though Jesus has ascended, He still calls people to Himself, miraculously or through other believers and the church. Jesus's mission is to redeem and rescue, but people also have a choice to follow Him or not.

After his conversion, Saul later wrote to the church in Corinth that "the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4). God blinded Saul's physical eyes to show him he was spiritually blind. Yet thanks be to God, He "who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ" (v. 6).

Why do you think Scripture describes our sinful state apart from Christ as spiritual darkness?

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WE ARE CALLED TO HELP OTHERS SEE JESUS (ACTS 9:10-16).

Circle Ananias's first response to the Lord, and underline his second response.

10 There was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias, and the Lord said to
him in a vision, "Ananias." "Here I am, Lord," he replied. 11 "Get up and go
to the street called Straight," the Lord said to him, "to the house of Judas,
and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, since he is praying there. 12 In a
vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and placing his hands
on him so that he may regain his sight." 13 "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have
heard from many people about this man, how much harm he has done to
your saints in Jerusalem. 14 And he has authority here from the chief priests
to arrest all who call on your name." 15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for
this man is my chosen instrument to take my name to Gentiles, kings, and
Israelites. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

Ananias was a follower of Jesus who lived in Damascus. He likely was converted by someone from Jerusalem who had scattered because of Saul's persecution. The Lord spoke to Ananias in a vision and gave him clear directions and instructions to find a blinded man named Saul, who was praying. The reason? The Lord called Ananias to go and help Saul see.

> **LEADER NOTE:** Scripture does not provide much biographical information for Ananias. He was a disciple of Jesus who evidently was sensitive to the movement of the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:10). We do not know how he was converted, but it may have been a result of the Holy Spirit's coming at Pentecost in Jerusalem. Ananias may have been there or simply heard about the event from an eyewitness.

But Ananias had heard about this man. He knew Saul was persecuting the church and leaving destruction and death in his wake from Jerusalem to Damascus, so he was afraid. Yet the Lord patiently explained to Ananias the plans He had for Saul. God saved Saul to be His "chosen instrument" for the gospel and to suffer for His name (vv. 15-16).

Why do you think the Lord included Ananias in Saul's conversion story?

Even though Ananias was afraid, he ultimately obeyed God. He entered the house, placed his hands on Saul, and greeted him as a brother: "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road you were traveling, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit" (v. 17). Then something "like scales" fell from Saul's eyes, and he was baptized

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Notes

immediately (v. 18). Saul, the proud persecutor of the church, repented of his sins and followed Jesus. Not only that, Saul immediately began proclaiming in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God (v. 20). The Holy Spirit radically transformed Saul's life—the persecutor of Jesus became a preacher for Jesus!

> **LEADER NOTE:** Christians often assume God changed Saul's name to Paul when he was converted in Acts 9. However, the biblical account continues to refer to him as Saul after his conversion (9:19,22,24,27-28; 11:25; 12:25). Finally, in Acts 13:9, Luke referred to him as "Saul—also called Paul" and thereafter used Paul. Why the change? In antiquity, people commonly had dual names. Saul used his Hebrew name until he began preaching widely to the Gentiles, at which point he used his Roman name, Paul.

No one is too far gone to be beyond God's call to salvation. Saul was Jesus's chief example of this amazing reach of God's grace (1 Tim. 1:12-16). But Saul also was chosen and called to take this gospel to the world. Jesus chooses to use all His people, the church, to spread His message of salvation. We are God's instruments to help people find salvation through Christ, no matter who they are. Despite our fear, God still uses us to share the gospel with the most unlikely candidates for salvation, which would include all of humanity.

When have you witnessed someone you thought was "too far gone" give their life to Jesus?

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

CHRIST AS RECONCILIATION: Ever since the fall of the first man and woman in the garden of Eden, God and human beings have been estranged. Sin resulted not only in an estranged relationship with God but also in enmity between God and humanity. Sin is an infinite offense against an infinite God. Thankfully, God loves His enemies and has sent Christ to be the reconciler between us and God. Through Christ's death, God provides the means whereby that broken relationship is restored and renewed (Rom. 6:23; 2 Cor. 5:18-19).

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ARRIVAL

INTERACT: As people arrive, ask them to respond to these questions: "What surprising changes in life direction have you experienced? How did you respond?"

CONTEXT

REVIEW: Describing his conversion experience, C. S. Lewis called himself "the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England."[2] Yet Saul of Tarsus had perhaps the greatest surprise conversion in history. He violently opposed what he considered to be the heretical sect of Jesus followers. He agreed to the murder of Stephen and persecuted the church, imprisoning believers. Obtaining authority from the chief priests, Saul traveled to Damascus to arrest even more. But on the way, he was dramatically transformed.

RECAP

ASK: As you prepared this week, what was your initial reaction to God's call for Saul to share the gospel and help people come to Christ?

SAY: Put yourself in the place of Ananias of Damascus. Saul had gained notoriety for persecuting Christians, yet God tells you to go pray for him in person so he can see once again and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Wouldn't this cause us to question God's instructions, even resist them? But we must remember that God never calls us to share His good news without empowering us to be His witnesses and having a purpose that is worth the cost of our lives.

TRANSITION: Most of us would be hesitant to witness to someone strongly opposed to Jesus. Today, as we look deeper at the interaction between Ananias and Saul, we'll learn the importance of not writing off anyone. God commissions Christians to share His good news so we can be conduits of God's love to all people, even those who initially reject Him and us.



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Key Concept: We are called to help people find salvation through Christ, no matter who they are.

GROUP ACTIVITY

Notes

CHART: Direct your group to page 110 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a chart titled "Reaching Difficult People." Recreate the chart on a board so you can record the group's findings as you interact with the text.

Reaching Difficult People

Read Acts 9:1-16. Describe Saul's conversion and Ananias's role in it. Then describe your own conversion and the role of people who participated in it.

