



the **GOSPEL** PROJECT.

FROM MANY PEOPLE TO ONE PEOPLE

ADULTS / LEADER GUIDE / WINTER 2023-24 / VOL. 10 / CSB



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SCRIPTURES ARE CONFIRMED

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. The risen Messiah brings peace (Luke 24:36-38a).
2. The risen Messiah overcomes doubts (Luke 24:38b-43).
3. The risen Messiah fulfills Scripture (Luke 24:44-49).

Background Passage: Luke 24

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

In appearing to His followers, the risen Jesus gave them and all who believe peace, hope, and confidence.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

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

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because what the Scriptures teach about Jesus is trustworthy, we preach Jesus with complete confidence and unwavering boldness.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.



INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **When has a book, movie, or series ending taken you totally by surprise and how did you react to that ending?** (wait for a volunteer to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion)

TRANSITION: God's perfect plan for an imperfect world had seemingly fallen apart. The One whom the disciples thought was the Messiah was dead, and only a few of His followers even held on to a glimmer of hope. Death can seem like the end of the story, but with God, anything can happen. With God in control, there will always be a surprise ending that humanity hadn't thought about. God's plan was unfolding exactly the way He wanted.

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- Luke 24 opens on resurrection morning, when some women bringing spices for the body of Jesus found the stone rolled away from His tomb and two gleaming angels instead. The mourning women were terrified, but Jesus had risen! The women told the disciples, who thought the women were out of their minds, but Peter went to see the open tomb. That same day, two disciples heading to Emmaus encountered a stranger who seemed to be completely unaware of Jesus and His tragic death. The most exciting part of the world's greatest story was just beginning.



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POINT 1

THE RISEN MESSIAH BRINGS PEACE (LUKE 24:36-38A).

SUMMARIZE: Use **PACK ITEM 2: JESUS'S FINAL DAYS MAP** to point to Emmaus, showing where two followers of Jesus were heading when they encountered Jesus. These disciples then returned to Jerusalem, gaining entrance to a locked room (John 20:19) where “the Eleven and those with them gathered together” (Luke 24:33). The disciples there were already talking about how the risen Lord had appeared to Simon Peter.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 24:36-38a** from his or her Bible.

36 As they were saying these things, he himself stood in their midst. He said to them, “Peace to you!” **37** But they were startled and terrified and thought they were seeing a ghost. **38a** “Why are you troubled?” he asked them.

GUIDE: Breaking into groups of 3-4, encourage them to answer, “How would you feel if you were one of the disciples and Jesus suddenly appeared in the room?” (afraid, worried, cynical, joyful, amazed)

EXPLAIN: Help your group understand Jesus’s words in **verses 36-38a** as you read and explain the following main idea (Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG] p. 22):

Jesus offers His peace in the midst of our fear, confusion, and chaos.

- *Optional:* This story is told in Luke 24:36-39 as well as John 20:19-23. As with other narrative accounts told across the Gospels, each writer presented the same story a little differently because of his unique emphasis.
- Amid a group of fearful disciples hiding in a locked room, discussing the claims of those who had seen the risen Lord (vv. 33-35), Jesus Himself appeared. The lives of the disciples gathered in that room had been in chaos at that moment, and Christ presented Himself and greeted them with an offering of peace.
- This peace is the blessing and culmination of all that Jesus offers those who believe and follow Him. It is what He desires to continue to offer us if we simply look to Him in the midst of fear or anxiety.
- As Jesus offered peace, the disciples were “startled and terrified” (v. 37), thinking they had seen a ghost, not fully understanding what had just happened. They were so overwhelmed, they couldn’t hear the voice of peace.
- Jesus then asked why they were troubled. The Greek word translated “troubled” in this verse points to agitation or inward commotion. King Herod was troubled when he heard that the wise men were searching for the King of the Jews (Matt. 2:3), the disciples were troubled when they saw Jesus walking on the sea (14:26), and even Jesus was troubled as He grieved for His friend (John 11:33) and faced His own death (12:27).

PEACE

Jesus’s greeting to the disciples in verse 36 was only two Greek words translated: “Peace, you.” The Greek word for “peace” can point to peace between people, peace within a nation, or the harmony that keeps life serene. In Christian vernacular, the word points to the tranquil peace of the soul that has been saved through faith in Christ.

ASK: (DDG p. 22)

How can we know and experience the peace of Christ in the midst of panic, chaos, or confusion? (we find time to take our eyes off our temporal circumstance and instead focus on Christ, listening to His words; we carefully consider our immediate situation in light of God's eternal plan for us and others; we pray for help from the Holy Spirit; we look to others in the church to encourage us)

SAY: "Jesus can do whatever He wants. As God, He is not limited by natural laws or by our human mind's understanding. He can defeat death, appear wherever He wants, make Himself recognizable or unrecognizable, and daily surprise us as we continue to learn more and more about Him. He is beyond human understanding. This is transcendence." Then encourage the group to read silently the key doctrine for this session (DDG p. 22).

Key Doctrine #23: God Is Transcendent: God's transcendence refers to the fact that He is distinct from and independent of His created world. He is transcendent over us in regards to His greatness and power as well as His goodness and purity. The implication of this doctrine is that God is inherently superior to humanity; His thoughts and ways are higher than ours (Isa. 55:8-9). When God saves us, He restores us so we can fulfill our human purpose; this does not mean that we become God or that distinctions between God and humanity are obliterated. Understanding God's transcendence evokes awe and wonder at His goodness and power.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 22)

How can we apply our knowledge of God's transcendence to our lives? (we can trust that God is not shaken by our upheavals; though we ourselves might be agitated, we can be confident that He is fully in control and never taken by surprise; we can acknowledge that His plan is not undone by our unexpected life turns)

TRANSITION: The disciples had been discussing Jesus's appearances, trying to weigh their validity from a distance, when Jesus appeared in their midst. Knowing their fear and hesitation, Jesus continued to converse with them, explaining Himself and giving proof where needed.

POINT 2

THE RISEN MESSIAH OVERCOMES DOUBTS (LUKE 24:38B-43).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 24:38b-43** from his or her Bible.

38b “And why do doubts arise in your hearts? **39** Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself! Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have.” **40** Having said this, he showed them his hands and feet. **41** But while they still were amazed and in disbelief because of their joy, he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” **42** So they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, **43** and he took it and ate in their presence.

ILLUSTRATE: Bring a classic challenge such as a puzzle cube or juggling balls to the group. Display the item and say, “Has anyone here mastered this task? Can you prove it?” (If no one can, ask if anyone has an interesting human body trick like being double-jointed or able to cross their eyes.) Invite any volunteers to demonstrate his or her prowess at the challenge. Point out that Jesus, in revealing to His disciples that He was not a ghost but instead had a glorified body, proved His identity through a visible, tangible demonstration.

DISCUSS: In groups of 3-4, ask the group to discuss: “How did Jesus respond to the disciples’ doubts as seen from **verses 38b-40?**” (by showing them His body; by letting them touch Him; by talking to them)

EXPLAIN: Use the bulleted points below to explain the following statement (DDG p. 22).

Jesus doesn’t minimize or dismiss the confusion and doubts of His disciples; instead, He gives them the opportunity to experience and find confidence in Him.

- We can imagine the thoughts of the disciples in this room: “This can’t be Jesus; He’s dead. That means either this is His ghost or it’s not really Him.” How compassionate of Jesus to know our earthly, fleshly doubts and address them in an earthly way by inviting His disciples to touch and see His flesh. Ghosts would not be able to make such claims.
- Christ’s demonstration of His hands and feet would have confirmed His identity: the wounds of the cross would be visible still in His glorified body. We know that Jesus invited Thomas to put his finger into the mark as proof (John 20:27). And when John saw Jesus in heaven, the evidence of His crucifixion was still visible (Rev. 5:6).

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“The Way, the Truth, the Life Thou art, This, this I know; to this I cleave; The sweet new language of my heart, ‘Lord, I believe.’ I have no doubts to bring to Thee; My doubt has fled; my faith is free.”¹

—Harriet McEwen
Kimball (1834–1917)

ASK: (DDG p. 22)

What have you experienced in the past that made you doubt God and how did Jesus reveal Himself in it? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to move the discussion along; examples might be: unanswered prayer; death, illness, or suffering of a loved one; sin in the church; traumatic or catastrophic events)

DIG: Ask the group, “How can the disciples be in disbelief and joyful at the same time as seen in **verse 41**?” (sometimes momentous occasions may seem so unbelievably miraculous, you’re in disbelief but happy at the same time; sometimes we feel both, as seen in certain phrases like, “It’s too good to be true” or “Pinch me; I must be dreaming!” where doubt and joy can come together)

HIGHLIGHT: Focus on the following truth statement taken from **verses 41-43** (DDG p. 23).

Even when doubting, we can be confident that Jesus will demonstrate the truthfulness of who He is as He wants us to find the joy of assurance and salvation.

- In His resurrected body, Jesus ate the typical food of His day. Fish was food that He and the disciples would have consumed on a regular basis.
- Jesus “took [the food] and ate it in their presence” (v. 43). It wasn’t that Jesus was hungry; rather, He wanted to confirm that He was the same Jesus, only glorified. The eating was not to benefit Jesus but to benefit those who were watching Him, giving further proof of His resurrection.
- As we work through our doubts, we can rest assured that Jesus is revealing Himself to us through His Word and the Spirit. This revelation may not be recognized or understood instantaneously but will be through the process of sanctification, requiring His Word, faith, and the grace He gives us to believe and trust Him more as we grow spiritually.

ASK: (DDG p. 23)

How do we help others (or ourselves) when we face doubts about God or His Word? (we can listen and pray; we can demonstrate care and concern; we can research logically history, archeology, and other sciences to show His validity; we can share personal testimonies)

TRANSITION: Jesus had addressed the struggle to find peace as well as the doubts of His followers. He addressed the immediate, gut reaction of the disciples. But He didn’t seek to satisfy only their initial panic, He planned to give them a firm footing for their deep knowledge and confidence in Him.

POINT 3

THE RISEN MESSIAH FULFILLS SCRIPTURE (LUKE 24:44-49).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 24:44-49** from his or her Bible.

44 He told them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” **45** Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. **46** He also said to them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead the third day, **47** and repentance for forgiveness of sins will be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. **48** You are witnesses of these things. **49** And look, I am sending you what my Father promised. As for you, stay in the city until you are empowered from on high.”

DIG: Use **PACK ITEM 3: JESUS FULFILLED SCRIPTURE** to show how Jesus fulfilled Scripture in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms. Tell the group to read or skim over the list of Scriptures fulfilled by Jesus. Ask the group: “Which fulfilled Scripture stands out to you most and why?” (be prepared to give an answer to start the conversation if needed)

HIGHLIGHT: Jesus explained to the disciples that everything about Him was a fulfillment of Scripture, from His birth to ministry to death and resurrection. Highlight what we learn from **verses 44-47** with the statement below (DDG p. 23).

Jesus still opens minds, allowing us to understand how He fulfills the Scriptures, being our Messiah who grants forgiveness of sin to those who repent.

- Jesus continued to remind the disciples that He fulfilled Scripture. But like the two disciples traveling on the road to Emmaus, the disciples did not fully understand everything until “their eyes were opened” (Luke 24:31). Jesus is doing the same thing for the larger group of disciples here: opening “their minds to understand the Scriptures” (v. 45).
- Jesus then affirmed in verses 46-47 what Scripture stated about Him: that the Messiah would suffer (Isa. 53:1-12) and rise (Psalm 16:8-10), and repentance would lead to forgiveness in His name to all nations, as seen in Isaiah where “the glory of the LORD will appear, and all humanity together will see it” (Isa. 40:3-5).
- Repentance was the message of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:1-2) and was the message of Jesus (4:17). But it is rooted in the Old Testament in the Prophets, where God’s people or the surrounding nations were called to turn from their idols and sin and return to God (see Isa. 55:7; Ezek. 18:21-23; Jonah 3:8-10).



THE LAW, THE PROPHETS, AND THE PSALMS

Scan this QR code for a brief explanation of the three sections of the Hebrew Bible.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 23)

From Day 4 in the DDG: **How can studying God’s fulfilled promises in the Bible strengthen your faith even today?** (by reminding us of His presence in times of loneliness; by reminding us of His sovereignty in times of trial; by giving us hope; by reminding us of His faithfulness and love in times of doubt)

GUIDE: Jesus’s visual, tactile proof of resurrection, along with the opening of His disciples’ minds, was not only for their joy. It was also to give validity to the recent events as Jesus called them to be witnesses—to go out into the world. Help learners zoom in on **verses 48-49** and consider the implication of this in their own lives (DDG p. 23).

Jesus calls His disciples to be His witnesses, knowing that we have the promise of the Holy Spirit.

- Jesus told the disciples that they were “witnesses.” There was purpose in Him calling them to be His disciples from the start and now revealing Himself in His resurrected, glorified body. Having heard and seen all concerning Jesus, they were eyewitnesses and now were called to proclaim the good news.
- Jesus then told them that He was sending what the Father promised. Again going back to Scripture, Jesus referred to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, referenced in Joel 2:28, “After this I will pour out my Spirit on all humanity.”
- The word translated “empowered” in verse 49 is from a Greek verb that means to put on, be clothed with, or be arrayed in. It’s used 28 times in the New Testament, most often pointing to the literal wearing of clothing (see Matt. 27:31; Mark 1:6; Acts 12:21), showing how the Spirit will come upon them.

