10

THE SON HAS RISEN

PERSONAL STUDY 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!

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SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

The Gospel Project for Adults aspires to point people 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 understand the storyline of Scripture and to see the thread from the beginning to the end that weaves through it all—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 and helping doubters become believers who become declarers of the gospel.

GOSPEL MISSION

Our desire is to encourage 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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VOL 01:
CREATION AND COVENANT

(Genesis; Job)
Fall 2024

VOL 02:
LAW AND LIFE

(Exodus–Deuteronomy)
Winter 2024–25

VOL 03:
LAND AND LOSS

(Joshua–1 Samuel)
Spring 2025

VOL 04:
FOOLISHNESS AND WISDOM

(1 Samuel–1 Kings; Wisdom Literature)
Summer 2025

VOL 05:
DIVISION AND DEFIANCE

(1 Kings–2 Chronicles; The Prophets)
Fall 2025

VOL 06:
PROPHETS AND PROVISION

(The Prophets; Ezra–Esther)
Winter 2025–26

VOL 07:
THE SON HAS COME

(The Gospels)
Spring 2026

VOL 08:
THE SON HAS AUTHORITY

(The Gospels)
Summer 2026

VOL 09:
THE SON HAS TRUTH

(The Gospels)
Fall 2026

VOL 10:
THE SON HAS RISEN

(The Gospels; Acts)
Winter 2026–27

VOL 11:
THE CHURCH HAS A MISSION

(Acts; The Epistles)
Spring 2027

VOL 12:
THE CHURCH HAS A FUTURE

(The Epistles; Revelation)
Summer 2027

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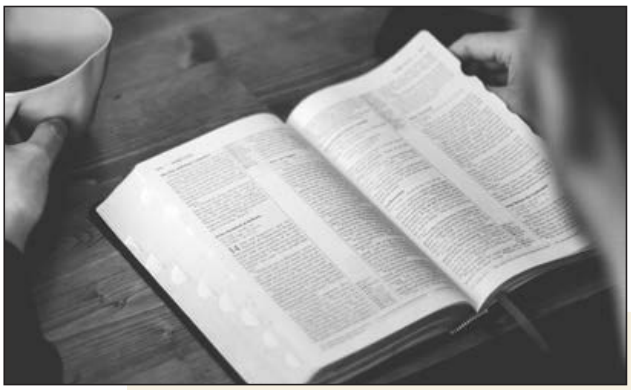
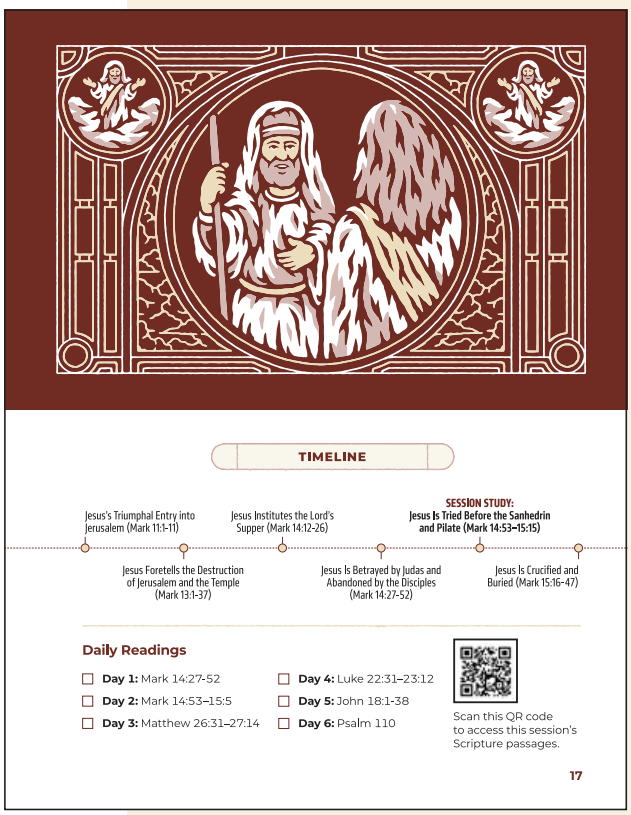
HOW TO USE THE PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