SAUL	YOURSELF

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Acts 9:1-9.

IDENTIFY: Instruct participants to call out the details surrounding Saul's conversion on the way to Damascus. Record their responses on the board, and encourage them to write them down in their PSG. Be sure to write the Scripture references as well.

READ: Invite another volunteer read aloud Acts 9:10-16.

DESCRIBE: Ask participants to describe Ananias and his role in Saul's conversion. Write summaries of their insights on the board along with the relevant Scripture references.

DISCUSS: Lead the group to discuss what we can learn from Saul's conversion. Ask: "What are some elements of Saul's conversion that seem unique to him? What are some principles for evangelism we can discern from this account?"

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Notes

PERSONALIZE: Direct participants to the second column of the chart to think about their own conversion and write down in their PSG their thoughts and attitudes toward Christ before they heard the gospel. Encourage them to write down the name of anyone who was instrumental in their hearing and believing the good news. Give them a few minutes to write responses in their PSG.

SHARE: Invite volunteers to share a few thoughts from their own experiences. Say: "Whether we were saved as children or came to Christ after years of unfortunate choices, all believers have experienced a moment when the Holy Spirit convicted us of our need for a Savior. We all were difficult people in need of Jesus. And we all know difficult people to reach with the gospel."

DEBRIEF

How does Saul's conversion encourage us to share Christ with "difficult people"?

How can we put the conclusions of this session into action this week?

SUMMARIZE

Ananias's encounter with Saul is more than a historically interesting scene. It exemplifies a primary principle for believers today. Just as Christ wanted Saul to be saved and used Ananias to help Saul, so He calls us to help other people come to Him and be born again. Even difficult people can be saved by the power of the Holy Spirit, who empowers us to share the gospel of Jesus. We are called to help people find salvation through Christ, no matter who they are.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 111). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Heart** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.



HEAD: Saul, the former persecutor of the church, knew he did nothing to earn his salvation. He later wrote, "For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift—not from works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). God's grace can redeem anyone! We must continue to thank God for His grace, rejecting the temptation to lean on our own merit.

What are some ways we might look to our own merit for our salvation rather than God's grace?



HEART: Jesus calls His followers to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them (Matt. 5:44). A first step in obeying Jesus's command is to cultivate a heart that desires the salvation of our enemies. No matter who they are or what they've done, Jesus calls us to help them find salvation through His love.

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Notes

How can you use God's love for you as a blueprint for loving your enemies and praying for their salvation?

HANDS: We are called to help others see Jesus. Jesus's last instruction before ascending to heaven was for His followers to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19). Every disciple of Jesus is expected to participate in the mission of making more disciples for Jesus. God uses the church—His people—to spread His message of salvation.

How will you cultivate relationships with lost people for the purpose of helping them see Jesus?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Read 2 Peter 3:9. Reflect on the implications of the word "all." Some people will refuse God's call to salvation. Still, believers aren't excused from sharing the gospel as a reflection of God's love.
- Re-examine your heart. Considering difficult individuals you know, why is it sometimes hard to believe God wants to save "all" people?
- Recommit yourself to being part of God's plan for someone in your life.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 111 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 123, thanking God for showing favor to us by granting us mercy. Thank Him that He calls those who once held the gospel in contempt, making them His sons and daughters.

References

1. Patrick Schreiner, *Acts*, eds. E. Ray Clendenen and Brandon D. Smith, Christian Standard Commentary (Holman Reference, 2021), 297.
2. C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, in The Beloved Works of C. S. Lewis (New York: Inspirational Press), 125.

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THE GOSPEL IS FOR EVERYONE

CORE PASSAGE: ACTS 10:9-16,34-35,42-45

CONTEXT

The church began in Jerusalem with the coming of the Holy Spirit, and people were being added every day. When persecution erupted, the church was scattered and the gospel spread to Samaria, where believers received the Spirit. But Jesus said the gospel would spread even further—to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Yet when a Roman centurion and God-fearer received a message from an angel preparing him to receive the gospel (10:1-8), God also needed to prepare His apostle to share it with the Gentiles.

KEY CONCEPT

God desires all people to come to Him, showing no favoritism.

As you examine Acts 10:9-16,34-35,42-45:

- Contemplate the scope and reach of Christ's work on the cross, having fulfilled the law and opening salvation to all.
- Acknowledge that preaching the gospel to all and the acceptance of all people into God's family is God's mission and ours.

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TIMELINE

The Church in Jerusalem Scatters Due to Persecution, Taking the Gospel to Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1-4)

Philip Preaches the Gospel in Samaria (Acts 8:5-13)

Peter and John Go to Samaria and Affirm the Gospel Work There (Acts 8:14-25)

Peter Performs Miracles in Lydda and Joppa (Acts 9:32-43)

SESSION STUDY:
Peter Receives a Vision and Goes to Preach the Gospel to Cornelius, a Gentile (Acts 10:1-48)

Peter Reports to the Church in Jerusalem That the Gentiles Received the Gospel and the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:1-18)

Daily Readings

- ☐ **Day 1:** Acts 10:1-8
- ☐ **Day 2:** Acts 10:9-20
- ☐ **Day 3:** Acts 10:19-33
- ☐ **Day 4:** Acts 10:34-43
- ☐ **Day 5:** Acts 10:44-48
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 133

Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

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Notes

GOD'S DESIRE FOR ALL NATIONS AND PEOPLE TO COME TO HIM MAY BEWILDER SOME (ACTS 10:9-16).

Circle all the number references in the passage.

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

As a Jew, Peter religiously followed the laws regarding clean and unclean animals for consumption (see Lev. 11). But God was about to confront Peter's over-zealous law-keeping, showing him that food formerly identified as impure was now made clean because of Christ's work on the cross (Mark 7:18-19), which also had further significant implications. On this point, Peter's personal practice did not yet reflect the freedom of Christ and God's kingdom.