ASK: (DDG p. 23)

How are we called to be witnesses today? (in sharing the good news of a resurrected Christ, declaring Jesus as Lord and Savior; in proudly proclaiming how Jesus has and is working in our life on a daily basis, bringing guidance, peace, and joy; empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are to love and serve, being Jesus’s hands and feet to a broken world)

TRANSITION: The Holy Spirit would come visibly upon the disciples (Acts 2:1-4), but they had to wait patiently for that power. In the meantime, we can only imagine how the revelation that Jesus was exactly who He had claimed to be would change their lives forever.

MY RESPONSE

SAY: After His death and resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples to confirm that He was alive and had defeated sin and death. All that the Scriptures had told about the Messiah was, or will be, fulfilled in Jesus. And because what the Scriptures teach about Jesus is trustworthy, we preach Jesus with complete confidence and unwavering boldness.

HEAD:

We, like the disciples, are sometimes initially struck with panic or fear at a new situation, life change, or surprise. And though our minds may race, we can find a stronger faith in believing what we know to be true about Jesus: He is with us. He has triumphed. He is eternal. His Word is true. He empowers us. As we find ourselves doubting ourselves and our situation, we can fix our thoughts on Jesus.

How can you point your eyes back to the Lord when circumstances are stealing your peace?

HEART:

Jesus revealed Himself to His disciples as exactly who He said He was. He continued to prove Himself even when the disciples doubted and were scared. Because of His love for His people, He continues to pursue us as He reveals Himself. It would be easy for Him to give up on us, but He never does.

How can you praise God for how He pursues you and reveals Himself even in your doubts and fears?

HANDS:

Luke 24:44-49 is a wonderful reflection of the Christian life. As believers, we believe God's Word as He opens our minds, accept our individual calling to be witnesses of Jesus, speak the truth of the Scriptures, and go out into the world to spread His gospel. Whether near or far, to friend or foe, we—empowered by the Spirit—choose to be a light in a dark world for we know Jesus to be our Savior and Lord.

What words or actions this week have revealed that you are a witness to Jesus our Lord?

PRAY: Lord, the early disciples look a lot like us: they doubted, they feared, and they let external situations rob them of peace sometimes. May we find security in You, Your Word, and Your calling for our lives.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

“There is no greater commission or higher calling than to help others find the way to experience God's presence.”²

—Darrell L. Bock

EXTRA

POINT 1: THE RISEN MESSIAH BRINGS PEACE (LUKE 24:36-38A).

+ COMMENTARY

“Peace be unto you . . . These were the last words Jesus had spoken before going forth to suffer crucifixion and death; but in the meanwhile, the conduct of the apostles had been such as to leave them weighted down with feelings of guilt and inadequacy. Under the circumstances, this was a shout of victory and a divine assurance that all would be well with them. There were two reactions on the part of those present. First, they were simply terrified, as any mortal would have been under the circumstances; but very soon this gave way to joy, which was also mentioned by Luke in Luke 24:41. . . . It was incumbent upon Jesus to win over the apostles to a complete and unfailing faith in his resurrection; and so, in these verses, one beholds the Son of God actually laying the keel, in a figure, of that ship of the church which would sail the seas of all subsequent generations. After the interview reported in this paragraph and the Johannine parallel, there was never any wavering at all on the part of the apostles forever afterward. They passed up and down the provinces of the great empire shouting, ‘He is risen from the dead,’ sealing their testimony with blood, and preaching the gospel that turned the world upside down. Did it all actually happen? There is no explanation of the results of that night appearance unless indeed it did all actually take place. No skepticism can explain it otherwise.”³

+ OPTIONAL TEACHING ACTIVITY

Peace is most certainly lacking in the world. One need not look around long to realize that everyone—young and old, rich and poor, healthy and sick—is lacking in peace and our world knows it. Ask the group to list ways the world around us is telling us we should find peace.

Some examples may be doing yoga, hiking or hobbies outdoors, breathing exercises, travel, having a positive mind-set, drugs, alcohol, escapism, binge-watching shows, journaling, etc.

After the list is made, ask, “Has anyone tried any of these activities and how did they work?” Briefly explain that although some of these things can be helpful in resting our minds, Jesus’s promise of peace is not an external act but an internal standard that is beyond what this world can give.

EXTRA

POINT 2: THE RISEN MESSIAH OVERCOMES DOUBTS

(LUKE 24:38B-43).

+ COMMENTARY

“It has well been said that the only work of man now in heaven is the marks of Calvary on the body of the exalted Saviour. Jesus even ate some honey and fish to prove to His doubting followers that He was indeed alive and real, and he even invited them to feel His body (Luke 24:39; 1 John 1:1). With our limited knowledge, we cannot explain how a human body can be solid flesh and bones and still pass through closed doors and appear and disappear, or how it can be glorified and still carry the marks of the cross. We do know that we shall one day be like Him and share His glory (1 John 3:1-2). Luke 24:41 describes a perplexing emotion: ‘they believed not for joy.’ It was just too good to be true! Jacob had this same feeling when he got the news that Joseph was alive (Gen. 45:26-28), and the nation of Israel experienced it when God gave them a great deliverance (Ps. 126:1-3). Jesus had told His disciples that they would rejoice when they saw Him again, and the promise was fulfilled (John 16:22).”⁴

+ ILLUSTRATION

Ask, “Has anyone been watching the new trend of making cakes to look like unbelievably real items?” If time permits, show the following video, which reveals some of the more amazing examples: <https://www.delish.com/food-news/a33436046/realistic-cakes-luke-vincentini>.

If you saw one of these cakes, and even if it looked exactly like the real thing, what would reveal for sure if it were real or fake would be touching the item. The same was true for the disciples with Jesus. They saw His body, but they realized He had come through a locked door. So though it looked like Jesus, they doubted that it could actually be Him. To put their doubts aside, Jesus invited them not only to look at Him but to touch Him. Then they would know without a doubt that He was a real person and not a spirit or ghost.

+ ILLUSTRATION

Bring some simple, bite-sized foods typically enjoyed by most people to your group time. Conceal each treat in an opaque container of some sort. Ask for a few good-natured volunteers who would be willing to participate in a food-tasting experiment. After the volunteers are seated at the front, explain that you are going to give them something to eat, but that they cannot see it or touch it before eating it. Instruct them to tightly close their eyes, place the item on a fork, and invite them to place it in their mouth. This will hopefully lead to a little skepticism. For the next round, allow the volunteers to hold the food items and see them before eating. When this happens, they’re much more likely to eat the food with ease. Say something like, “In the same way, Jesus didn’t ask His disciples to believe Him based only on what He said. He allowed them to see Him and touch Him so that they would be confident in His bodily resurrection.”

POINT 3: THE RISEN MESSIAH FULFILLS SCRIPTURE

(LUKE 24:44-49).

+ COMMENTARY

“In the law of Moses, The five books of Moses—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. Among the Jews, this was the first division of the Old Testament, and was called the law. ‘The prophets’ This was the second and largest part of the Hebrew Scriptures. It comprehended the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, which were called the former prophets; and Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve smaller books from Daniel to Malachi, which were called the latter prophets. ‘The Psalms’ This word here probably means what were comprehended under the name of Hagiographa, or holy writings. It comprehended the Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, and the two books of Chronicles. This division of the Old Testament was in use long before the time of Christ, and was what he referred to here. And he meant to say that in each of these divisions of the Old Testament there were prophecies respecting himself.”⁵

+ OPTIONAL TEACHING ACTIVITY

Write on a large poster board with marker “ $2^2=$,” “ $2^3=$,” “ $2^4=$,” “ $2^1=$,” and finally “ $2^0=$ ”. Display the board where everyone can see it. Open the discussion by saying, “Let’s take a quick walk back in time to when you learned algebra. You probably remember learning about exponents. Who can tell me what two squared is?” (4) Whenever someone gives the correct answer, write it next to the problem. Continue down the line. ($2^3=8$, $2^4=16$, $2^1=2$)

Point to the last equation: “ $2^0=$ ”. Ask if anyone knows the answer. (1) Ask: “Are you sure of that answer? Can you explain why?” Many adults can answer the first few exponents easily and quickly, but anything to the zero power is actually 1. Engage learners in debating what the answer is (or what they think it might be) and invite each to defend his or her answer. Show a video from the Internet showing why the answer is 1. Then point out that a knowledgeable explanation helps us find confidence in our answers. Say, “Jesus did the same thing with His disciples; His knowledgeable explanation of Scripture allowed them to have confidence in His resurrection and power.”

References

1. Harriet McEwen Kimball, *Poems* (United States: A.D.F. Randolph, 1889), 15.
2. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 624.
3. James Burton Coffman, “Commentary on Luke 24,” *Coffman’s Commentary on the Bible* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press), February 22, 2013, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/bcc/luke-24.html>.
4. Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament Volume 1* (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor Publishing, 2001), 280.
5. Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Gospels . . . By Rev. Albert Barnes. [With the Text] . . . Condensed from the American Edition* (United Kingdom: R.T.S., 1835), 183.

DOUBTS ARE OVERCOME

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Belief is passed down by faithful witnesses (John 20:24-25).
2. Belief is based on the historical resurrection of Jesus (John 20:26-27).
3. Belief is grounded in confessing Jesus as Lord (John 20:28-29).

Background Passage: John 20

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

While all are invited to believe in Jesus, not all are willing to place their faith in Jesus so that they might be saved.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

While the resurrection of Jesus can be supported with evidence, ultimately, belief in the gospel comes by faith. All who place their trust in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus by faith are blessed with eternal life.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we have experienced the blessings of following Jesus, we proclaim Him to others, calling on them to place their faith in Him for salvation as well.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **When have you missed something that seemingly everyone else experienced?** (answers will vary, but there may have been an episode on television when a sitcom, sports event, or movie aired and you missed it; or perhaps you were out of town when something big happened in your area; some people who have moved into an area feel that they missed an entire history of a friend group simply because they didn't grow up there)

TRANSITION: Thomas was one of Jesus's chosen disciples, those who had walked with, eaten with, and learned from Jesus for a three-year period. But when Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to His disciples, Thomas wasn't there. We don't know where Thomas was on resurrection morning. We just know he hadn't seen Jesus like the other disciples and definitely missed out.

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- Luke 24:36-49 and John 20:19-23 tell the same story from different perspectives. John added a little more detail: not only did Jesus appear to the Eleven and some other disciples, He also showed them His hands and side, offered peace, pledged the Holy Spirit, and gave them instructions on forgiveness. What a moment! When the small group of followers had been contemplating whether or not to believe the testimony of a few, Jesus Himself showed up and removed all doubt. His visible, tangible, spiritual, and emotional proof gave them what they needed to believe. And Thomas missed it.



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POINT 1

BELIEF IS PASSED DOWN BY FAITHFUL WITNESSES (JOHN 20:24-25).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **John 20:24-25a** from his or her Bible.

24 But Thomas (called “Twin”), one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. **25a** So the other disciples were telling him, “We’ve seen the Lord!”

INTERACT: Do a quick character study on Thomas, splitting your group into three smaller groups. Give each group the selected passages: (1) Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; (2) John 11:11-16; and (3) John 14:1-5. Ask the groups to read these appearances of Thomas in the Gospels, discuss, and then report to the large group. Use the points below to add anything missing from the groups’ answers.

- Thomas’s name was explained to mean “Twin” twice (John 14:5; 20:24), but we don’t know who his twin was. Thomas was named three times in lists of the Twelve (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15). “The Twelve” referred to those twelve people who were closest to Jesus and were sent out to spread the message of the gospel.
- Thomas also made an appearance in John 11:16. Lazarus had become sick, and his sisters reached out to Jesus in their desperation. Jesus had intentionally stayed where He was. After news of Lazarus’s death reached them, Thomas saw the danger of going to Bethany—since it was very close to Jerusalem—due to the conflict brewing with the religious leaders. But Thomas responded boldly, “Let’s go too so that we may die with him.”
- In another instance, as Jesus described at the last supper that He was going away to prepare a place for His followers (John 14:1-2), He assured the Twelve: “You know the way to where I am going” (v. 4). Thomas responded, “We don’t know where you’re going. How can we know the way?” (v. 5). Thomas listened carefully and tried to understand Jesus’s teaching.

EXPLAIN: Thomas was a faithful disciple, but he wasn’t there when Jesus appeared. He needed to rely on the words and witness of the other disciples as seen in **verses 24-25a**. Explain the following main idea (Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG] p. 30):

As witnesses of Jesus, we are called to tell others what we have seen and experienced concerning Him.

- In verse 25, we see the phrase, “So the other disciples were telling him.” The translation is a Greek verb tense indicating the disciples kept on telling Thomas. We shouldn’t see this as an irritation or bother; they could have simply wanted Thomas to believe as they did or, in their excitement, continued to tell him of Jesus’s appearance because of its importance.

ASK: (DDG p. 30)

Why is it difficult for some people to be faithful witnesses of the gospel? (they're afraid of how people might respond; they're unsure of their words; they feel like they have to prove everything; they can't find the right opportunities)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **John 20:25b** from his or her Bible.

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."

INTERACT: Answer in groups of 3-4, "Is Thomas reasonable in his doubting and skepticism? Why or why not?" (yes and no; sometimes it's good to want proof—we can't blindly believe everything we hear; sometimes faith is all we can have to hear or see God move; God values discernment in our faith as there are many false prophets as well)

EXPLAIN: Thomas was a faithful disciple, but he wanted proof. Explain the following (DDG p. 30):

When we are truly searching for truth but doubting, God will meet us there.