The Personal Study Guide is a vital 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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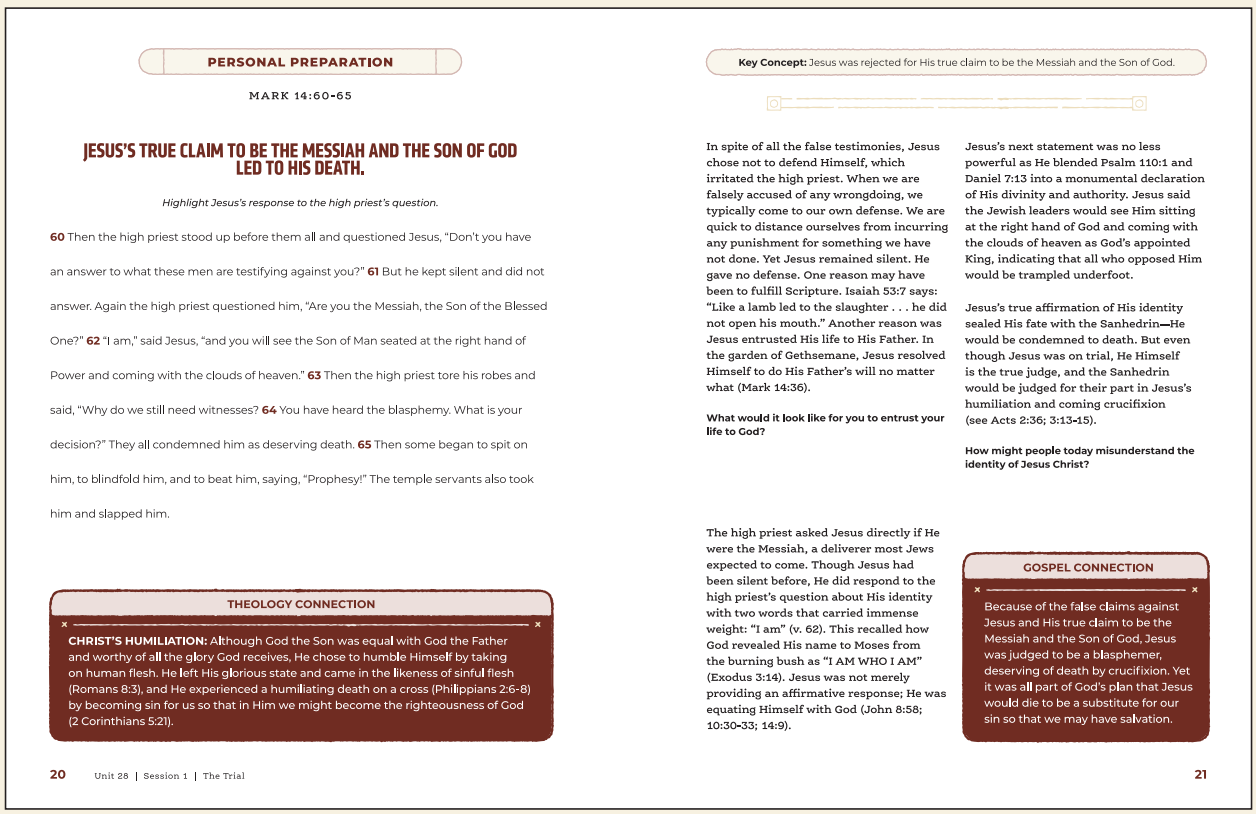
2) STUDY THE PERSONAL PREPARATION

The Personal Preparation section contains the Scripture passages you will examine and discuss with your Bible study group. As you read each Scripture passage, a Bible study prompt will help you highlight, underline, or jot notes to help you engage with the Scripture and to provoke discussion with your group on the following Sunday. A brief commentary with thought-provoking questions will help you dig deeper into the text and reflect on what the text teaches you about God and yourself. You have the full week to work on your personal preparation, so whether you prefer to break it up into parts or do it all in one day, the flexibility is there for your schedule.

- **Scripture**
- **Commentary**
- **Questions**



PERSONAL PREPARATION

MARK 14:60-65

JESUS'S TRUE CLAIM TO BE THE MESSIAH AND THE SON OF GOD LED TO HIS DEATH.