> **LEADER NOTE:** Peter was staying in Joppa with a leather tanner named Simon (Acts 9:43). A follower of Jesus named Dorcas had fallen sick and died there, and the Lord miraculously raised her from the dead through Peter's prayer so that many would believe in the Lord (vv. 36-42). Evidently, Peter had a clean conscience regarding staying under the roof of a tanner. Because tanners handled animal corpses and hides, Old Testament law would deem them unclean (Lev. 11:24-25).[1] While Peter had relaxed his Jewish law-keeping in some ways, God was preparing to confront other ways Peter had a restricted view of God's kingdom.

God confronted Peter's view of His kingdom through a vision while Peter was hungry and waiting for lunch. He caused Peter to see a large sheet coming down from heaven with all the four-footed animals and reptiles of the earth and birds of the sky, many of which were explicitly forbidden for consumption in Leviticus 11. God then commanded Peter to kill and eat what He had provided. Despite Peter's refusal, claiming a moral high ground of never having eaten anything unclean, the Lord was adamant: "What God has made clean, do not call impure" (Acts 10:15). God issued this command to Peter three times before taking the sheet back to heaven.

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Notes

Why do you think God gave Peter this vision when he was hungry?

Peter was bewildered (v. 17). What was the purpose of a vision that provided food but then took it away after three commands to eat? God's prohibition against contact with the unclean was rooted in His holiness (Lev. 11:45). The vision God gave to Peter signaled an expansion of God's kingdom to include those outside of the Jewish faith because holiness now clearly rested in a faith relationship with the Holy One—Jesus—and in sanctification by the Holy Spirit.

While the subject of Peter's vision was food, its intent was regarding people—Gentiles. The sheet being lowered by its "four corners" containing all the animals of the earth (Acts 10:11) may illustrate the whole earth full of people, both Jew and Gentile (see Isa. 11:12; Rev. 7:1). And immediately after this vision, Peter was visited by three messengers, likely Gentiles, sent by the Gentile Cornelius at the instruction of the Lord (Acts 10:1-8,17-23). God was confronting Peter with a clear message: All nations and peoples are called to come to Jesus.

> **LEADER NOTE:** Because faith in Christ alone brings salvation, all people and nations can come to Him. The apostle Paul, the former Pharisee of Pharisees, later wrote that salvation does not come from keeping all the Mosaic Law but through faith, "so that it may be according to grace, to guarantee it to all the descendants—not only to the one who is of the law but also to the one who is of Abraham's faith. He is the father of us all" (Rom. 4:16).

What misconceptions about God's grace has the Holy Spirit had to confront you with in your walk with Him?

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

PEOPLE OF GOD: Scripture describes the church as the people of God (2 Cor. 6:16). Comprised of both Jew and Gentile, the church is created by God through the atoning death of Christ. The term "church" is used in two senses—of individual local churches composed of people who have covenanted together under the lordship of Christ and of the universal church composed of all believers in Christ in all times. As the people of God, the church seeks to live under God's ruling care while we are protected and cared for by Him.

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Notes

GOD DOESN'T SHOW FAVORITISM (ACTS 10:34-35,42-45).

Highlight Peter's descriptions of how we are saved.

34 Peter began to speak: "Now I truly understand that God doesn't show
favoritism, 35 but in every nation the person who fears him and does what is
right is acceptable to him. . . . 42 He commanded us to preach to the people
and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be the judge of the
living and the dead. 43 All the prophets testify about him that through his
name everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins." 44 While
Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came down on all those
who heard the message. 45 The circumcised believers who had come with
Peter were amazed because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out
even on the Gentiles.

As Peter was trying to figure out what his vision meant, the Spirit made it clear: "Three men are here looking for you. Get up, go downstairs, and go with them with no doubts at all, because I have sent them" (vv. 19-20). Peter went with the men to the house of the centurion Cornelius, who had gathered all of his relatives and close friends (vv. 23-24). Cornelius told Peter how the angel had visited and instructed him to send for Peter (vv. 30-32). This whole Gentile company now was ready to "hear everything [Peter had] been commanded by the Lord" (v. 33).

Immediately Peter understood the link between his vision and Cornelius's: All who believe in Christ, no matter where they are from, will be given the Holy Spirit. Regardless of their culture or customs, God will accept all people who repent of their sins into His family because of the work of Jesus. The Lord does not show favoritism. So Peter shared this good news with the Gentiles of Cornelius's household. He told them that the Scriptures, of which Cornelius must have been somewhat familiar, testified that through Jesus's name "everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins" (v. 43).

> **LEADER NOTE:** Jesus's followers are commanded to share the good news of the gospel with all people because the situation is urgent. God appointed Jesus "to be the judge of the living and the dead" (v. 42). Judgment is certain for those who have not turned from their sin and trusted in Jesus. We should be ready to tell the unbelievers around us that there is hope: salvation is found in Jesus. Preaching the gospel and accepting all believers into God's family is God's mission and ours. The gospel is for everyone.

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Notes

What place should the coming judgment have in our proclamation of the gospel, and why?

While Peter was sharing the gospel with Cornelius's household, the Holy Spirit came upon those who heard his message. These Gentiles, though they were uncircumcised and did not keep the Old Testament law, were filled with the Holy Spirit and accepted in God's family (vv. 44-45). Peter's Jewish companions were amazed! God's people now included Gentiles, and those who had received the Holy Spirit soon were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (vv. 47-48).

That day, Peter and his companions saw a foretaste of heaven, where "a vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language" will stand before God's throne, crying out, "Salvation belongs to our God . . . and to the Lamb!" (Rev. 7:9-10). Cornelius, a Gentile, a centurion, and a man of significant standing, now had the task as a believer in Christ to carry the gospel to his own sphere of influence and beyond.