- Thomas had spoken words of courage as Jesus went to Bethany after Lazarus's death, and he had been there when Lazarus walked out of the grave. But Thomas wanted proof of the truth. He wanted to see it for himself.
- Perhaps Thomas is like many of us. In a world of false prophets and conspiracy theories, sometimes it is right to be a critical thinker and ask for proof. Yes, he was doubting and wanting visible evidence, but we'll continue to read that Jesus appeared and gave him the evidence he asked for.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 30):

How does knowing God honors our search for truth remind us that our faith is not blind? (God will meet us where we're at in our spiritual journey and reveal to us more of Him as we truly seek Him; Christianity is not based on a myth but reliable evidence; God honors logic and reason that build on faith and trust in Him as our faith is based on objective truths)

TRANSITION: The disciples who had seen Jesus in His glorified body were eager for their friend Thomas to share in their faith. Thomas, however, simply wouldn't believe unless he had proof. But Jesus loves His own even in their doubts and will reveal Himself in His time.

POINT 2

BELIEF IS BASED ON THE HISTORICAL RESURRECTION OF JESUS (JOHN 20:26-27).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **John 20:26-27** from his or her Bible.

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.”

DIG: Ask someone to read John 20:19-20 of when Jesus first appeared to the other disciples. Ask, “What do you notice are some similarities with this appearance?” (doors were locked when Jesus appeared; He greeted with peace; He showed them visible proof) Thomas was no different than the other disciples. John wrote that Jesus had to show them His hands and His side too for them to truly see and believe Him.

HIGHLIGHT: Using **verse 26**, highlight the main idea below (DDG p. 30):

We can be assured that our belief in Jesus is true because of historical evidence of His life, death, and resurrection by many eyewitnesses.

- Jesus was buried on a Friday and raised on a Sunday. On that first Sunday, He appeared to His disciples and the Eleven (minus Thomas) in the locked room (Luke 24:36). He would continue to appear to many other witnesses before His ascension forty days later.
- Jesus again greeted them with peace. Though the English renderings of Luke 24:36 (“Peace to you”) and John 20:26 (“Peace be with you”) are slightly different, they both come from the same Greek words. At Jesus’s first appearance, John recorded this phrase twice (John 20:19,21). Jesus had also promised peace as a parting gift after the last supper (John 14:27). The Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6), whose ministry turned the religious world on its head, was most certainly pointing out that He brought peace with God. The word “you” in “Peace to you” is plural; His offer of peace is to all.
- Jesus didn’t call Thomas “Doubting Thomas,” but He addressed Thomas’s doubts. He invited Thomas to touch and look at the proof of His resurrection: the hands where the nails had entered and His side where He had been pierced by the spear.
- Doubt and disbelief are not the same thing. When we doubt something, we either don’t understand it or need more proof (whether concrete or mental). But when we don’t believe, we have chosen to harden our hearts and not trust God. Doubts are common among the faithful: John the Baptist doubted (Matt. 11:2), Peter doubted (14:31), and even some who saw Jesus resurrected doubted (28:17). We must take our doubts to the Lord and allow Him to open our minds. On the other hand, we must confess our unbelief for the sin it is and ask the Lord to help us overcome it (Mark 9:24).

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

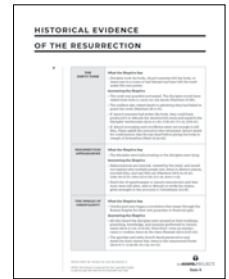
“Never further than Your cross; Never higher than Your feet; Here earth’s precious things seem dross; Here earth’s bitter things grow sweet. Here we learn to serve and give, And rejoicing, self deny; Here we gather love to live, Here we gather faith to die.”¹

—Elizabeth Charles (1828–1896)

ASK: (DDG p. 30)

From Day 4 in the DDG: **How does the historical resurrection of Jesus and its validity bring you peace and encouragement?** (what we're trusting in is not a false hope but a real one; knowing Jesus is real makes the rest of the Bible real as well; we can trust in God's promises and plans)

DISCOVER: From **verse 27**, we see that the disciples and Thomas saw Jesus's hands and side and believed. We don't have that luxury, but we do have other proofs and evidence of Jesus and His resurrection. Use **PACK ITEM 4: HISTORICAL EVIDENCE** to show such evidence to the group. Allow the group to read or skim over the handout. Ask: "What proof seems compelling to you and why?" After people answer, say: "If all we had were the Gospel accounts, these are sufficient because they are the inspired Word of God. The preservation of Scripture by the providence of God reinforces our faith in the Scriptures, in God, and in the resurrected Jesus for our salvation."



EXPLAIN: Invite someone to read the key doctrine (DDG p. 30):

Key Doctrine #8: Preservation of Scripture: God has chosen to reveal Himself to humanity through the text of Scripture, having inspired it and directed it to be free from error. God has also acted providentially throughout the course of history to ensure the biblical text is faithfully preserved for future generations. Our belief in the preservation of Scripture is supported by investigation into how the canon of Scripture was formed and how manuscripts were faithfully transmitted throughout the centuries.

SAY: We praise God for the preservation of the Scriptures, both the passages of Jesus and the apostles and all of the Old Testament. Throughout the whole Bible, we see God's faithfulness, His holiness, His commitment to righteousness, His authority, and His compassionate love for His people. In Jesus, we see that God's promises are fulfilled in Him, and we find hope for our own lives and purpose.

ASK: (DDG p. 31)

Knowing the Bible is true and reliable, what are some ways we can encourage ourselves and others to read and study it more? (be more consistent in going to a Bible study, small group, or Sunday School class; watch or listen to a reliable podcast that dissects the Scripture well; take notes in church or while listening to other sermons; buy commentaries or books to supplement our study of Scripture)

TRANSITION: Imagine your own reaction. Jesus has come to you in the midst of your unbelief. He's looked you in the eye, invited you to view His body, and instructed you to believe Him. What would you say and do?

POINT 3

BELIEF IS GROUNDED IN CONFESSING JESUS AS LORD (JOHN 20:28-29).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **John 20:28-29** from his or her Bible.

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.”

HIGHLIGHT: Read the following main idea as seen from **verse 28** (DDG p. 31):

When we are brought to the point that we believe Jesus is exactly who He declares Himself to be, we see clearly that He is our Lord and God.

- John’s Gospel is a great source of the testimony as to the identity of Jesus as Lord and God. John the Baptist called Him “the Son of God” (1:34); Nathanael declared, “You are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel!” (1:49); Peter called Him “the Holy One of God” (6:69); Martha said, “I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who comes into the world” (11:27); and John himself concludes with these words: “These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God” (20:31).
- The Bible doesn’t record that Thomas actually placed his finger into the hands and side of our Lord; maybe he didn’t need to. Regardless, Jesus offered up His own body as the proof of His identity, and Thomas responded with faith. As Jesus reveals Himself to us, we also should open our mouths and speak aloud what we have heard, seen, learned, and believed.

INTERACT: On the board, make a chart with two columns that have the headings “My Lord” and “My God.” Ask the group to fill out the chart, saying, “How is Jesus our Lord and how is He our God?” (Lord: He guides us, He loves us; we submit to Him; we obey Him; we trust Him // God: He is supreme, His ways are not our ways; He is all-knowing; He is all-powerful; He is God with us)

ASK: (DDG p. 31)

How have you submitted to Jesus as your Lord and God this past week? (I try to live my life for His glory; I pray and read His Word; I try to tell others about Him; I look to Him for my joy and peace)

EXPLAIN: We should get very excited when we read the words of Jesus in **verse 29**. Call attention to **PACK ITEM 5: YOU HAVE SEEN ME** as you explain how Thomas believed because he saw the proof of the crucifixion in Jesus's body, but we are blessed if we "have not seen and yet believe." Explain the following statement (DDG p. 31):

Generations will be blessed because of the testimony of others as we believe even when we haven't seen.

- The Greek word translated "blessed" is the same word used in each of the similar statements found in the Beatitudes. Just as Matthew 5:3-11 guides us to live in accordance with the righteousness of God, Jesus's final statement in John 20:29 promises that we are blessed when our faith comes not from sight but from faith in God's Word.

LIST: As you ask the question below, consider making a list on the board so your group can see the abundant blessings of faith (DDG p. 31).

How do you feel "blessed" through your faith in Jesus? (He gives me peace; I feel loved; I know I have eternal life; I know He sees me and is with me; I have a forever friend; He gives me joy, even in trials; He helps me have an eternal perspective; He helps me love others; I feel forgiven)

TRANSITION: We see what happened when Thomas opened his heart to the truth of Jesus. The question then becomes this: What will we do with the faithful testimony of Jesus's resurrection?



MY RESPONSE

SAY: While the resurrection of Jesus can be supported with evidence, ultimately, belief in the gospel comes by faith. All who place their trust in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus by faith are blessed with eternal life. Because we have experienced the blessings of following Jesus, we proclaim Him to others, calling on them to place their faith in Him for salvation as well.

HEAD:

God made us curious and inquisitive. This makes us good at problem solving and exploring. But these traits can also lead to doubts, creating a stumbling block for faith when we want to have proof of what Jesus tells us. But belief can go beyond tangible proof. Sometimes God asks us to trust Him simply because He is trustworthy. Waiting for proof before accepting the Lord's Word isn't faith; it's doubt.

In what spiritual situation or question have you chosen to doubt because you haven't seen proof?

HEART:

Jesus calls us to obedience and faith. Yet, as He did for Thomas, sometimes He reveals Himself boldly even as we struggle to believe. Thomas responded with overwhelming faith at the true identity of Jesus. As we come to see Him clearly in our own lives, this should lead us to worship and full submission. Open your heart to the mercy and grace of Jesus; He has called you to see and believe.

How can you worship Jesus now for answering a cry of your heart this past month?

HANDS:

Thomas, a disciple of Jesus, went a full eight days in stubbornness, even though the other disciples kept telling him that they had seen the Lord. But the picture of the pleading, encouraging, loving disciples should be us. We will not stop telling and sharing the amazing news of Jesus's resurrection. Don't give up on that friend or loved one; keep sharing!

How does today's text encourage you to speak the truth of Jesus to someone who doubts?

PRAY: Lord, You alone are Lord and God. Please meet us in our doubts and forgive our unbelief. As we see You clearly, may we respond in faith, worship, obedience, and evangelism.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Give me a new, a perfect heart, From doubt, and fear, and sorrow free; The mind which was in Christ impart, and let my spirit cleave to Thee."²

—Charles Wesley
(1707–1788)

EXTRA

POINT 1: BELIEF IS PASSED DOWN BY FAITHFUL WITNESSES (JOHN 20:24-25).

+ **COMMENTARY**

“It is not known what was the ground of the incredulity of Thomas. It is probable, however, that this was the effect of deep grief, and of that despondency which fills the mind when a long-cherished hope is taken away. In such a case it requires proof of uncommon clearness and strength to overcome the despondency, and to convince us that we may attain the object of our desires. Thomas has been much blamed by expositors, but he asked only for proof that would be satisfactory in his circumstances. The testimony of ten disciples should have been indeed sufficient, but an opportunity was thus given to the Saviour to convince the last of them of the truth of his resurrection. This instance shows, what all the conduct of the apostles proves, that they had not conspired together to impose on the world. Even they were slow to believe, and one of them refused to believe even on the testimony of ten of his brothers. How unlike this to the conduct of men who agree to impose a story on mankind!”³

+ **ILLUSTRATION**

Before digging into the text for this point, open with the questions: “Has anyone in here ever been a courier or used a courier? Has anyone ever served as a messenger in an official role?” Be sure to have read through the following article by searching for “Runners World Great Messengers of the Past” [<https://www.runnersworld.com/advanced/a20808052/great-messengers-of-the-past>]. This short article gives an overview of notable messengers who carried news, mail, and even supplies over treacherous terrain. Be prepared to read some of the highlights of the article.

After sharing about a couple of the messengers, say something like this: “We should be amazed and astonished at the determination of these messengers. They knew they had vital information that needed to be delivered. But those ancient messengers should also inspire us today: We too have vital information that changes not just lives but eternity.” As you open today’s passage, point out that the first disciples as well as Christians today should see themselves as messengers; we should devote ourselves to the high calling of carrying our witness everywhere we go.

EXTRA

+ OPTIONAL TEACHING ACTIVITY

As you open the group time, state: “In July of 1969, Neil Armstrong walked on the moon.” Ask for a show of hands of people who believe that statement. Then ask: “Are there some people here who doubt the truth of that?” You may get a few hands. Say: “Just because most people believe something, that doesn’t mean all people do. In today’s passage, we’re going to see that most of the disciples had already believed that Jesus had been raised from the dead. But that didn’t convince one in the group.”

POINT 2: BELIEF IS BASED ON THE HISTORICAL RESURRECTION OF JESUS (JOHN 20:26-27).