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.

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 (Romans 8:3), and He experienced a humiliating death on a cross (Philippians 2:6-8) by becoming sin for us so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).

20 Unit 28 | Session 1 | The Trial

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

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" (Exodus 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.

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).

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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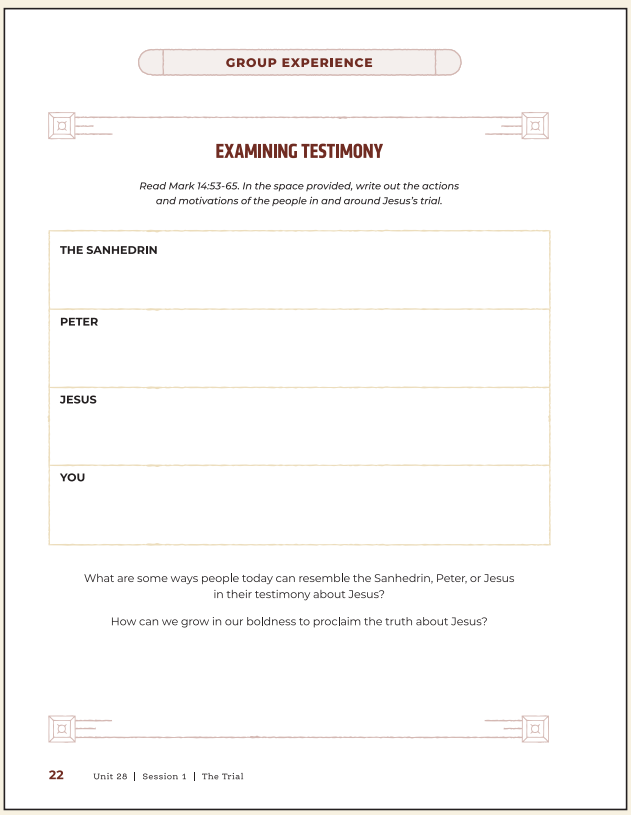
3) PARTICIPATE IN THE GROUP EXPERIENCE

The Group Experience for each session includes an activity and interactive questions designed to make the most of your group experience. Depending on your leader, he or she may have you do the activity on your own before doing it together as a group, or your leader may want you to wait until group time. Either way, the personal prep you've 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 group time.



GROUP EXPERIENCE

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

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?

22 Unit 28 | Session 1 | The Trial



- Group Activity
- Interactive Questions
- Theological Applications

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4) TAKE THE NEXT STEPS

At the conclusion of your group time, consider how to apply the day's Scripture lesson by walking through the Head, Heart, and Hands application questions. Share and discuss answers to the questions for the mutual benefit of everyone in the group. Then take time in your group, and during the week after, to read and pray through the designated psalm, focusing your thoughts and words once more upon God's Word. And finally, record 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.





- **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 (Matthew 28:6).

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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).

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.

David Roach is pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church in Saraland, Alabama. He holds a PhD from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Erin, have three children.

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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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PERSONAL PREPARATION

MARK 14:53-59

JESUS SUFFERED REJECTION BECAUSE PEOPLE CHOSE TO DENY THE TRUTH.

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.

FIGURE STUDY

PETER: Simon, son of Jonah and brother of the apostle Andrew, was given the name Peter by Jesus (Matthew 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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Key Concept: Jesus was rejected for His true claim to be the Messiah and the Son of God.

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 (Matthew 12:6) because in Him, God's full presence dwelt among His people.

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.

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



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PERSONAL PREPARATION

MARK 14:60-65

JESUS'S TRUE CLAIM TO BE THE MESSIAH AND THE SON OF GOD LED TO HIS DEATH.

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.

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 (Romans 8:3), and He experienced a humiliating death on a cross (Philippians 2:6-8) by becoming sin for us so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).

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

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" (Exodus 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.

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).

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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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

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?

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

HEAD

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

HEART

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

HANDS

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

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

As you read and pray through Psalm 110, express gratitude that Jesus is our Priest whose sacrifice made it possible for us to be reconciled to God. Pray for boldness to proclaim the truth of Jesus as our righteous and just King.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

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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

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PERSONAL PREPARATION

MARK 15:16-20,29-32

JESUS ENDURED SUFFERING AS PART OF GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION FOR HUMANITY.