> **LEADER NOTE:** Peter's vision and message to those in Cornelius's household aligned with and fulfilled Jesus's final words before ascending to heaven in Matthew 28:19: "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." Jesus's command to make disciples of all nations was not given only to the apostles but also to us today. We must share the gospel with all peoples, participating with God in His mission to redeem a people for Himself through the work of Jesus Christ.

What opportunities do you have for sharing the gospel with those in your sphere of influence and beyond?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Though God began with a people He chose for Himself, they were always for the purpose of blessing the nations. Now through Christ's work on the cross, people from all backgrounds can experience forgiveness of sin and salvation through Jesus.

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Notes

ARRIVAL

ENGAGE: As people arrive, break the ice by asking: "How have your tastes for foods changed over the years?"

CONTEXT

SUMMARIZE: Mosaic Law forbade the Israelites, later called Jews, from eating certain foods to signify that God had set them apart from other nations to be a nation of priests to Him (Ex. 19:5-6). Jesus and His disciples were Jews. Jesus not only kept God's law perfectly, but He fulfilled the law completely by being the perfect sacrifice for our sin. Yet when Jesus told His followers to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, He did not just mean to the Jews scattered throughout the known world. God wants people from every tribe, tongue, and nation to be saved. But He would have to prepare His people to understand the reach of His desire for all to be saved (2 Pet. 3:9).

RECAP

DISCUSS: In your personal preparation this week, what phrases and ideas really hit home?

TRANSITION: God used visions to bring Peter and Cornelius into a gospel encounter. God gave us His Word with clear instructions about His desire that all kinds of people be saved, regardless of their nationality, ethnicity, social status, or background. In our activity today, we'll learn that God shows no favoritism, so He has called us to share the gospel with all people.



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Key Concept: God desires all people to come to Him, showing no favoritism.

GROUP ACTIVITY

Notes

CHART: Direct your group to page 118 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a chart titled "God's Calling." Recreate the chart on a board so you can record the group's findings as you interact with the Scripture.

God's Calling

Read Acts 10:1-48. Write down the ways God called Cornelius and Peter, how they responded, and the result of their gospel encounter.

	THE CALLING	THE RESPONSE	THE RESULT
CORNELIUS			
PETER			

READ: Invite four volunteers to read aloud Acts 10:1-48, splitting the chapter into Cornelius's vision (vv. 1-8), Peter's vision (vv. 9-23), Cornelius's welcome of Peter (vv. 24-33), and Peter's conclusion (vv. 34-48).

ANALYZE: Instruct groups of 3-4 to consider the Scripture passage and to fill in the chart in their PSGs. Guide them to begin by considering the ways that God prepared both Cornelius and Peter and the method He used to call them. *(The vision of an angel telling Cornelius to summon Peter; the vision of the sheet for Peter)* The groups should then contemplate the response of Cornelius *(immediate obedience)* and of Peter *(refusal to kill and eat, confusion, and then obedience as he accompanied Cornelius's messengers).* Discuss what God ultimately wanted in this gospel encounter *(for Cornelius and his household to be saved; for the church to take the gospel to the Gentiles).* After a few minutes, allow the groups to share their conclusions, and record a consensus summary of each section in the chart on the board.

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Notes

DISCUSS: Why do you think the Lord addressed dietary laws with Peter to reveal that His gospel would go to all nations? Why do you think God was preparing both Peter and Cornelius for this encounter at the same time? Why is it encouraging to know that God prepares the one sharing the gospel and not just the one hearing it?

SUMMARIZE: While this was a turning point in the mission of the early church, it would be something they would struggle with. Many of Paul's letters were directed at promoting unity between Jewish and Gentile believers. Paul said, "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and we were all given one Spirit to drink" (1 Cor. 12:13). Salvation is for everyone who believes in Christ, no matter who they are. Likewise, the gospel is meant to be shared with every unbeliever, no matter who they are, because God does not show favoritism, and neither should we.

DEBRIEF

How can believers be intentional about reaching people of all backgrounds with the gospel?

SUMMARIZE



Display **Pack Item 13: No Favoritism** and read the verses. Say: "God desires all people from every nation, language, and background to come to Him, showing no favoritism. The good news is for all people, and when people from every nation, language, and background come to Jesus, we all stand on equal footing within His body, the church."

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 119). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Heart** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.

HEAD: While God shows no favoritism, we still have many personal and cultural preferences that cloud our minds. A deeper understanding of the gospel begins with an understanding of believers' unity in Christ Jesus. If we belong to Jesus, then we all are children of the promise and one in Him, no matter our background (Gal. 3:27-29).

How should we reconcile the unity we have in Christ with the diversity of people who follow Him?

HEART: As followers of Christ, our desires must be shaped to align with His. God's kingdom will be comprised of believers from every nation, tribe, and language (Rev. 7:9-10). When we ask God to give us a heart that matches His, our hearts will burn for the salvation of lost people around the world.

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Notes

What are some attitudes of your heart you need to confess that keep you from pursuing all people with the gospel?

HANDS: God graciously gives us a mission—to make the name of Jesus known to all people. We must faithfully proclaim the gospel and pray for the Holy Spirit to save those who hear, regardless of their background. When they respond in faith and are filled with the Holy Spirit, we then can receive them as brothers and sisters in God's family (Acts 10:48).

How will you welcome as brothers and sisters in Christ those who are different from you?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this week's session.

- Read Acts 1:8 and compare it with the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20).
- Reflect on your own cultural identity and preconceptions that may hinder you from reaching beyond your comfort zone. Rely on the Holy Spirit to empower you to share the gospel of Christ with all kinds of people.
- Remind yourself each day that someone you meet may be a divine appointment for a gospel conversation.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 119 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 133 with your group. Pray for and thank God for the unity of your group, and thank God that He has made all believers into one body, bound together in love and harmony.