+ COMMENTARY

“What was it that Thomas would not believe? The reports of the other Christians that Jesus Christ was alive. The verb said in John 20:25 means that the disciples ‘kept saying to him’ that they had seen the Lord Jesus Christ alive. No doubt the women and the Emmaus pilgrims also added their witness to this testimony. On the one hand, we admire Thomas for wanting personal experience, but on the other hand, we must fault him for laying down conditions for the Lord to meet. . . . But let’s give him credit for showing up the next week. The other ten men had told Thomas that they had seen the Lord’s hands and side (John 20:20), so Thomas made that the test.”⁴

+ OPTIONAL TEACHING ACTIVITY

Bring three small items to the group that you can easily hide in the palm of your hand. They should be something that most people would like, such as a quarter, a wrapped piece of candy, or a small toy. Walk up to a good-natured group member with the treasure hidden in your closed hand and say: “I’ve got something in my hand that you would probably want. If you’d like it, reach out your hand.” Some will accept the gift; others won’t. But as they see that the gifts are decently desirable, they will likely be willing to take it. Say: “In this passage, we see Jesus invited Thomas to reach out his hand and find confidence in the resurrected Jesus.” As a group, discuss how your faith can inspire others to find confidence in Christ.

+ OPTIONAL TEACHING ACTIVITY

Write the word “peace” on the board. Ask: “Do we live in a peaceful world? Do most people consider their lives to be peaceful? Why or why not?” Before class, find the following link [<https://peacealliance.org/tools-education/peace-inspirational-quotes>] by searching “peace alliance inspirational quotes,” and read through several of the chosen quotes. Share what you found, including notable people and their ideas for peace in the world. You may want to point out that Wendell Berry finds peace in “wild things” and the “presence of still water,” or that Albert Einstein said, “Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding.”

Say: “There are many quotes on peace, and many opinions on what it takes to achieve it. Jesus approaches this differently; He simply gives peace. Let’s consider His words carefully today.”

POINT 3: BELIEF IS GROUNDED IN CONFESSING JESUS AS LORD (JOHN 20:28-29).

+ COMMENTARY

“Thomas’ response, My Lord and My God! is the high point of the Gospel. Here was a skeptical man, confronted by the evidence of Jesus’ resurrection. He announced that Jesus, the Man of Galilee, is God manifest in the flesh. Thus the truths in the first chapter were realized personally in this apostle (1:1, 14, 18). The Resurrection (a) demonstrated that what Jesus predicted about His being raised was true . . . (b) proved that Jesus is the Son of God . . . and was sent by God . . . (c) testified to the success of His mission of salvation . . . (d) entitled Jesus to a position of glory . . . and (e) proclaimed that Jesus is the ‘Lord.’”⁵

+ ILLUSTRATION

Stress the following from John 20:29: “Because you have seen me, you have believed.” Ask: “Are there any sayings in our culture that link seeing and believing?” (Learners may suggest “seeing is believing” or “a picture is worth a thousand words.”) Ask: “Have you used that phrase lately? Is it true? Is it always true?”

Search for the “Invisible Gorilla” video through your search engine but don’t draw attention to or let the group see the title. Explain that they are about to watch a video and must count how many times the players wearing white shirts pass the basketball. Play the video and see if anyone actually notices the person dressed in a gorilla costume moving among the basketball players. Explain that in the original experiment in 1999, half of the people counting the passes missed the gorilla. According to the website: “This experiment reveals two things: that we are missing a lot of what goes on around us, and that we have no idea that we are missing so much.”⁶

Engage learners in considering a link between this video and our faith: have you seen the fingerprints of God this week? Has the Lord revealed something to you in His Word, in nature, or in your worship that should have brought you greater faith? As a group, consider how we don’t always “see” with our eyes. Faith requires that we choose to see Christ and then believe in Him.

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1. Elizabeth Charles, *The Epworth Hymnal*, No. 235 (Boston, MA: Harvard University, 1900), 205.
2. Charles Wesley, *Hymnal of the Methodist Episcopal Church with Tunes*, No. 528 (New York: Nelson and Phillips, 1878), 195.
3. Albert Barnes, ed. Samuel Green, *Notes, Explanatory and Practical, on the Gospels* By Rev. Albert Barnes Condensed from the American Edition (London: Oxford University, 1851), 827.
4. Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2007), 314–15.
5. Edwin A. Blum, “John,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, eds. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 343–44.
6. Christopher Chabris, Daniel Simons, “The Invisible Gorilla,” 2010, http://www.theinvisiblegorilla.com/gorilla_experiment.html.

PEOPLE ARE RESTORED



+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. The risen Messiah reveals Himself (John 21:1-6).
2. The risen Messiah enjoys relationship (John 21:7-14).
3. The risen Messiah restores fellowship (John 21:15-19).

Background Passage: John 21

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

In giving Peter the opportunity to confess his love three times, Jesus demonstrated His forgiveness and desire to restore fellowship with His own.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

During Jesus's trial, Peter denied knowing Him three times. After Jesus was resurrected, He gave Peter the opportunity to declare his love of Him three times, confirming to the disciple that their relationship had been restored. Through His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus restores the relationship between God and all who believe in Him.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because Christ has restored our relationship with God, we seek to live as God's agents of reconciliation, pointing others to how they too can be made right with God through Jesus.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **When have you had to wait patiently for someone or something really important and how were you at waiting?** (wait for a volunteer to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion)

TRANSITION: So let's get a picture of the eleven disciples waiting on Jesus. They were back in Galilee, and though Jesus had revealed Himself, they were not exactly sure what the next step would look like, let alone the rest of their lives. What did the resurrection mean? How would it change them? Before Jesus could lay out the plan for taking His gospel to the ends of the earth, first He had some relationships to restore.

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- Jesus had appeared to His disciples twice in Jerusalem a week apart. But that wouldn't be the only place He would come to them as the resurrected Lord. Jesus had left instruction for the disciples with the women who had come to His tomb: Go to Galilee. They would see Jesus there (Matt. 28:16). Galilee had been home base throughout most of Jesus's earthly ministry, so it probably felt like going home for them. We can only imagine them wondering what was coming next and waiting for Jesus's next appearance.



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POINT 1

THE RISEN MESSIAH REVEALS HIMSELF (JOHN 21:1-6).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **John 21:1-6** from his or her Bible.

1 After this, Jesus revealed himself again to his disciples by the Sea of Tiberias. He revealed himself in this way: **2** Simon Peter, Thomas (called “Twin”), Nathanael from Cana of Galilee, Zebedee’s sons, and two others of his disciples were together. **3** “I’m going fishing,” Simon Peter said to them. “We’re coming with you,” they told him. They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. **4** When daybreak came, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not know it was Jesus. **5** “Friends,” Jesus called to them, “you don’t have any fish, do you?” “No,” they answered. **6** “Cast the net on the right side of the boat,” he told them, “and you’ll find some.” So they did, and they were unable to haul it in because of the large number of fish.

COMPARE: Use **PACK ITEM 2: JESUS’S FINAL DAYS MAP** to show the location of the Sea of Galilee. Tell your group to turn to Luke 5:1-11, Jesus’s first encounter with these men by the same shore. Make a chart comparing the two instances, with your group shouting out answers. (by the Sea of Galilee; Peter and the sons of Zebedee were there; they tried to catch fish on their own but couldn’t; Jesus told them where to cast their nets, and they obeyed; they caught lots of fish)

EXPLAIN: Use the bulleted points below to explain **verses 1-5** (Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG] p. 38):

Jesus will choose to reveal Himself anytime and anywhere—He shows up in His timing when needed.

- A few of the disciples were together at the Sea of Tiberias, and in such a time of confusion and uncertainty, the impulsive Peter needed to do something, anything. But his friends weren’t going to let him do it alone. They told him, “We’re coming with you.” They knew he would need their support.
- We know from Luke 5:1-11 that Peter, Andrew, James, and John had been professional fishermen before Jesus called them to follow Him and fish for men. We can only imagine that a night of work with nothing to show for it was frustrating.
- Much debate exists between Bible experts as to whether these men were acting in obedience or not by going fishing. Some commentators think they were going back to their pre-Jesus lives, becoming again who they once were. Others say they were simply waiting, doing something comfortable as they passed the time as not to be idle.

SEA OF TIBERIAS

Also known as the Lake of Tiberias, Lake of Gennesaret, or Sea of Chinnereth, but most commonly known as the Sea of Galilee. It was a major resource for the fishing industry in Jesus’s time.

- In the morning, Jesus “stood on the shore” (v. 4), revealing Himself, though the disciples didn’t know it was Him. They may not have recognized Jesus because there wasn’t enough light, or perhaps they were too far away. Or perhaps they weren’t expecting Him to be there, so they simply assumed it was someone else.

ASK: (DDG p. 38)

What are some reasons we might struggle to recognize the presence or work of Jesus in our lives? (we aren’t looking for or expecting Him; we have sin in our lives distracting us; we are struggling in the areas of Bible reading and prayer; we are living more by sight rather than by faith)

HIGHLIGHT: Emphasize the main point below as seen from **verse 6** (DDG p. 38).

Sometimes Jesus’s instructions may seem unrealistic, but anything is possible when we submit to His will.

- Knowing that the disciples didn’t catch any fish, Jesus simply told them to “cast the net on the right side of the boat” (v. 6). It doesn’t take a fisherman to understand that Jesus’s instruction would have seemed silly. What difference would it make to cast on the right side?
- As mature believers know, it makes all the difference in the world that when Jesus speaks and instructs, we need to obey. In the disciples’ obedience, their catch was abundant and full.

ASK: (DDG p. 38)

When has Jesus led you to do something odd or contrary to a societal norm and how did you respond? (answers may vary, but may include: helping a stranger; giving over and abundantly; sharing the gospel with someone who seemed antagonistic; praying in public)

TRANSITION: The disciples obeyed, but we know Peter’s reputation, temperament, and past mistakes. We thus turn our attention to shore.

POINT 2

THE RISEN MESSIAH ENJOYS RELATIONSHIP (JOHN 21:7-14).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **John 21:7-11** from his or her Bible.

7 The disciple, the one Jesus loved, said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he tied his outer clothing around him (for he had taken it off) and plunged into the sea. **8** Since they were not far from land (about a hundred yards away), the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish. **9** When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish lying on it, and bread. **10** “Bring some of the fish you’ve just caught,” Jesus told them. **11** So Simon Peter climbed up and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish—153 of them. Even though there were so many, the net was not torn.

DISCUSS: This story takes a dramatic turn at this point. Though this may seem to be a fun fishing story, we see here that it is actually about the Man on the shore. Let’s first consider Peter’s reaction to Christ in **verses 7-11** (DDG p. 38).

Whatever our state or circumstances, the appropriate response to Jesus’s presence is to come to Him.

- Peter had taken off his outer garment for fishing, as the tunic alone would have made movement easier. But many struggle to explain Peter’s reasoning for putting on his outer garment upon seeing Christ. Some suggest He was simply making himself appropriately attired, as no one would appear in public wearing only a tunic.¹ Some suggest he donned it to cover spiritual nakedness when facing Christ.² What we know is this: In the midst of a great catch of fish, Peter stopped fishing and went toward Jesus.
- The words “charcoal fire” appear only twice in the New Testament: here and in John 18:18, where Peter denied Jesus three times. Though charcoal fires were common, we can only imagine that the sight and smell brought back that very vivid memory to Peter.
- Notice that Jesus already had a meal waiting. He already had fish and bread, even as the disciples were hauling in fish. He helped the disciples catch fish, not for Himself but for them to understand who He was.
- Commentary writers have attempted to explain the significance of the number 153 (v. 11). What we take away, though, is simply that it was a large enough haul of fish that it was worthy of counting. And even though it was large, with Jesus’s power and authority, the net was not torn.

THE DISCIPLE THAT JESUS LOVED

John often described himself as the disciple that Jesus loved in his Gospel (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7,20,24). Some reasons for this may have been to identify himself as an apostle as well as to emphasize that he understood his ultimate identity as one being loved by Christ.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“We offer Christ the submission of our hearts, and the obedience of our lives; and He offers us His abiding presence. We take Him as our Master; and He takes us as His friends.”³

—Hugh Black (1868–1953)

ASK: (DDG p. 38)

How do you respond when you experience Jesus's presence in any given moment? (we, like Peter, might run to Him; we sometimes might want to avoid or ignore Him if we have unconfessed sin; we might be uncertain of what to do; we might treasure the moment)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **John 21:12-14** from his or her Bible.

12 “Come and have breakfast,” Jesus told them. None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” because they knew it was the Lord.

13 Jesus came, took the bread, and gave it to them. He did the same with the fish. **14** This was now the third time Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

HIGHLIGHT: Though John recognized Jesus, and Peter jumped out of the boat, we can't forget the others who were there with them. They all enjoyed a meal with Jesus. Let's zoom in on **verses 12-14** and consider this moment on the beach, using the idea found below (DDG p. 38).

Jesus desires and invites us to fellowship with Himself and others.

- Over the past two sessions, we've seen Jesus appear to His followers, inviting them to see His wounds and touch Him because of their doubts. That experience of unbelief wasn't necessary here; they all recognized who He was as He invited them to have breakfast with Him (v. 12).
- Note that Thomas was among this group (v. 2). After being chastised by Jesus for his lack of belief, we don't get a word from him in this situation.
- Jesus shared bread and fish with His disciples. Sharing meals with others in Jesus's time, as it is in ours, was a sign of solidarity, unity, and fellowship. Jesus and the disciples were enjoying each other's company.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 38)

What does it look like to enjoy fellowship with Jesus and others today? (like the time on the shore, nothing elaborate is needed: simple food, undistracted time together, and freedom to listen and share are the only needed ingredients; simply time to enjoy each other's presence; everyday moments to cherish memories together)

TRANSITION: How compassionate of Jesus to feed Peter before starting a difficult conversation. We see His compassion and friendship with the impulsive man, who had been a leader among the disciples and would become a leader of the early church.