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.

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

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).

How does Jesus's suffering relate to His call for disciples to take up their cross and follow Him (Matthew 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 Isaiah 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.

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

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PERSONAL PREPARATION

MARK 15:33-39

JESUS DIED TO RECONCILE US TO GOD AND TO GIVE US DIRECT ACCESS TO HIM.

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!"

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 (Hebrews 10:4), Christ's sacrifice on the cross was able to permanently, "once and for all," take away sins.

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

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)."[1]

–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 Corinthians 5:17).[2]

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

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 (Psalm 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 (Ephesians 2:11-22). Through Christ, the church is one unified body of believers who all have access to our Father in heaven.

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

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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?	

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?

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

HEAD

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

HEART

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

HANDS

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

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Read through Psalm 22 as a psalm Jesus prayed as He suffered on the cross. Express your gratitude for all that Jesus endured as your substitute. If you are suffering righteously (1 Peter 3:13-18), pray this psalm with a focus on verses 22-24.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

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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

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PERSONAL PREPARATION

MATTHEW 28:1-8

THE NEWS OF JESUS'S RESURRECTION CAUSED FEAR AND JOY.

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.

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

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 (Matthew 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?

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 (v. 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!

What reasons might you fear sharing the gospel with others?

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PERSONAL PREPARATION

MATTHEW 28:9-15

JESUS WILL REVEAL HIMSELF TO THOSE WHO TRULY SEEK HIM.

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.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

RESURRECTION: Both the Old and New Testaments teach that one day believers will experience a resurrection of the body from the dead (Isaiah 26:19; Ezekiel 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 (Philippians 3:20-21; Romans 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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Key Concept: We need to share the good news of Jesus's resurrection with all people.

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!

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.

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.

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

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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?

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

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

HEAD

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

HEART

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

HANDS

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

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

As you read Psalm 68, reflect on the character and power of God, who crushes His enemies and bears the burdens of those who belong to Him. As you pray, thank God for Jesus, who bore your burdens to save you from our enemies of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

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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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PERSONAL PREPARATION

JOHN 20:19-25

JESUS'S RESURRECTION RESULTS IN JOY AND OUR RECEIVING THE HOLY SPIRIT.

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."

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

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.

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

As the disciples experienced that day when they proclaimed, "We've seen the Lord!" (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 (Hebrews 12:1-2).

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?

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PERSONAL PREPARATION

JOHN 20:26-31

EVERYTHING JESUS DID WAS TO SHOW US THAT HE IS THE MESSIAH, THE SON OF GOD.

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.

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.

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

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 (Jeremiah 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.

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

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 Corinthians 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, and preaching, and especially His crucifixion and resurrection, revealed His divine identity and His purpose and power to save.

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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		

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?

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

HEAD

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

HEART

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

HANDS

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

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

As you read and pray through Psalm 108, recognize both the confidence and the questions present. The psalmist expressed confidence and faith in God's salvation. As we join in the mission of making Jesus known, pray that "with God we will perform valiantly" (v. 13).

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

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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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PERSONAL PREPARATION

ACTS 1:4-8

WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT'S POWER, BELIEVERS SPREAD THE GOSPEL TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH.

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."

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

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.

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 (Isaiah 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).

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

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PERSONAL PREPARATION

ACTS 1:9-14

AS WE WAIT FOR JESUS'S RETURN, WE LIVE UNITED IN PRAYER WITH OTHER BELIEVERS.

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.

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.

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

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 (Exodus 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.

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.

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 (v. 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 [Matthew 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.

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

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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		☐

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?