References

1. A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1933), Ac 9:43.

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THE GOSPEL IS HOLISTIC

CORE PASSAGE: ACTS 11:19-30

CONTEXT

Acts 10–11 marked a significant transition in the spread of the gospel according to Jesus's instructions. So significant that the story was told twice, once as the narrative account and once as an eyewitness report. The news of Gentiles receiving the gospel caused no small controversy among those in Jerusalem (11:1-3). Jews of the "circumcision party" criticized Peter for his ministry among the Gentiles, but after they heard about the coming of the Holy Spirit, they glorified God, concluding, "God has given repentance resulting in life even to the Gentiles" (v. 18), which also involved them in the life and ministry of His church.

KEY CONCEPT

Christians proclaim the gospel in words backed up by loving actions for others.

As you examine Acts 11:19-30:

- Acknowledge that as believers, we all are called to proclaim the good news of the Lord Jesus.
- Recognize that we serve others in accordance with our gifting and ability to love the church and show God's love to the world.

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TIMELINE

The Church in Jerusalem Scatters Due to Persecution, Taking the Gospel to Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1-40)

Saul Encounters the Risen Jesus on the Road to Damascus and Is Baptized (Acts 9:1-19)

Saul Proclaims Jesus in Damascus and Jerusalem, Escaping Threats upon His Life (Acts 9:20-30)

SESSION STUDY: **The Gospel Is Proclaimed to Jews and Gentiles in Antioch, and Barnabas and Saul Teach the Church There (Acts 11:19-30)**

Daily Readings

- ☐ **Day 1:** Acts 11:1-9
- ☐ **Day 2:** Acts 11:5-14
- ☐ **Day 3:** Acts 11:15-18
- ☐ **Day 4:** Acts 11:19-26
- ☐ **Day 5:** Acts 11:27-30
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 70

Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

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Notes

WE ALL HAVE A CALLING TO PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL SO THAT MORE MAY BE SAVED (ACTS 11:19-24).

Circle the results of the rise in persecution that started in Jerusalem.

19 Now those who had been scattered as a result of the persecution that started because of Stephen made their way as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. 20 But there were some of them, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, proclaiming the good news about the Lord Jesus. 21 The Lord's hand was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. 22 News about them reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to travel as far as Antioch. 23 When he arrived and saw the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged all of them to remain true to the Lord with devoted hearts, 24 for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And large numbers of people were added to the Lord.

> **LEADER NOTE:** The martyrdom of Stephen marked the beginning of a severe persecution of the church in Jerusalem, the scattering of the church, and the rapid spread of the gospel. Stephen's martyrdom was the match that lit the fire of the spread of the gospel. After persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, the gospel reached Jews, and eventually Gentiles, beyond Judea all the way to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch (v. 19).

Persecution in Jerusalem caused the church to scatter throughout the region. While the majority of those who were scattered only shared the gospel with their fellow Jews, some men from Cyprus and Cyrene went to Antioch and preached the gospel to the Greeks too. God's hand was upon their work, and "a large number who believed turned to the Lord" (v. 21).

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Christ compels us to follow His example in showing love through serving others in their spiritual and physical needs. Christians follow Christ in sharing the gospel and providing for the physical needs of others.

The men from Cyprus and Cyrene were motivated to share the gospel. They recognized that they had a calling to proclaim the gospel so that more may be saved. They understood the assignment. Even though they were far from their home because of persecution, they used their circumstance as an opportunity to share the hope of Jesus Christ. They were burdened for the Greeks in

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Antioch and shared the good news with them. These men are an example for Christ's followers today. We too are called to proclaim the good news of the gospel, sharing out of an overflowing heart of gratitude for our salvation. When all join in proclaiming the gospel, more people will be saved.

Notes

Why does God use persecution to expand the reach of the gospel?

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

"In the cross and persecution of Christians, faith increases, the gospel is in full force, the hearts of Christians are kindled and prepared to suffer for Christ's sake whatever they must. The more Christians are persecuted and slaughtered, the more Christians are born."[1]

–Johann Spangenberg (1484–1550)

The church in Jerusalem heard about the mass conversion of people in Antioch and sent Barnabas to the city to confirm and affirm God's work there (v. 22). Barnabas's name was really Joseph, but he earned the nickname "Son of Encouragement" because that's who he was (4:36).

> **LEADER NOTE:** Luke described Barnabas as "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith" (11:24). Barnabas sold a field he owned and gave the money to the Jerusalem church (4:36-37). He encouraged Saul (also called Paul) and connected him with the church when others distrusted Saul's intentions (9:26-27), and he extended a second chance to John Mark after he abandoned Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (13:13; 15:37-39). It is hard to fathom the far-reaching impact of Barnabas's loving encouragement of other believers and the church.

Barnabas recognized the Greeks accepted the gospel by the grace of God, and he stayed in the city and "encouraged" them in their faith and devotion to the Lord (11:23). Evidently, Barnabas joined in the work, and even more were added to their number. God's hand was upon this church. The faithfulness of the men from Cyprus and Cyrene to share the gospel resulted in a vibrant, evangelistic church in Antioch.

Who has been a "Barnabas" to you in your walk with Christ, and how?

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Notes

ALONG WITH SPIRITUAL NEEDS, WE ARE CALLED TO MEET PHYSICAL NEEDS (ACTS 11:25-30).

Circle the means and evidence of the church's growth in their knowledge and experience of the Christian faith.

25 Then he went to Tarsus to search for Saul, 26 and when he found him
he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and
taught large numbers. The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch.
27 In those days some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.
28 One of them, named Agabus, stood up and predicted by the Spirit that
there would be a severe famine throughout the Roman world. This took
place during the reign of Claudius. 29 Each of the disciples, according to
his ability, determined to send relief to the brothers and sisters who lived
in Judea. 30 They did this, sending it to the elders by means of Barnabas
and Saul.