POINT 3

THE RISEN MESSIAH RESTORES FELLOWSHIP (JOHN 21:15-19).

INTERACT: Invite groups of 3-4 to describe what loving Jesus looks like and to compile a list of responses (for example: enjoying His presence; obeying Him; wanting to spend time with Him; serving others; living like He would; sharing His good news; living on mission for Him). Then allow groups to share their responses with the larger group.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **John 21:15-17** from his or her Bible.

15 When they had eaten breakfast, Jesus asked Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said to him, “you know that I love you.” “Feed my lambs,” he told him. **16** A second time he asked him, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” “Yes, Lord,” he said to him, “you know that I love you.” “Shepherd my sheep,” he told him. **17** He asked him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved that he asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” “Feed my sheep,” Jesus said.

EXPLAIN: In **verses 15-17**, we see a significant conversation between Jesus and Peter. Just as the disciple had denied Him three times, so he would have three times to state his love for Jesus. Through this, Jesus was restoring Peter. Use the bulleted points below to explain (DDG p. 38):

Jesus desires to forgive us and restore fellowship with us when we’ve strayed so that we may be used for His glory.

- Several interpretations have been given for Jesus’s question in verse 15, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” (1) “Do you love Me more than these fish, or more than your past life of being a fisherman?” (2) “Do you love Me more than you love these friends?” (3) “Do you love Me more than these men love Me?” Whichever way you interpret it, the main point is Jesus was giving Peter an opportunity to be restored.
- Throughout this passage, Jesus and Peter used both *agape* and *phileo* as Greek words for love. But remember, they weren’t speaking Greek; they were speaking Aramaic. This conversation was written in Greek. Analysis doesn’t lead to any firm conclusion that Peter didn’t love Jesus as Jesus was asking.
- Jesus instructed Peter to “feed my lambs” (v. 15), “shepherd my sheep” (v. 16), and “feed my sheep” (v. 17). Some commentators make a distinction between lamb and sheep, alluding to different maturity levels of Christ followers. Peter was called to both feed and shepherd all of them. This would include ministering, sharing the Word, and speaking boldly about Christ.

SHEEP

In the Bible, God referred to Israel as sheep, then extended that symbol to all His people (Ezek. 34; Matt. 10:6; 15:24). Sheep aren’t the smartest animals. They are helpless, wander often, and have herd mentality. They need a master and leader to follow because of their inability to take care of themselves and stay on the right path. We, as sheep, need Jesus as our Shepherd and trustworthy pastors and leaders to shepherd us as well.

READ: In restoring Peter, Jesus was also edifying him, helping him to mature and be equipped for service. Ask someone to read the key doctrine (DDG p. 39):

Key Doctrine #89: Edification: Edification refers to the progressive growth and maturity of the church, both individually and collectively. The Bible talks about different ways maturity, or edification, may happen, such as through the fellowship Christians share with one another (1 Cor. 12:26; Gal. 6:2). In addition, edification takes place through the church's preaching and teaching of Scripture (Eph. 4:11-12), helping people understand and internalize the whole counsel of God. In the end, edification is building up the body of Christ, equipping people to live on mission for the kingdom of God.

ASK: (DDG p. 39)

What can we be doing to minister to other believers, whether or not we're called to full-time service? (seek opportunities to share the Word; help meet spiritual and tangible needs; guide and direct younger believers; walk beside those who are struggling)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **John 21:18-19** from his or her Bible.

18 "Truly I tell you, when you were younger, you would tie your belt and walk wherever you wanted. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will tie you and carry you where you don't want to go." **19** He said this to indicate by what kind of death Peter would glorify God. After saying this, he told him, "Follow me."

ENGAGE: Use the bulleted points below to explain **verses 18-19** (DDG p. 39).

Our life of faith may lead to undesirable situations, but we can be certain that it will glorify Jesus.

- Jesus's words to Peter indicated that his faith would lead to death at the hands of others. From Acts 1-12, even knowing he would die for the sake of Christ, Peter did not back down from speaking and doing according to the gospel. The bold-spoken Peter became a devoted leader and example for the early church. (According to tradition, Peter was crucified for his faith, requesting to be so upside-down as he did not deserve to die as Jesus had.)

ASK: (DDG p. 39)

From Day 5 in the DDG: **When has bold faith because of love for Christ led to persecution or trials in your life?** (laughter from coworkers; shunning from relatives; lost job because of personal integrity; lost love because of the Spirit's guidance)

MY RESPONSE

SAY: Through His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus restores the relationship between God and all who believe in Him. Because Christ has restored our relationship with God, we seek to live as God's agents of reconciliation, pointing others to how they too can be made right with God through Jesus.

HEAD:

Peter knew who Jesus was. Peter had witnessed Jesus's life, miracles, and teaching. But Peter still failed Him. But just as we can know Jesus, we can know He seeks to reconcile us to Himself when we fail Him. A life of knowing Christ is not wasted through one day or season of sin. He seeks us out, brings us to confession, and gives us reconciliation.

How has a regret from your past led you to live more fully in His path and plan today?

HEART:

Three times in just a few moments, Jesus asked Peter some form of "Do you love Me?" And though Peter felt frustration at His repetition, we must recognize the connection between our love for Christ and our willingness to obey and honor Him. Our love for Christ leads us to worship, pray, submit to, and serve Him. Perhaps we should spend time prayerfully considering our own love for Jesus and how we reveal that in our lives.

How do you know that you love Jesus?

HANDS:

It may seem simple or old-fashioned, but one of the most timeless ways to fellowship with other believers is through sharing a meal. As we consider Jesus and His disciples enjoying fish and bread on the beach, we can imagine them talking, laughing, and perhaps even joking. Relationships are built around moments like these, and we should be intentional in cultivating our unity with other believers in this kind of situation. Enjoy the godly blessing that comes through eating, talking, and laughing together.

With whom can you enjoy a meal this week to enjoy fellowship in Christ?

PRAY: Father, we see the beauty in restored relationships. We know that we sometimes fail You and stray from Your presence. Thank You that You pursue us and restore us. Thank You that You are a God of reconciliation.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"When you are restored by a person who knows what he is doing, you will be restored in such a way that no one knows that you ever were broken."⁴

—Tony Evans

EXTRA

POINT 1: THE RISEN MESSIAH REVEALS HIMSELF

(JOHN 21:1-6).

+ COMMENTARY

“The sea of Tiberias. Called also the sea of Galilee, being situated in Galilee. In this place Jesus had promised to meet them. . . . Galilee was a retired place where they would be free from danger, and was therefore a safe and convenient situation for Jesus to meet them, in order to give them his last instructions. . . . That night they caught nothing. This was so ordered in the providence of God, that the miracle which was wrought might appear more remarkable. On the right side. Why the right side is mentioned is not known. . . . It does not appear that they yet recognized the Lord Jesus, but from some cause they had sufficient confidence in him to make another trial. Perhaps they judged that he was one skilled in that employment, and knew where there was the greatest probability of success.”⁵

+ OPTIONAL TEACHING ACTIVITY

As you delve into John 21:1-6, invite learners to focus on Peter’s statement: “I’m going fishing,” and the disciples’ response to him: “We’re coming with you” (v. 3). Say: “Peter had been a fisherman professionally before he followed Jesus; here, he’s going fishing and his friends are joining him. Let’s consider for just a moment that I have a \$1000 budget for each of you to take us all to join you on a favorite activity. What would you take us to do?”

Hopefully learners will share activities they enjoy or are skilled in doing. As volunteers offer their ideas, ask questions such as: “What would we need to take? What skills would we need to have? What might we expect from this outing?”

Point out that these men encountered Jesus doing this very ordinary activity. Encourage learners to consider following through on Peter’s example: find something they can do this week and invite others to join them. Suggest this may develop relationships in a new way and create wonderful memories.

EXTRA

POINT 2: THE RISEN MESSIAH ENJOYS RELATIONSHIP

(JOHN 21:7-14).

+ COMMENTARY

“With characteristic impulsiveness, Peter quickly put on his outer garment (‘naked’ simply means ‘stripped for work’) and dove into the water! He wanted to get to Jesus! This is in contrast to Luke 5:8, where Peter told the Lord to depart from him. The other six men followed in the boat, bringing the net full of fish. In the experience recorded in Luke 5, the nets began to break, but in this experience, the net held fast. Perhaps we can see in these two ‘fishing miracles’ an illustration of how the Lord helps His people fish for lost souls. All of our efforts are useless apart from His direction and blessing.”⁶

+ COMMENTARY

“Chapter 21 is about discipleship and leadership. As its story unfolds, Peter remains in the spotlight (along with the Beloved Disciple, John), modeling for us what it means to shepherd the flock of Christ. The disciples have now not only witnessed the resurrection of Jesus, but they have experienced the Spirit. They know the truth and have experienced the Spirit of truth. One question remains: What will they do with it? Will they simply privatize these spiritual moments with Jesus or will these moments lead them somewhere significant? The miraculous catch of fish no doubt is symbol as well as surprise. Jesus is still the disciples’ champion, aiding them in the struggle of their labors. But more, he wants to direct their work, and with his help they will find catches beyond their wildest belief. This symbolism can be applied to the church and its work. As Jesus worked through the direction of the Father, so too the disciples must work at the word of Jesus. He is a coworker and with him success is assured.”⁷

+ OPTIONAL TEACHING ACTIVITY

After reading John 21:7-14, engage learners in considering Peter’s overall reaction to realizing that Jesus Himself was on the beach. Say: “We aren’t told these things, but what do you think was going on in Peter’s mind and heart?” Consider playing for the group videos of returning soldiers surprising their family members. Engage learners in considering if the family members’ reactions possibly look like Peter’s as he jumped out of the boat.

Ask: “Have you ever found yourself in this kind of situation with the Lord? Have you ever realized just how far you were from Him and desperately sought to get into His presence?” This kind of answer might include an immediate need to pray, worship, or sit privately with another believer. Some learners might remember this desperate call to walk an aisle, pray at an altar, or even rededicate their lives. Ask: “What should we do when, like Peter, we’re overwhelmed with the inclination to go straight to Jesus?” Encourage learners to challenge themselves to be more impulsive in following the prompting of the Holy Spirit, even if it goes against cultural norms.

POINT 3: THE RISEN MESSIAH RESTORES FELLOWSHIP (JOHN 21:15-19).

+ COMMENTARY

“Peter needed to be broken, but he also needed to be restored. That’s exactly what Jesus does. . . . How could he who denied Jesus three times claim to love Jesus more than someone else? The foundation of his self-righteous morality had eroded, and he was forced to confront the reality he wasn’t good enough. His effort wasn’t enough. Twice more Jesus asked Peter if he loved him (vv. 16,17). All three times Peter responded yes. This is the mercy of Jesus at work. . . . With great mercy [Jesus] restored Peter. In mercy he lifted him up and healed him. . . . Jesus atoned for Peter’s failure. Peter did nothing but receive mercy.”⁸

+ OPTIONAL TEACHING ACTIVITY

If you have a group of mature learners, you may want to dig a little deeper into Jesus’s instructions for Peter as to how to be a leader. Don’t minimize the fact that Jesus restored fellowship with Peter, which was crucial, but point out that He also gave basic but integral instructions for taking care of the flock, the fledgling church.

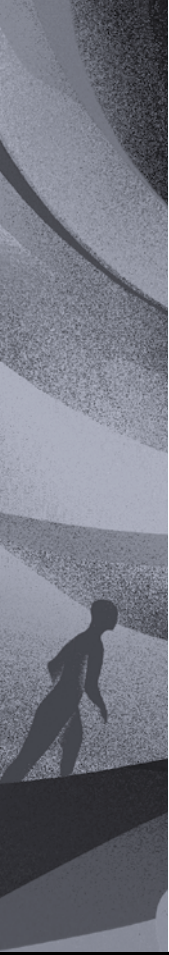
Say: “If you have a relationship with Jesus and are following Him faithfully, you are also called to minister to others. We are all called to reach the lost, but we’re also all called to edify the body of believers. We all have a call to lead, whether by teaching, serving, caring, or any other number of things.” Consider playing a short clip of R. C. Sproul’s “Feed My Sheep” sermon. The sermon is for pastors primarily but is enlightening for all believers serving others. Engage learners in discussing how they are individually serving your church and, for those who are not regularly serving, different opportunities they could pursue.

Additionally, encourage learners to consider who their “flock” may be: their families, friend groups, small group from church, etc. Challenge them to see the people in their sphere of influence as the flock of sheep assigned to them by Christ Himself. Invite learners to prayerfully consider how well they are acting as caretakers in their communities.

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GOD IS HERE



+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. The Lord is with His people from high above (Isa. 55:8-11).
2. The Lord is with His people with full authority (Matt. 28:16-18).
3. The Lord is with His people forever and always (Matt. 28:19-20).