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

HEAD

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

HEART

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

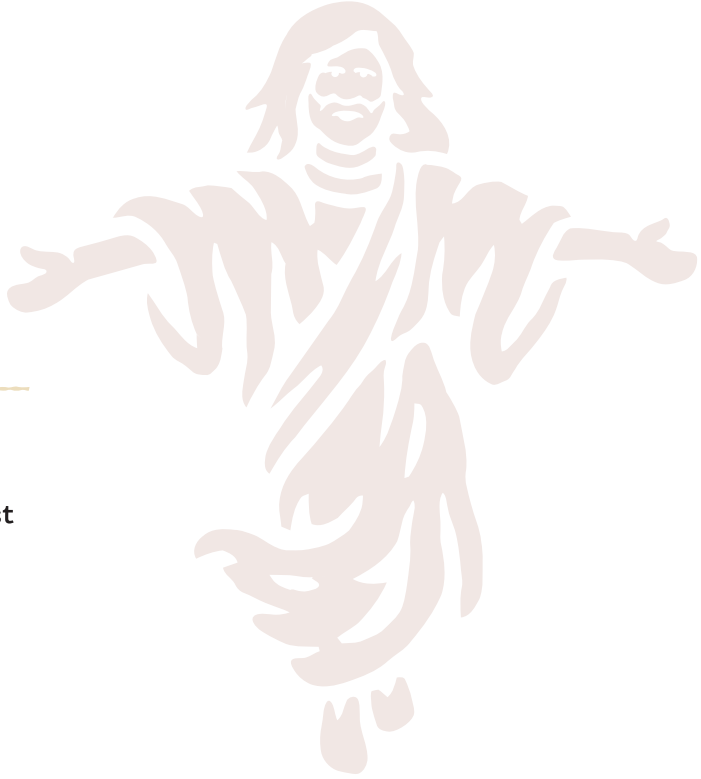
HANDS

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

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Read Psalm 48. Thank God for His greatness (vv. 1-3). Ask Him to prevail over all spiritual forces opposing the advance of His kingdom (vv. 4-8). Pray for the work of the Holy Spirit to cause people of all nations to praise Jesus (vv. 9-14).

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



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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

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PERSONAL PREPARATION

ACTS 2:1-6

THE HOLY SPIRIT EMPOWERS US TO BE KINGDOM PEOPLE.

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.

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.

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

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 Samuel 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 (Exodus 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.

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

The supernatural signs of God's presence were followed by the disciples' being "filled with the Holy Spirit" (v. 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 (Ephesians 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.

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

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PERSONAL PREPARATION

ACTS 2:14-21

THE HOLY SPIRIT EMBOLDENS US TO SPEAK SO PEOPLE MAY HEAR THE GOSPEL, BELIEVE IT, AND BE SAVED.

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.

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

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. Ephesians 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 Ezekiel 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).

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.

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

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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**

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

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

HEAD

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

HEART

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

HANDS

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

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Read Psalm 134. Express worship and praise to God for His character and attributes (vv. 1-2). Look around at the creation and thank God for creating it by His mighty power. Ask Him to bless you in your work for the gospel mission (v. 3).

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

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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.

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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 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.

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.

Chad Meeks is the lead pastor at Cedar Heights Baptist Church in North Little Rock, Arkansas, and an adjunct professor of philosophy at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Holly, have three children: Micah, Alexis, and Griffin. Chad also received his PhD in Philosophy from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and he loves discussing scriptural and theological ideas.

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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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PERSONAL PREPARATION

ACTS 3:1-10

GOD'S WORKS LEAD US AND OTHERS TO PRAISE AND GLORIFY HIM.

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.

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 (Hebrews 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.

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

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).

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 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.

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.

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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PERSONAL PREPARATION

ACTS 3:11-16

ALL MIRACLES AND ACTS OF GOD SHOULD POINT TO CHRIST AND THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL.

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.

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

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 (Genesis 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).

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

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.

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

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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	

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?

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

HEAD

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

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Read Psalm 9. Thank God for His wondrous works in your life (vv. 1-6,11-12). Express your trust that He is powerful and just (vv. 7-10,15-20). Ask God to help you praise Him each time He delivers you and to give Him the glory for all His works in and through you (vv. 13-14).

HEART

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

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

HANDS

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



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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 Corinthians 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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PERSONAL PREPARATION

ACTS 5:17-24

GOD'S MISSION IN SPREADING THE GOSPEL WILL NOT BE THWARTED.

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.

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

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.

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" (v. 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.