The church in Antioch was growing rapidly, and Barnabas needed help! So he went to Tarsus to look for Saul, whom he had encouraged and helped when the church in Jerusalem initially doubted his surprising conversion (9:26-30). Together they taught the church in Antioch for an entire year. The church was growing in every way—new people were being added, their knowledge was deepening, and their faith was increasing. Interestingly, the church in Antioch was the first place believers were called "Christians" (11:26).

Why do you think Barnabas invited Saul to serve the church in Antioch?

At some point during that year, the Holy Spirit empowered a prophet from Jerusalem named Agabus to accurately predict a severe famine throughout the Roman world. When the famine finally hit, likely around AD 46–47, the church was prepared. The Christians in Antioch willingly sent relief to those in Judea through Barnabas and Saul (vv. 29-30).

> **LEADER NOTE:** The account of the church in Antioch supporting the church in Judea illustrates the unity of the church of Jesus Christ. The church in Antioch, largely comprised of Greeks, did not view themselves as separate from the church in Jerusalem (11:19-22). Filled with the same Spirit, they were compelled to extend care to their brothers and sisters living in other areas, a pattern that would continue throughout the book of Acts.

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Notes

After learning from Saul and Barnabas's teaching, the church in Antioch grew in their understanding of the way of Jesus. As they matured, they knew they must not only proclaim the gospel in words but should back it up with loving actions. Each Christian served others according to their gifts and abilities. Here they took up a special offering to support those affected by the famine, and they each gave "according to his ability" (v. 29). In doing so, they showed that they not only cared about others' spiritual needs but also their physical needs. The Christians in Antioch understood that the gospel is holistic.

> **LEADER NOTE:** Interestingly, when the church in Antioch supported the church in Judea, they were giving back to the Christians who had sent Barnabas, and in effect Saul, to them. In other words, the church in Jerusalem sent Antioch spiritual life in the form of the gospel carried by Saul and Barnabas, and later, the church in Antioch sent Judea physical life in the form of famine support, likely money, carried by Saul and Barnabas in their time of need. The holistic nature of the gospel was clearly in view as these two churches met each other's needs.

We have the same holistic gospel today. Christians everywhere are called to proclaim the gospel in words backed up by loving actions for others. Each Christian can serve according to their gifts and abilities, caring for the spiritual and physical needs of others. This is no new addition to the gospel. Jesus taught His disciples that whenever they met the physical needs of their spiritual brothers and sisters, they were ministering to Him (Matt. 25:34-40). No Christian is exempt from this example—we all are called to care for the spiritual and physical needs of others.

Why can meeting physical needs back up our proclamation of the gospel but should never take the place of that proclamation?

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

CHRISTIANS AND THE SOCIAL ORDER: All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society. Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. In the spirit of Christ, Christians should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death.

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Notes

ARRIVAL

ENGAGE: As your group arrives, initiate interaction by asking: "What are some ways a believer could respond to someone on the street holding a cardboard sign saying, 'Will work for food'?"

CONTEXT

SUMMARIZE: Persecution against Christians swept through Jerusalem following Stephen's murder, and this rise in conflict forced the church outward. Philip went to Samaria and preached the gospel there. Samaritans were related to the Jews but had different beliefs and a mixed heritage that kept the two peoples separated. Through the gospel of Jesus Christ, however, and the work of the Holy Spirit, the believers from the two peoples were becoming one through their shared faith in the one Savior of all. Yet the spread of the gospel didn't stop there. Just as Jesus had said, the Holy Spirit would work through Jesus's disciples to take the good news to the ends of the earth. And in response to the persecution, the gospel was being taken to primarily Gentile areas, where it was shared with the Jews and also with the Gentiles, making one people in Christ.


THE GOSPEL IN ACTION

TRANSITION: Distribute copies of **Pack Item 14: The Gospel in Action** and review how the early church met tangible needs. Say: "Early in the history of the church, they shared everything with one another so that they met physical needs (Acts 4:32-35). The early church had a holistic view of the gospel. The term 'holistic' simply means applying to the whole person."

RECAP

ASK: From your personal preparation this week, what were some surprising turns in the biblical narrative? What details from the Scripture passage reveal the importance of ministering to the whole person?

TRANSITION: The gospel of Jesus Christ has a surprising effect of unity where disunity would be expected. It can bring separated peoples together, reconcile enemies, and lead to loving people both body and soul. In today's activity, we'll think about how biblical Christianity brings the gospel to bear both spiritually and physically for the good of all.

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Key Concept: Christians proclaim the gospel in words backed up by loving actions for others.

Notes

GROUP ACTIVITY

BOXES: Direct your group to page 126 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find an activity titled "Reaching the Whole Person." Recreate the boxes on a board so you can record the group's findings.

Reaching the Whole Person

Read Acts 11:19-30. Write down spiritual and physical needs in the spaces below. Then write down steps you can take to meet them.

SPIRITUAL NEEDS	PHYSICAL NEEDS

WHAT CAN I DO?

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Acts 11:19-24.

ANALYZE: Guide participants to discuss the situation in Antioch. Ask: "Why did some believers limit their evangelism to the Jews? How did the Greeks respond to the gospel? How did Barnabas view the spiritual activity in Antioch?"

IDENTIFY: Lead the group to identify the spiritual needs in Antioch that opened the door for the gospel message. Then ask: "What spiritual needs can you identify among people you know?" *(Write down the responses on the board and give participants time to record responses in their PSG.)*

READ: Invite another volunteer read aloud Acts 11:25-30.

ENGAGE: Above all, people need the gospel for the salvation of their soul. But people with physical needs are all around us. The apostle John asked, "If anyone has this world's goods and sees a fellow believer in need but withholds compassion from him—how does God's love reside in him?" (1 John 3:17).