Background Passages: Isaiah 55; Matthew 28

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

God made the perfect way to be with His people through Christ Jesus.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

God is immanent, meaning that although He is distinct from His creation, He is also personable and involved within it. Of the many ways that God demonstrates His immanence, the greatest is through the earthly ministry of Jesus. Jesus came from above, lived a perfect life, gave up His life on the cross, and rose from the dead so that all who trust in Him might have a personal relationship with God.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because God has made the way to be in relationship with Him through Jesus, we strive to live in joyful obedience to carry the gospel to all the world so that others might come to know God too.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **Who in your life has left a positive impact as a mentor or leader?** (wait for a volunteer to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion; hopefully you'll hear about some parents, teachers, coaches, mentors, bosses, and more who did a great job encouraging, helping, leading, guiding, and explaining; you may want to ask if learners still keep in contact)

TRANSITION: Over the past few sessions, we have followed the last earthly days of Jesus: His appearance to some men on the Emmaus Road, His shocking arrival in the hiding place of the Eleven and other disciples, His special return visit to edify Thomas, and His surprise breakfast on a shore in Galilee. But for the disciples, Jesus was about to leave. He had been their rabbi, their shepherd, and their friend. This man had changed their lives, and now He was talking about going away. What were they going to do without Him?

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- It's easy to read a story and picture the setting in our minds. But the Bible is different. Though the narrative occurred in a specific time and place, it connects directly to many more stories spread across years and miles within the Bible. Today's passage is no different. Jesus spoke to His disciples from a mountain in Galilee, but His words reached back into the Old Testament. In His final words, Jesus reveals not only Himself but also His purpose for His followers.



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POINT 1

THE LORD IS WITH HIS PEOPLE FROM HIGH ABOVE (ISA. 55:8-11).

SUMMARIZE: Before we continue in the storyline of the gospel, we look back in Isaiah to remind ourselves of God's plan of redemption throughout history. Isaiah 55 recounts God calling His people back to Him, back from the exile, and back from sin. God, through Isaiah, reminded His people of the everlasting covenant He made with David to send a Messiah and told them to repent and receive forgiveness (vv. 3,7). Israel may have been skeptical, as some are today, of God's grace-filled forgiveness, but anticipating that, God replied with verses 8-11.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Isaiah 55:8-11** from his or her Bible.

8 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not my ways." This is the LORD's declaration. **9** "For as heaven is higher than earth, so my ways are higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. **10** For just as rain and snow fall from heaven and do not return there without saturating the earth and making it germinate and sprout, and providing seed to sow and food to eat, **11** so my word that comes from my mouth will not return to me empty, but it will accomplish what I please and will prosper in what I send it to do."

HIGHLIGHT: Looking at **verses 8-9**, explain the following (Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG] p. 46):

God is often beyond our understanding as His compassion, mercy, and forgiveness extend beyond human capacity.

- God understands and orchestrates the world and our lives at a level we can't fully comprehend. This is part of the doctrine of transcendence, which we learned in an earlier session.
- This passage points to God's compassion and forgiveness: He forgives and gives compassion to repentant sinners. Human beings do not typically overflow with such mercy. Though He is high above us in so many ways, He reaches down to us because of His love and longs to have a relationship with His image-bearers.
- The Hebrew word translated "thoughts" in verses 7-9 is a noun that means what we think, but also purposes, imaginings, inventions, or thought-out works.

WAYS

The Hebrew word translated "ways" in verses 8-9 is a very common noun (found over 700 times in the Old Testament) that can be translated as way, road, distance, journey, manner, path, habit, or course of life. The phrase "The way(s) of the LORD" (Gen. 18:19; Ps. 18:21) points to God's path for His faithful ones.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"The very fact that a holy, eternal, all-knowing, all-powerful, merciful, fair and just God loves you and me is short of astonishing. The wildest part is Jesus doesn't *have* to love us. His being is utterly complete and perfect, apart from humanity. He doesn't need me or you."¹

—Francis Chan

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 46)

How does knowing God is beyond us encourage you? (reminds me that He is in control and I can let go of things; reminds me to seek His will and guidance as He knows more and all; reminds me that I need not worry)

INSTRUCT: Invite learners to visualize a rainy or snowy day after a drought and instruct them to get a good picture of it in their mind's eye. With that as the background, instruct them to read **verses 10-11** silently, pondering the significance of this image.

EXPLAIN: Use the bulleted points below to explain (DDG p. 46):

God will accomplish what He says He will do, including making a way for the redemption of humanity.

- Just as Jesus taught spiritual truths using tactile parables, so God inspired Isaiah to use the same approach.
- Agricultural societies of this time understood intimately that rain was necessary for crops; it brought about plants and food for God's people to eat and be nourished.
- Similarly, what God says never returns void. He always produces good fruit and a harvest as blessings to His people—the biggest blessing of all being Jesus, who was sent to save us from sin, guilt, shame, and death.

ASK: (DDG p. 46)

How do you respond to knowing God always had a plan of redemption because of His love for His people? (with gratefulness and joy; with a deep love for who God is; with awe that God was able to redeem us; with humility that He sacrificed His Son for us)

TRANSITION: Isaiah showed how God is apart from us and yet intimately involved with us. He is beyond our understanding and accomplishes what He wills—His greatest accomplishment being humanity's salvation and redemption. With that concept nailed down, let's flip to the very end of Matthew's Gospel and consider carefully Jesus's farewell to His disciples.

POINT 2

THE LORD IS WITH HIS PEOPLE WITH FULL AUTHORITY (MATT. 28:16-18).

SUMMARIZE: Last week's passage in John 21 recounted that the disciples had traveled to Galilee and gone fishing when Jesus appeared on the bank. Today's passage overlaps slightly, revealing that at some point Jesus's disciples obeyed His directive to go to Galilee (Matt. 28:7). Matthew's Gospel doesn't include the fishing trip or the reconciliation of Peter, but we can see how they fit together.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 28:16-18** from his or her Bible.

16 The eleven disciples traveled to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had directed them. **17** When they saw him, they worshiped, but some doubted. **18** Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth."

EXPLAIN: Though **verses 16-17** are short, they set the stage for some of the most important words that Jesus spoke to His apostles, and to us. As a group, consider the statement below (DDG p. 46):

We can identify with Jesus's disciples even today: They obeyed His instruction and felt called to worship, but doubts still lingered.

- It's not explicitly clear who was at this gathering. Though the Eleven were mentioned, other disciples often congregated with the Eleven in these post-resurrection days. There could have been dozens or hundreds of people here.
- The statement "they worshiped, but some doubted" (v. 17) supports the idea that other disciples were also in attendance. In previous encounters, all Eleven had seen Jesus and confirmed that they believed He had been raised from the dead (Luke 24:36-42; John 20:24-29). So it seems here that the "some" who doubted were not the Eleven. These may have been seeing the resurrected Jesus for the first time.
- Even if doubts remained for the Eleven, perhaps they simply didn't understand all the details or how this kingdom would unfold. "Doubted" could also mean be uncertain. The Christian faith is not lived with complete understanding but is lived with faith in God's sovereignty (see Deut. 29:29). As we doubt and have questions, we take them to the Lord, worshiping and obeying as we work through our struggles.

ASK: (DDG p. 46)

How do obedience, worship, and doubt mix in someone's walk of faith? (sometimes bigger decisions are more difficult to obey than smaller ones, or vice versa; sometimes it's easy to doubt God can accomplish things in the small asks rather than the bigger ones, or vice versa; worship should be involved through it all but sometimes isn't)

EXPLORE: Christ's statement of His authority in **verse 18** requires unpacking. As a group, consider carefully the statement below and how it impacts our understanding of Jesus. (DDG p. 46)

Jesus, answering people's doubts, explained His divinity by proclaiming His ultimate authority in heaven and on earth.

- The word translated "came near" points to an intentional approach, visit, or going among a group. That same Greek word is used in Matthew in describing that the tempter came to Jesus (4:3), the angels came to minister (4:11), the disciples came to Jesus on the mountain (5:1), and a woman with an issue of bleeding came to Jesus to touch His garment (9:20). Jesus may have wanted to address the doubters personally or may have wanted them to see Him up close to show He was the real deal.
- The word "authority" is sometimes translated "power" and points to the power of choice, the freedom to do as one pleases, physical and mental power, influence, privilege, and mastery.
- Matthew's Gospel stresses Jesus's authority. In 7:29, he explained that Jesus's teaching had authority. Matthew 8:5-13 told the story of a centurion who understood the authority of Jesus because of the authority he also possessed. Jesus had also given His twelve disciples authority over unclean spirits and the authority to heal disease and sickness (10:1).
- Satan had offered Jesus the kingdoms of the world (4:8-9), revealing that he had some authority on earth. But that does not compare to the authority of God the Father and God the Son.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 46)

If we know and believe that Jesus has all authority, how should that change our prayer life and spiritual walk? (we would pray more, asking God for more of His will; we would worry less and trust God more with the outcomes of life; we would lay everything at God's feet, knowing He owns it all and is in charge over all)

TRANSITION: All authority from God the Father was given to Jesus, God the Son, because He proved Himself faithful to the Father in every way. With that kind of authority, many would abuse, misuse, and glorify self. But you know that's not what Jesus did. Instead, He took that authority to command His people to spread the good news to the world.

POINT 3

THE LORD IS WITH HIS PEOPLE FOREVER AND ALWAYS (MATT. 28:19-20).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 28:19-20** from his or her Bible.

19 “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

DIG: Call attention to **PACK ITEM 6: GREAT COMMISSION**. Say: “For some of us who grew up in the church, we are familiar with this passage that we often call the Great Commission.” Ask: “Why do you think we call it that and how important is it for you in your life?” Discuss as a group.

EXPLAIN: Use the following statement and **verses 19-20a** to engage learners in the discussion (DDG p. 47).

In response to the authority of Jesus, His followers are instructed to make disciples by going, baptizing, and teaching.

- As the old Bible teachers say, “Whenever you see ‘therefore,’ ask yourself, ‘What’s it there for?’” In combining verses 18 and 19 using the word “therefore,” we might also think of it this way: Since Jesus has all authority, we obey His commands. And He commands us to make disciples. Notice that the instruction from Christ does not say to “make converts” but disciples. Our responsibility to share the gospel does not end at a person’s verbal commitment to Jesus as Savior but continues on as they actually follow Him on their own.
- In the Greek, there is one primary verb in this verse: make disciples. The other words that seem to be verbs—go, baptize, and teach (v. 20)—are present participles, which are often represented in English as “-ing” verbs. One might restate verse 19 likewise: “Therefore, make disciples of all nations, going . . . baptizing . . . and teaching.”
- The participle “teaching” modifies the primary verb “make disciples.” As believers teach others to observe everything Jesus commanded, we realize clearly that making disciples requires entering into a relationship with them. We teach in formal settings, but we also teach through example, through living life openly, through sharing our testimony, and through walking beside others.
- Matthew 28:19-20 is known by many Christ followers as the Great Commission. But we cannot forget that this integral command—the central instruction of a Christian’s life—rests on Jesus’s authority. We reveal our submission to His authority when we obey Him by making disciples.

MAKE DISCIPLES

The verb translated “make disciples” carries with it the idea of becoming a pupil, enrolling as a scholar, or taking in teaching. This Greek word occurs only four times in Scripture: three of them are in Matthew’s Gospel (Matt. 13:52; 27:57; 28:19) and one in Acts, where Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel and “made many disciples” (Acts 14:21).

ASK: (DDG p. 47)

What are some practical ways to make disciples? (first, sharing the good news of Jesus to others; also, helping others grow in the knowledge of God's Word; praying with others; mentoring younger believers; being an example of a Jesus-follower; being an example of serving others)

EXPLAIN: Jesus pointed to His authority in verse 18, gave His instruction in verses 19-20a, and in **verse 20b** made a promise to be always with us. Throughout Scripture, God made Himself known among His people as being with them (Ex. 3:18; Deut. 5:2; 1 Kings 8:57; 2 Chron. 14:11; Ps. 46:7; Zech. 8:23). Use the bulleted points to help explain the doctrine below (DDG p. 47).

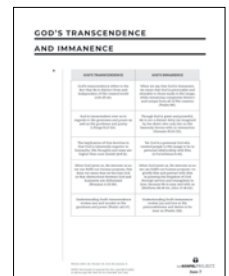
Key Doctrine #24: God Is Immanent: When we say that God is immanent, we mean that God is personable and relatable to those made in His image, while remaining completely distinct and unique from all of His creation. It means that God is not a distant deity (as imagined by the deist) who only sits on His heavenly throne with no interaction, but instead, He is a personal God who created people in His image to be in personal relationship with Him.

- Christ encouraged His followers to remember His promise: He would be with them. The word "remember" appears frequently throughout the Bible: God would remember His covenant when He saw a rainbow (Gen. 9:16), God remembered Abraham when He set out to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:29), God remembered Rachel and opened her womb (Gen. 30:22), and God instructed His followers to remember His name for every generation (Ex. 3:15).
- God promised "I am with you" to Isaac (Gen. 26:24), Jacob (Gen. 28:15), and the Israelites (Isa. 41:10; Jer. 42:11; Hag. 1:13). When Jesus was born, He was known by the prophetic name, "Immanuel," which means "God is with us" (Matt. 1:23). Jesus also spoke these words of comfort to Paul (Acts 18:10).

COMPARE: Use **PACK ITEM 7: GOD'S TRANSCENDENCE AND IMMANENCE** to compare the two attributes of God. Ask your group: "Which attribute do you tend to be more thankful for and why?"