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

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PERSONAL PREPARATION

ACTS 5:25-32

GOD'S PEOPLE REMAIN STEADFAST IN OBEDIENCE TO HIM.

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."

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.

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

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.

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

Believers submit to governing authorities unless those authorities contradict God. In such instances, believers "must obey God rather than people" (Acts 5:29). 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 (Matthew 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?

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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		

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?

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

HEAD

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

HEART

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

HANDS

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

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Read Psalm 143. Thank God for equipping you to face obstacles with faithfulness (vv. 1-4). Ask Him to defeat spiritual forces seeking to derail your faith (vv. 5-11). Praise God that nothing can thwart His plan (vv. 12-15).

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

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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 (Matthew 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

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PERSONAL PREPARATION

ACTS 6:8-15

GOD WILL GIVE US WISDOM THROUGH HIS SPIRIT TO ENDURE PERSECUTION.

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.

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

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.

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 (v. 13; cf. Exodus 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 Matthew 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.

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

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PERSONAL PREPARATION

ACTS 7:54-60

BELIEVERS NEED NOT FEAR DEATH FOR WE KNOW HEAVEN AND JESUS AWAIT US.

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.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

LIFE AFTER DEATH: The Bible teaches that when a Christian dies, he or she immediately is with the Lord (2 Corinthians 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 (Revelation 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).

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

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.

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

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.

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.

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

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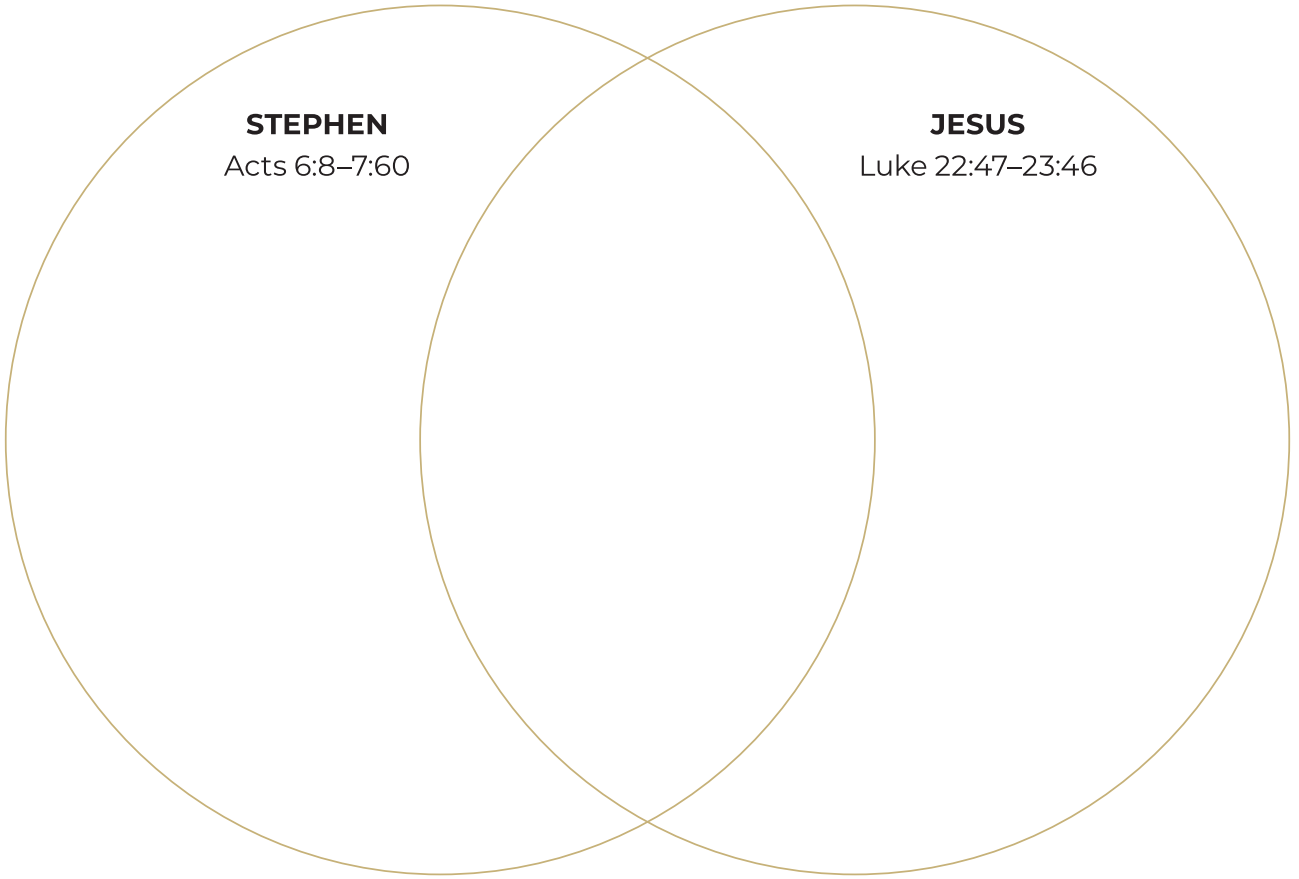
TALE OF TWO MARTYRS