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Notes

Branching this idea out, meeting physical needs often shows unbelievers that Christians care about them and opens the door for sharing the good news. Ask: "What are some physical needs the church can meet?" *(Write the responses on the board and give participants time to record physical needs in their PSG.)*

DISCUSS: Ask: "How do spiritual and physical needs relate to each other?" Record responses in the space between the boxes.

APPLY: Encourage participants to consider what they personally can do to meet such needs. *(Give financially through the church's benevolence offering; volunteer at a food pantry; encourage a needy family by sharing food; offering a job)* Record sample responses on the board and give them time to record ideas in their PSG.

DEBRIEF

As we walk in the Spirit, how does He spur us toward compassion for others in need?

How can holistic ministry provide a conduit for sharing the gospel?

SUMMARIZE

Jesus told His followers that when they do good things for others, they are actually doing it for Him (Matt. 25:40). Believers love others because we have been loved by Christ. We meet needs because Jesus has met our greatest need. Out of love for Jesus and our neighbors, Christians proclaim the gospel in words backed up by loving actions for others.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 127). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Hands** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.



HEAD: Under Saul and Barnabas's teaching, the church in Antioch grew. They were convinced of the gospel's holistic nature, and their service to the church in Judea reflected their newfound faith. The gospel encompasses all of life. Christ's redeeming work calls Christians to proclaim the gospel in words backed up by loving action for others.

How have you experienced the holistic nature of the gospel?



HEART: When Christians understand the gospel, our hearts become burdened for others. When Agabus prophesied the famine, "Each of the disciples, according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brothers and sisters who lived in Judea" (Acts 11:29). Willingly meeting physical needs has been a distinguishing mark of Christian believers from the beginning (2:45).

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How can you cultivate concern for the well-being of others in the church?

Notes



HANDS: The believers were first called "Christians" in Antioch (Acts 11:26). To be a Christian is to meet the spiritual and physical needs of others. Jesus said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35). We should show our love for Christ and others by looking for ways to help those whom Christ has put in our path.

What steps will you take in your finances or schedule so you are available to share the gospel holistically?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Read James 2:15-17. Write a brief statement about how Barnabas, Saul, and the early church demonstrated application of James's exhortation.
- Think about your own conversion story. Remember how the holistic ministry of others might have influenced you to turn to Jesus.
- Reinforce your understanding of Acts 11 and James 2 by planning and executing loving actions to help others this week.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 127 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 70:4-5, thanking God for being a God who helps the poor and needy, both spiritually and physically. Pray for opportunities to show God's care for others so they too will rejoice in the God who saves.

References

1. Johann Spangenberg quoted in Esther Chung-Kim et al., eds., Acts: New Testament, vol. VI, Reformation Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 154–155.

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GROUP ARTICLE

FROM CLIQUES TO COMMUNITIES

By Ken Braddy

First impressions are not always correct, but they are difficult to change.

- An unresponsive salesperson allows you to wander throughout the store without approaching you.
- A waitress takes a long time before approaching your table.
- The promise of great service at your local car dealership leaves much to be desired.
- A guest visits a Bible study group but is ignored while group members carry on conversations with one another.

The lack of hospitality cripples the attractiveness of groups to outsiders. It has been said that connection and community will win out over content in post-COVID churches. Carey Nieuwhof made that prediction a few years ago, reminding us that people can get great preaching and Bible studies in just a matter of seconds through an Internet search. What they cannot get, however, is something every one of us needs: in-person, human connection. The pathway to genuine, biblical community begins and ends with the degree to which groups break down cliques and establish real community. The church and groups need a resurgence of biblical hospitality.

How can Bible study groups start fresh in their efforts to be welcoming and open? Is it possible for groups to refocus on making strangers feel like friends? What is the likelihood that functionally closed groups could begin a new era of biblical hospitality? What would they have to change in order to break down cliques and become inclusive, inviting, and perhaps even irresistible? Here are five ways that groups can welcome people aboard.

1) **Group leaders must become "hospitality champions."** For real change to take place in groups, a catalyst is needed. Group leaders who embrace the idea of providing a higher level of biblical hospitality can become that catalyst when they cast a vision for it and model the behavior they want to see. Group leaders can lead group members to understand the needs of guests for relationships, to approach them and engage them in genuine conversation, and to take a genuine interest in them.

2) **Adult groups will enlist a Hospitality Leader or a Hospitality Team.** There are members of every adult group who are "people persons." They have the gift of gab and can connect with people instantly. These group members excel at making people feel comfortable, especially newcomers. These gifted group members enjoy introducing guests to others, sitting with them in the worship service, and inviting them to lunch and other activities.

3) **Everyone in a group will take ownership of hospitality.** While it is helpful to have a person (or persons) designated as hospitality leaders, making people feel welcome is really everyone's job. Guests can quickly sense if they are welcome or not by the way the members of a group engage with them or don't. This is where a catalytic group leader can make a difference in motivating his or her group to own the responsibility of making every guest feel welcome.

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It has been said that connection and community will win out over content in post-COVID churches.

4) Adult group members will wear name tags. People often don't fully engage another person in conversation because they either don't know the person's name or they've forgotten it. In either case, people don't like to look forgetful, and they certainly don't want to be embarrassed because they can't call the person by name. Simple stick-on "Hello, My Name Is _____" name tags are a great solution to this problem and get groups talking. Groups should wear them every time they come together, which will spark more conversations and connections than ever before.

Guests can quickly sense if they are welcome or not by the way the members of a group engage with them or don't.

5) Groups will multiply and start new ones. A truism of group life is that when a group has been together longer than twenty-four months, it turns inward. At that point, it is very difficult to send guests to that group and expect them to make significant relational connections. Why is this? After being together two years or more, group members have spent a lot of time praying together, studying together, talking together, serving together, and having fun together. Relationships and connections have formed, and they often have no bandwidth for newcomers to connect with them. New groups, however, have people with time, energy, and interest in developing new relationships—it's one reason they are part of a new group launch. Guests often find a higher level of hospitality in these new groups.