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 47)

From Day 5 in the DDG: **How does Jesus's promise "I am with you" give you courage to make disciples?** (regardless of our confidence or hesitation to share the gospel, we can walk boldly because Christ is with us; we can believe that He is going to give us understanding, knowledge, and compassion because we are walking by faith and obedience; we need not fear because He is with us)



MY RESPONSE

SAY: God is immanent, meaning that although He is distinct from His creation, He is also personable and involved within it. Of the many ways that God demonstrates His immanence, the greatest is through the earthly ministry of Jesus. Because God has made the way to be in relationship with Him through Jesus, we strive to live in joyful obedience to carry the gospel to all the world so that others might come to know God too.

HEAD:

As Jesus assured His believers that He had authority over everything in heaven and earth, perhaps we need to hear and consider those words for ourselves. Perhaps you believe Jesus is the authority who keeps planets spinning and oxygen flowing in earth, but is He the authority over your words, your honesty, your attitudes, and your entertainment? Do you bow to His Word and His teachings when it comes to your free time and your work?

How can you choose to acknowledge and believe Jesus to be your authority today?

HEART:

Some days, we wake up knowing that we have an important task to get done. As Christians, the Great Commission should mark our daily walk: Do I love others enough to tell them about Jesus? Do I yearn for them to know salvation? Does my heart break over their sin? Do I cry out to the Lord over their lack of salvation? Only when we center our hearts and minds on this significant command of Christ will we wholeheartedly devote ourselves to it.

What can I confess to God concerning my devotion, or lack thereof, to Jesus's Great Commission?

HANDS:

Many of us grew up in churches that would have designated times of church-wide evangelism that don't happen today. That does not remove our responsibility to make disciples as we go. Sharing Jesus requires no memorized script or Bible degree. It can start as simply as this, "As I read the Bible today, I learned . . ." and seeing where the conversation goes.

What can you do to start on a journey to make more disciples this week?

PRAY: Lord, we are so often distracted with the nonessentials of life that we forget our daily calling. May we look for opportunities to speak Your name, share Your truth, and expand Your kingdom. As we go this week, give us courage and faith to make disciples everywhere we step, knowing You are with us.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"There is no day, no hour of the day, in which our Lord Jesus is not present with his churches and with his ministers; if there were, in that day, that hour, they would be undone."²

—Matthew Henry
(1662–1714)

POINT 2: THE LORD IS WITH HIS PEOPLE WITH FULL AUTHORITY (MATT. 28:16-18).

+ ILLUSTRATION

Write the word “authority” on a board or large piece of paper. Ask: “What words come to mind as you consider this word?” As learners offer suggestions, write those in a smaller font around it, creating a word cloud. Ask: “In what areas do you have authority or share authority and how do you use it?” Learners may offer that in their jobs, homes, or in different organizations they maintain a certain level of authority. Ask: “How is your authority different from Jesus’s authority?” Provide time for learners to share. Help learners remember that Jesus’s character is unchanging. He doesn’t let power go to His head or abuse it as some may do. He uses it always for His glory and our good.

POINT 3: THE LORD IS WITH HIS PEOPLE FOREVER AND ALWAYS (MATT. 28:19-20).

+ OPTIONAL TEACHING ACTIVITY

Ask: “How good is your memory? Do you remember as well as you did when you were younger? Or have you always struggled to remember certain things?” Invite a few volunteers to share something they’ve recently forgotten or something they tend to forget. Use a tablet to pull up a website featuring games to help improve memory and invite a volunteer to try to play the game. Say: “Jesus tells us in Matthew 28:20 to remember that He is with us always. If we leave it up to our minds, that may not be easy to do. So we’re going to need to go out of our way to keep this at the forefront of our thinking, our prayers, and our faith.” Engage learners in discussing some practical ways to keep this truth front and center. They may want to consider finding it on word art and setting it as a background on their phones or hanging it in their homes. They may want to enlist an accountability partner to text them or tell them this truth once a week. Be creative and point out that we can remember the things we intentionally place before us.

References

1. Francis Chan, *Crazy Love* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2013), 62.
2. Matthew Henry and Thomas Scott, *Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997), Mt 28:16.

YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES

“Filled with the Spirit”

by Mike Brooks

+

Perhaps you’ve been there. You’re at the birthday celebration of a child, and she’s holding up her new toy triumphantly, moments away from ripping open the packaging. Then the thought etches across the mind of an unwitting parent: I wonder if it came with batteries or if I needed to buy them separately. In one fell swoop, the packaging disappears, buttons are pressed, and reality sets in. The summer’s hottest new toy is reduced to a hunk of plastic, tossed in the corner and in need of Triple-A-sized help.

We’re regularly reminded in this life of our own great need for help. Whether in the workplace, on campus, at home, or in our neighborhoods—the demands of this life are often more than we are capable of handling on our own. This is certainly true of the Christian life as well. Thankfully, as believers, we are well-resourced to carry out all that God has purposed for us to do. Yet, over and over again, we are reminded that this miraculous assistance is not the result of our own cunning or human effort. Rather, it is the work of the Holy Spirit, who works powerfully in and through our lives toward God’s intended purposes.

THERE’S NO SUCH THING AS ROGUE CHRISTIANITY

Before His ascension to heaven, Jesus left His disciples specific instructions to follow as they awaited His eventual return. “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations,” He told them, “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20a). On its face, the task seems daunting. Engaging in a global effort to proclaim the gospel and help others become devoted followers of Christ is not for the faint of heart.

But Jesus reminded His followers that they did not have to engage in the work alone. He reminded the disciples that He has all authority and He promised to be with them (Matt. 28:20b). Specifically, Jesus promised the disciples the Holy Spirit would come upon them to sustain them for the great missionary task ahead (Acts 1:8).

Today, as believers, we lay hold to the same mission as those early disciples and we are given the same help along the way. The New Testament picture of a Christian engaged in the mission of Christ is not that of an individual bearing the weight and responsibility of the

work alone. The same Spirit dwelling in and with Jesus's followers in the book of Acts continues to dwell inside of us (1 Cor. 3:16). The Holy Spirit guides, comforts, and empowers followers of Jesus as we seek to faithfully obey God's will. As those united now to Christ by faith, we are now direct beneficiaries of the Spirit's magnificent power and His faithful presence.

WE NEED THE SPIRIT'S POWER

Because we are incapable of saving ourselves, the Holy Spirit's work in our salvation is vital. In the work of salvation, the Spirit applies to our lives all that Christ has accomplished in and through His perfect life, His sacrificial death, and His resurrection. We become aware of and increasingly convicted over our sinful state as a result of the Spirit's work in our lives (John 16:8-11). The Spirit leads us to true repentance and brings about our new birth through the miraculous work of regeneration (3:3-5). In addition to being washed clean, we have right-standing (justification) and are being made holy (sanctification) as a result of the Spirit's powerful work in our lives.

Because we are incapable of saving ourselves, the Holy Spirit's work in our salvation is vital.

The Spirit is at work in other ways too. The Holy Spirit is ever at work in the lives of believers, guiding and empowering us to fulfill God's will for our lives individually and together. In Scripture, we see the Spirit's work is as multi-faceted as it is miraculous. The Spirit supplies the power needed to (a) overcome sin, (b) reveal truth found in God's Word, (c) walk in faithfulness and freedom, (d) discern the will of God, and (e) help us use our spiritual gifts for the spread of the gospel and the building up of the body of Christ.

WE RELY ON THE SPIRIT'S PRESENCE

As believers, we experience not only the Holy Spirit's power but His presence as we seek to live according to the truth we have found in Jesus. The Spirit indwells believers and is given as a deposit both as a source of power and as surety for the eternal promises of God in salvation. The Spirit is a helper, sent for the purposes of teaching and reminding believers of Jesus's instructions (John 14:26). The Spirit is a blessed source of comfort amid various trials (Acts 9:31) and He intercedes for us in prayer when our thoughts are inexpressible (Rom. 8:26).

There is no question: remaining aware of the Spirit's power and presence in our lives isn't always easy. Human beings have a remarkable tendency to return to the well-worn paths of self-governance and self-determination. Yet, the essence of our new identity as those saved and redeemed by God runs against the grain of all our more natural, self-centered impulses.

Because of the high calling placed on our lives, even a seasoned Christian will feel inadequate for the task at hand. Understanding that salvation itself is a gift from God, and not a work of our own doing, bears witness to the fact that maturity and growth in our Christian walk is the powerful work of the Spirit as well. What is more, beyond the Spirit's work in our own lives, we also rely on the Spirit's power and presence in the lives of those who do not yet believe. Because we have been saved by the work of God, we seek to fulfill our mission of sharing the gospel—trusting not in our own power, but rather in the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit to change the lives of others.



THE COMMISSION RECEIVED

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Jesus's disciples rely on the power of the Spirit (Acts 1:4-5).
2. Jesus's disciples fulfill the mission of the Father (Acts 1:6-8).
3. Jesus's disciples anticipate the return of the Son (Acts 1:9-11).

Background Passage: Acts 1

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

Jesus's disciples were to carry out their mission of telling the world about Him, a mission they could only fulfill through the power of the Holy Spirit.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

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

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we have been saved as a result of the Son of God coming to us, we go and make disciples of all nations by declaring the truth of the gospel with the power of the Holy Spirit through our words and actions.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.



INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **What is the most important challenge you have ever been tasked with?** (getting married; becoming a parent; joining the armed services; going to college)

TRANSITION: In our passage today, we will discover a significant challenge that all followers of Jesus have been given. It is a task of great importance and difficulty, which requires the presence of God's Spirit in our lives to fulfill it. This task is incredibly important to God, and yet He has entrusted and enlisted us as disciples to participate in His work of redeeming sinners from all nations. Our willingness and obedience to be witnesses of Christ is vital to this mission.

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- Acts picks up where the Gospel of Luke ends. After Jesus's resurrection, He spent forty days with His disciples, teaching them about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). He did this to prepare them for life and ministry in His physical absence. The disciples were nervous and anxious about the next phase of their lives and ministry, but Jesus gathered them, commissioned them, and assured them of the promise of the Holy Spirit and His physical return.



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POINT 1

JESUS'S DISCIPLES RELY ON THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT (ACTS 1:4-5).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 1:4-5** from his or her Bible.

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."

EXPLAIN: Using the bulleted points, explain **verse 4** as you discuss the following (Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG] p. 58):

In some of His last words, Jesus reminded the disciples of the promise and blessing of the Holy Spirit.

- Jesus would send His disciples to the ends of the earth, but first, they needed to wait and be adequately equipped. The disciples may have wanted to give up in disappointment at Christ's leaving or go ahead in excitement, but Jesus commanded them to wait. Obedience to the Lord's commands and waiting on the Lord's timing allows us to experience His blessings.
- Jesus previously taught His disciples about the coming of the Spirit in His physical absence (see John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7-15). He taught that: (1) the Spirit will be our Helper (14:26); (2) the Spirit will bring to remembrance Jesus's teachings (14:26); (3) the Spirit will guide us in truth (14:17; cf. 15:26; 16:13); and (4) the Spirit will bring the testimony of Christ to us and through us (15:26). These teachings lay the foundation for the disciples to anticipate the "Father's promise" of the Holy Spirit in Acts 1:4.

DISCUSS: As a group, discuss the following question (DDG p. 58).

How do you see the Holy Spirit as a promised blessing in the life of a believer? (He guides believers in God's paths; He reminds His people of God's daily presence; He reminds us of our sealed inheritance)

LIST: On a dry erase board, ask the group to help you make a list to compare and contrast how John's baptism—a water baptism—and the baptism of the Spirit are similar and different (John's baptism was with water, Christ's with the Holy Spirit; John's was an act of repentance on the part of the individual, Christ's was an act of sealing our adoption because of the forgiveness of sins through the work of Christ and the power of the Spirit; John's was a symbolic cleansing, Christ's was a real cleansing).

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Certainly we must never conceive 'salvation' in purely negative terms, as if it consisted only of our rescue from sin, guilt, wrath and death. We thank God that it is all these things. But it also includes the positive blessing of the Holy Spirit to regenerate, indwell, liberate and transform us. What a truncated gospel we preach if we proclaim the one without the other! And what a glorious gospel we have to share when we are true to Scripture! When sinners repent and believe, Jesus not only takes away their sins but also baptizes them with his Spirit."¹

—John Stott (1921–2011)

HIGHLIGHT: Refer to **verse 5** and the bulleted points to highlight this truth (DDG p. 58):

Because of Jesus and the Father's promise, believers are baptized with the Holy Spirit.

- John's baptism was a symbol representing the individual's repentance from sin, God's forgiveness, and a hope in God's promise to bring restoration through a Messiah. The immersion into water represented ceremonial cleansing that served as a personal identification and reminder of their hope in God to fulfill His promise.
- The baptism of the Holy Spirit referenced here would be a unique event when the Holy Spirit would be poured out on the disciples (Acts 2:3). While John's baptism was an immersion into the water as a sign of repentance, the baptism of the Spirit at Pentecost was the Spirit immersing the disciples as He came to live within them.
- Once the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, He was made available to all believers upon their conversion (Acts 11:44-47; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:13-14).

ASK: (DDG p. 58)

From Day 2 in the DDG: **How should the awareness of the Holy Spirit being in your life impact your daily life and relationship with God?** (I can be more confident in obeying God and sharing the good news with others; I can feel assured that God guides me in my decisions and prompts me toward good works; I can feel His presence; I can know I can talk to Him at any time)

TRANSITION: The Holy Spirit is given to Christ followers so they may grow in Christ, serve Him with spiritual gifts, and be empowered to live holy lives that point others to Jesus. Christ's disciples must rely on the Spirit of God for faithfulness and fruitfulness. Disciples are unable to effectively carry out Christ's work in their own strength and resources.