Compare and contrast the arrests and deaths of Stephen and Jesus. Write the similarities and differences in the diagram.



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

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

HEAD

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

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Read Psalm 140. Ask God to rescue you from people who plot evil (vv. 1-5). Express trust in God to shield you from spiritual harm (vv. 6-8). Praise Him for bringing justice to those who are persecuted (vv. 9-13).

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

HEART

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

HANDS

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



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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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PERSONAL PREPARATION

ACTS 8:26-31

GOD GIVES US OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE THE GOSPEL, SO WE MUST OBEY.

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.

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.

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

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.

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)

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

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 (Matthew 28:18-20).

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

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PERSONAL PREPARATION

ACTS 8:32-39

ALL SCRIPTURE POINTS TO GOD'S REDEMPTION OF HUMANKIND THROUGH THE SAVIOR.

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.

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

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).

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" (Isaiah 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!

The eunuch saw water and asked to be baptized, which 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 the baptism, the 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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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

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

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

HEAD

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

HEART

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

HANDS

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

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Read Psalm 43 aloud slowly. When you are finished, select one verse. Read the verse again five times, praying it to the Lord and asking God to apply it to your heart. Consider writing the verse down and praying it repeatedly throughout the day.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



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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

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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.

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.

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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

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PERSONAL PREPARATION

ACTS 9:1-9

JESUS CALLS ALL TO HIMSELF SO THAT THEY MAY SEE HIM AND KNOW SALVATION.

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.

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.

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

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.

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?" (vv. 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).

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.

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 Corinthians 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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PERSONAL PREPARATION

ACTS 9:10-16

WE ARE CALLED TO HELP OTHERS SEE JESUS.

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."

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 (Romans 6:23; 2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

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

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.

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 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!

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 Timothy 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?

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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

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?

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

HEAD

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

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

The psalmist described looking to the Lord as a servant looking for his or her master's approval. As you read Psalm 123, pray and ask God to bless you and give you favor as you share the gospel with others.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

HEART

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

HANDS

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

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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

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PERSONAL PREPARATION

ACTS 10:9-16

GOD'S DESIRE FOR ALL NATIONS AND PEOPLE TO COME TO HIM MAY BEWILDER SOME.

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.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

PEOPLE OF GOD: Scripture describes the church as the people of God (2 Corinthians 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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Key Concept: God desires all people to come to Him, showing no favoritism.

As a Jew, Peter religiously followed the laws regarding clean and unclean animals for consumption (see Leviticus 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.

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.

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 (Leviticus 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 Isaiah 11:12; Revelation 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.

What misconceptions about God's grace has the Holy Spirit had to confront you with in your walk with Him?

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PERSONAL PREPARATION

ACTS 10:34-35,42-45

GOD DOESN'T SHOW FAVORITISM.

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.

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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Key Concept: God desires all people to come to Him, showing no favoritism.

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).

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!" (Revelation 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.

What opportunities do you have for sharing the gospel with those in your sphere of influence and beyond?

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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			

How can believers be intentional about reaching people of all backgrounds with the gospel?

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Key Concept: God desires all people to come to Him, showing no favoritism.

HEAD

How should we reconcile the unity we have in Christ with the diversity of people who follow Him?