Ken Braddy is Lifeway's Director of Sunday School and has trained and equipped group leaders since 1992. He is the author of several leadership books, including *Welcome Aboard!* and *Sacred Spaces*.

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ARTICLE

THE DISCIPLINE OF ENDURANCE

By Daniel Davis

Life is hard. Some people seem to experience that hardship more than others, but the difficulties of life, and death, come for us all. This is the fallout of sin in the world, the curse of the fall and the consequences of our own fallenness as sinners.

But Christians have a unique experience with hardships in life, in part because we choose to suffer, not as a consequence of our sin but in connection with our Savior. Jesus warned His followers of persecution and suffering because that was His experience in this world, even as the perfect and holy Son of God (John 15:20-21). Still, Jesus encouraged His friends to follow in His footsteps because He has conquered the world (16:33). So, in our effort to follow those steps as Christians, we must learn to endure like Christ (Heb. 12:1-2).

ENDURE TEMPTATION

Practically, Scripture teaches believers to fight against temptation and sin by treasuring God's Word in our hearts (Ps. 119:11; see Luke 4:1-13), praying (Luke 22:46), resisting the devil (Jas. 4:7), fleeing from sexual immorality (1 Cor. 6:18), and taking our thoughts captive (2 Cor. 10:5). Yet we are also given a disposition to employ in these efforts: Christ died to sin for us and rose from the dead, so we too should "consider [ourselves] dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:10-11).

From the beginning, God warned that sin results in death (Gen. 2:17), but somehow we continue to ignore that fact in each of our sinful choices. If we needed a greater visual of this truth beyond headstones and graveyards, consider that Jesus, "who did not know sin" (2 Cor. 5:21), was murdered on a cross as a result of sin (cf. Mark 14:64)—even our sin. But more than a victim, Jesus willingly laid down His perfect life on the cross for our forgiveness. So in our baptism as believers, we honor this sacrifice and choose to identify with our sinless Savior: dead to sin and buried with Him in order to rise with Him and walk "in newness of life," no longer using our bodies for sin but as an offering to God, as "weapons for righteousness" (Rom. 6:1-14).

ENDURE PERSECUTION

Persecution against believers can come in many forms, mild to severe, personal, familial, corporate, and governmental, not to mention the demonic. As Jesus warned, Paul echoed: "All who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12). But we are not without help in this matter. Chiefly, God has given us the Holy Spirit to guide and strengthen us through persecution. We also have God's sovereign promise of purpose through all our sufferings. "Testing . . . produces endurance" for our completeness so we can share in the sufferings of our Savior (Jas. 1:2-4). Persecution also opens doors for the gospel (Acts 8:1,4; 11:19-21; 1 Pet. 3:14-18).

ENDURE TO THE END

But what about persecution that ends in death? Some believers were rescued from death; others, like Stephen, weren't (Acts 6–7). We may not be able to understand how death by any means can serve God's good purposes, but we can know and trust that it does—just look at Jesus! And look at Stephen's final moments: forgiving his killers, trusting the Lord, and seeing Jesus standing to receive His servant. We can endure faithfully to whatever end God has for us because, in the end, we will hear: "Well done, good and faithful servant! . . . Share your master's joy" (Matt. 25:21).

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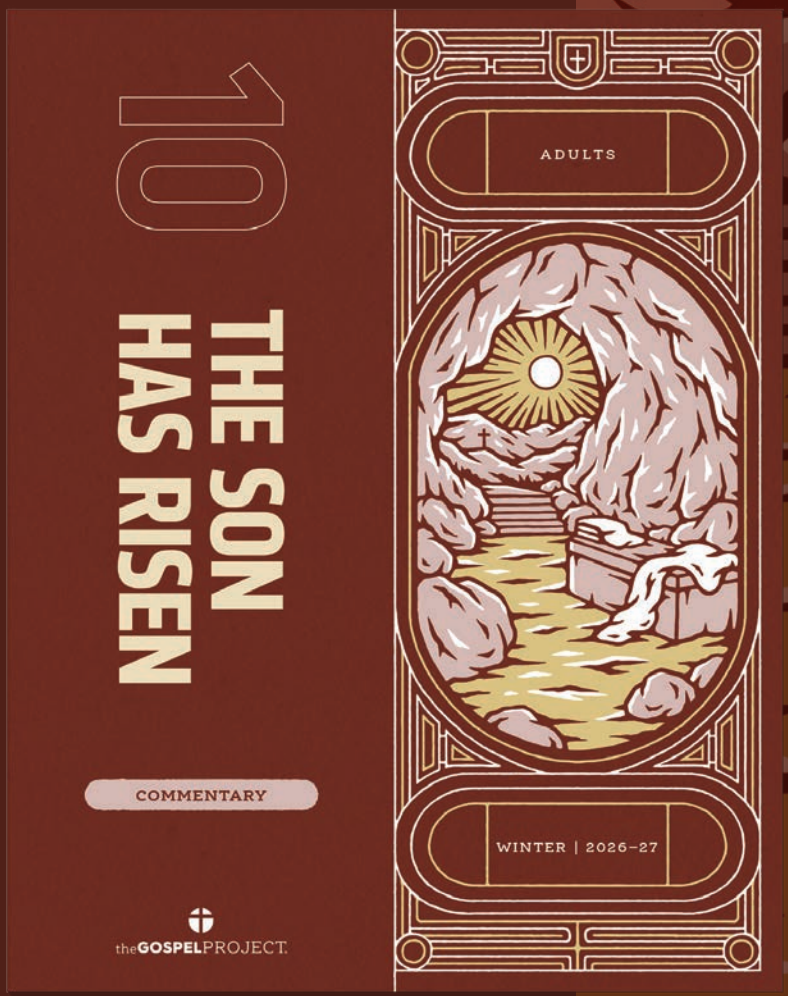

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