HEART

What are some attitudes of your heart you need to confess that keep you from pursuing all people with the gospel?

HANDS

How will you welcome as brothers and sisters in Christ those who are different from you?

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Read Psalm 133. Consider someone with whom you are not currently living in harmony (v. 1). Pray through Psalm 133, and envision reconciliation with that person. Pray and ask God to help you to pursue harmony in your relationship.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

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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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PERSONAL PREPARATION

ACTS 11:19-24

WE ALL HAVE A CALLING TO PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL SO THAT MORE MAY BE SAVED.

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.

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)

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Key Concept: Christians proclaim the gospel in words backed up by loving actions for others.

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 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.

Why does God use persecution to expand the reach of the gospel?

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).

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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PERSONAL PREPARATION

ACTS 11:25-30

ALONG WITH SPIRITUAL NEEDS, WE ARE CALLED TO MEET PHYSICAL NEEDS.

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.

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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Key Concept: Christians proclaim the gospel in words backed up by loving actions for others.

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).

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.

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 (Matthew 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?

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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?

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?

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Key Concept: Christians proclaim the gospel in words backed up by loving actions for others.

HEAD

How have you experienced the holistic nature of the gospel?

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Read Psalm 70 once before taking time to consider a time of personal anguish. As you remember a time you have needed God's deliverance, read the psalm once more, praying the psalm back to the Lord.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

HEART

How can you cultivate concern for the well-being of others in the church?

HANDS

What steps will you take in your finances or schedule so you are available to share the gospel holistically?

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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.

It has been said that connection and community will win out over content in post-COVID churches.

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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.

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.

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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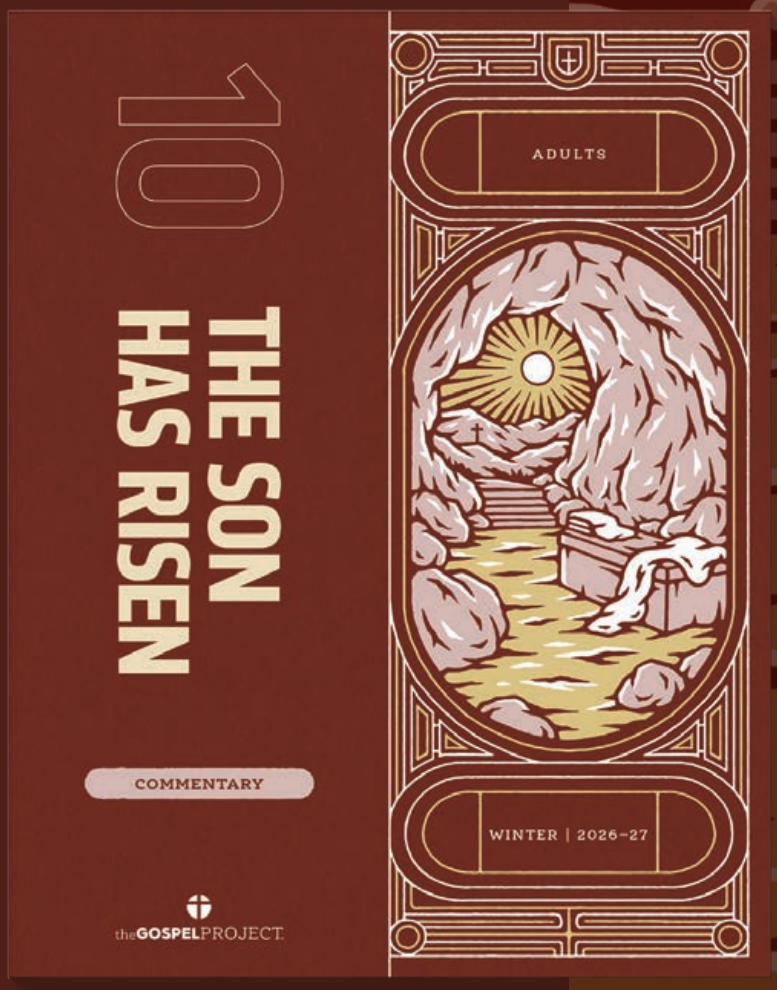

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