POINT 2

JESUS'S DISCIPLES FULFILL THE MISSION OF THE FATHER (ACTS 1:6-8).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 1:6-8** from his or her Bible.

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."

ASK: Christ preparing to leave was a very emotionally intense moment for the disciples. Now that He was leaving soon, the disciples still held on to the expectation that the kingdom of Israel would be restored. In pairs, answer the question "What are some expectations someone might have of Christ today?" (give me a stress-free life; make everything perfect; fix everything; erase all evil on the earth; give me a rich life)

EXPLAIN: Use the bulleted points below to explain the following main point as seen in **verses 6-7** (DDG p. 58):

The disciples had hopes for Israel, but Christ shifted their focus to the Father's greater plan for the nations.

- The disciples' question concerning the restoration of Israel followed the common teaching of the time that God's Messiah would come to restore the national identity and rule of Israel.
- While Jesus did not deny that there would be a future restoration, He turned the disciples' attention to consider God's greater plan.
- A primary implication of verse 7 is that we should not seek to figure out the date or believe any group or person that promotes a certain date for Christ's return. Church history is full of such false predictions, and Jesus made it clear that such knowledge of God's plan will not be revealed. Instead, we are to live each day faithfully and mindfully with the hope that it could be the day God has set for Christ's return (Matt. 24:44).

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 58)

Why was it important for Christ to refocus the disciples' attention from the restoration of Israel to the Father's ultimate plan? (so they would understand God's greater plan of salvation to all nations; so that they would be engaged, active witnesses, not passive observers waiting for God to act; so that they would be obedient witnesses, understanding the urgency needed)

COMPARE: Ask a group member to read Matthew’s account of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20). Ask the group, “How do Matthew 28:19-20 and Acts 1:8 lay out a similar purpose and plan for the disciples?” (both require the disciples to depend on the Holy Spirit; both focused on going beyond geographically; both centered on the disciples as witnesses of Christ to others)

HIGHLIGHT: Call attention to **PACK ITEM 8: PROMISE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT** and use **verse 8** to connect to the doctrine below (DDG p. 58).

Key Doctrine #85: 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.

- Jesus would use the disciples to expand the kingdom by bringing a Spirit-empowered witness of Jesus Christ to other places and cultures. God’s plan was a much greater plan than what they anticipated and would involve their active participation in achieving it.
- The Holy Spirit working in the disciples would enable them to have the power to fulfill their task of being Jesus’s witnesses.
- The advancement of the disciples’ gospel witness from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth could similarly be understood today as taking the gospel to people who are like you, somewhat different from you, significantly different from you, and extremely different from you. The progression is not only geographic but also cultural.
- The geographic and cultural progression of the disciples’ ministry provides a rough outline of the book of Acts as they went from Jerusalem (ch. 1–7) to Judea and Samaria (ch. 8–12), and finally to the ends of the earth (ch. 13–28). Our task today is to continue this Spirit-empowered task of being Christ’s witnesses to all people everywhere.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 59)

Do you think the first disciples completed this commission and why? (yes and no; Acts shows how these disciples took the gospel witness of Christ to the places listed, but it wasn’t exhaustive—it wasn’t meant to be; there are still people who have not heard the gospel message; this commission to be a witness for Christ is for all believers through all time until the Father’s time for Christ’s return)

TRANSITION: Christ promised the arrival of the Spirit, and He was sure to come. But first, Jesus had to return to the Father.



POINT 3

JESUS'S DISCIPLES ANTICIPATE THE RETURN OF THE SON (ACTS 1:9-11).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 1:9-11** from his or her Bible.

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."

ILLUSTRATE: Ask if anyone has ever seen a rocket launch in person or on video. The picture painted in **verse 9** of the disciples watching Jesus ascending to heaven may have been similar. Use **PACK ITEM 2: JESUS'S FINAL DAYS MAP** to highlight where Jesus visibly rose to the heavens. Near the Mount of Olives, the disciples watched until they could no longer see Him because of the clouds.

EXPLAIN: Using **verse 9**, explain the following main idea (DDG p. 59):

After commissioning the disciples and providing them with all they needed to accomplish that commission, Jesus ascended to heaven.

- Christ's ascension completed His physical ministry to the disciples until His return. Although Christ had physically returned to the Father, He revealed Himself to Stephen (Acts 7:56) and in visions to Paul (9:5) and John (Rev. 1:12-19).
- *Optional:* The ascension of Christ is reminiscent of Enoch (Gen. 5:24) and Elijah (2 Kings 2:11-12) whom God took to heaven. The difference, however, is that Jesus died, resurrected, then was taken to heaven, as well as the fact that Jesus's ascension to heaven anticipates His future physical return.

ASK: (DDG p. 59)

In John 14:1-7, the disciples were distraught at the thought of Christ leaving. Why do they now seem composed in Acts as He returned to the Father? (Christ explained that His departure was for their benefit; they knew that the Spirit was coming soon; they realized that He must leave in order to return; their confidence and trust in Jesus had increased since His resurrection)

REFLECT: Tony Evans took the well-known quote from Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., and flipped it on its head: "If you are a Christian who has become so heavenly minded you are no earthly good, you have missed it. The whole point of being heavenly minded is so that you can be of some earthly good."² **Verses 10-11** illustrate that point.



HIGHLIGHT: Use **PACK ITEM 9: JESUS'S EXALTATION** to highlight a believer's response to Christ's exaltation. Ask: "Which item in the fourth column, 'Respond in Worship and Mission,' is most difficult for you to do?" Ask for volunteers to answer the question.

INSTRUCT: Understanding Christ's exaltation, continue to use **verses 10-11** to explain the truth below (DDG p. 59):

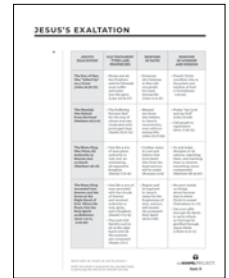
Christ's disciples must wait for His return by carrying out His commission to take the gospel to all people.

- As Christ vanished from view, the disciples' gaze to the sky lingered on. They were understandably mesmerized, having witnessed the miracle of Christ's ascension. However, such high spiritual experiences should be motivation for faithfulness, not idleness.
- The two men who appeared were most likely angels, given their sudden appearance, white clothing (as seen in other angelic appearances), and insight into what had taken place. Like the angels who appeared at Christ's tomb to explain the event and encourage the women to go tell the others (Luke 24:4-9), these messengers reminded the disciples of Christ's promise to return and refocused their attention to the task at hand.
- The return of Christ will be physical, where He will come down from the heavens. The messengers explained that Christ will come back similarly to how He left. Other New Testament passages confirm this idea of Christ's return on the clouds (Rev. 1:7) and His descent from heaven to earth (1 Thess. 4:16). All Christians look forward to the return of Christ as the day of the "blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

ASK: (DDG p. 59)

How should our anticipation for Christ's return motivate our activity to be His witnesses? (God's timing for the return of Christ is connected with our efforts to be His witnesses; we want to be found faithful and obedient to His command when He returns; there are still people who need to hear and believe the gospel and we want them to come to faith before it is too late)

TRANSITION: The sudden appearance and message from the angels to the disciples is a reminder to all believers that we should anticipate Christ's return. But while waiting and anticipating, we should be active to fulfill our commission to be Jesus's witnesses to all people in all places as Christ commanded.



MY RESPONSE

SAY: Before Jesus ascended to the Father, He commissioned His disciples to go into the world and make disciples of all nations. Under the authority of Jesus, and with the power of the Holy Spirit, we make disciples of all peoples as we anticipate the return of Christ. Because we have been saved as a result of the Son of God coming to us, we go and make disciples of all nations by declaring the truth of the gospel with the power of the Holy Spirit through our words and actions.

HEAD:

The good news of salvation available through faith in Christ alone has come to us so that we might pass it on to others. We must now consider ourselves commissioned by the Savior to go in the power of the Spirit and be Christ's witnesses near and far. As we anticipate the return of Christ, we should be motivated to see the gospel message go throughout the nations.

How would taking on the responsibility to be a witness for Christ influence your daily decisions and actions?

HEART:

Christ's commission to be His witnesses to all people should spark a desire in us to see the gospel of Jesus go to all people. It should shape our compassion toward other nationalities, cultures, and people groups as we see them as people made in God's image and who may be redeemed by the gospel just as we have been. But many of us get too busy, lazy, or distracted.

What are the distractions in your life that prevent you from prioritizing or obeying Christ's commission that you need to confess?

HANDS:

Christ's commission to His followers requires action. We should seek to reach those close to us with the gospel as well as be involved in the gospel work of those serving throughout the world. The task requires all Christians to pray, give, and/or go so that the good news of salvation through Jesus would be heard across the street and across the world.

What are ways you can be involved personally and cooperatively with others to see the gospel go to all people everywhere?

PRAY: Lord, we wait for Your return. Help us be diligent in fulfilling Your mission as we wait. Fill us with Your Spirit to lead us to make disciples that all people may learn of Your love, grace, and forgiveness. You are our hope and salvation! Amen.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Jesus' commission to evangelize the world was not a suggestion to be considered but a command to be obeyed. Jesus' followers did not consider this Great Commission to evangelize the world as an option to entertain but rather saw it as a mandate to fulfill whatever the cost."³

—Dave Earley

POINT 1: JESUS'S DISCIPLES RELY ON THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT (ACTS 1:4-5).

+ COMMENTARY

“The Old Testament prophets announced the pouring out of the Holy Spirit in connection with the new covenant. Isaiah 32:15 looks forward to a time when ‘the spirit is poured upon us from on high.’ God says through Ezekiel that, ‘I will put my spirit in you’ (Ezekiel 37:14; cf. 36:27). On the day of Pentecost, Peter specifically connected the outpouring of the Spirit with the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32. Jesus gave his most extensive teaching about the coming of the Holy Spirit to his disciples the night before he was crucified (John 14-16).”⁴

+ ADDITIONAL TEACHING RESOURCE

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is a topic that is often debated in the church today. While Christians may differ in their teachings and practices regarding how the Spirit works in the church today, we must remember that the Holy Spirit is an essential part of the Christian faith.

- **The Holy Spirit is the presence of God in our lives:** When we become Christians, we receive the Holy Spirit as a gift from God. The Holy Spirit is God’s presence within us, and it is through the Holy Spirit that we can have a personal relationship with God. Therefore, considering the Holy Spirit in our lives helps us cultivate a deeper sense of God’s presence and experience His love, peace, and joy (John 14:16-17).
- **The Holy Spirit guides and directs us:** The Holy Spirit is our guide and counselor, and it is through the Holy Spirit that we can discern God’s will for our lives. By considering the Holy Spirit in our decision-making and seeking His guidance, we can make choices that align with God’s plan for us and lead us to greater fulfillment and purpose (John 16:13; Rom. 8:14).
- **The Holy Spirit empowers us for ministry:** The Holy Spirit gives us the gifts and abilities we need to serve God and others. By considering the Holy Spirit in our lives and being open to His leading, we can discover our unique gifts and use them to build up the church and share the gospel with others (1 Cor. 12:7-11).
- **The Holy Spirit produces spiritual fruit in our lives:** Spiritual fruit such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are the result of the Holy Spirit in our lives (Gal. 5:22-23). By considering the Holy Spirit in our lives and allowing Him to work in us, we can grow in these virtues and become more like Christ.

EXTRA

POINT 2: JESUS'S DISCIPLES FULFILL THE MISSION OF THE FATHER (ACTS 1:6-8).

+ COMMENTARY

“To be a witness for Christ is to bring a message that is a marvel of simplicity: Jesus Christ is God come in the flesh; he died to pay for our sins; he was resurrected; now he is exalted in Heaven; he calls us to believe in him and so receive forgiveness of sins. This is good news. There is nothing to join, no system to climb—just a person to receive and, in him, eternal life. Though this witness is simple, it requires costly commitment from its carriers. It radically touches our inner complexities—who we are deep inside. Not only must we have the message, the logos, the Word, but we must also attract the magnificent compliment that Sir Henry Stanley gave David Livingstone after discovering and spending time with him in Central Africa: ‘If I had been with him any longer, I would have been compelled to be a Christian, and he never spoke to me about it at all.’ Livingstone’s witness went far beyond mere words.”⁵

+ ADDITIONAL TEACHING RESOURCE

What does it look like to be a witness of Christ? Consider a few examples from the Bible.

- In the book of Acts, Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, preached to the crowds in Jerusalem, telling them about Jesus and calling them to repent and be baptized. Through his boldness and willingness to speak the truth, many people came to believe in Jesus.
- Paul, a former persecutor, traveled extensively throughout the Roman Empire, sharing the gospel with both Jews and Gentiles. He endured persecution, imprisonment, and even shipwreck in order to spread the message of Christ. Through his teaching and writing, Paul left a lasting legacy of faith and devotion to Jesus.
- In John 4, a woman from Samaria met Jesus at a well. He told her about living water, and she believed that He was the Messiah. She went back to her village and told everyone about Jesus, and many of them believed in Him as well.
- In Acts 6–7, Stephen preached a powerful sermon to an angry mob of religious leaders, accusing them of rejecting God’s messengers throughout history. As a result, he was stoned to death. Despite the violence done to him, Stephen inspired others to stand firm in their faith and continue to spread the gospel.

The New Testament provides many examples of what it means to be a witness for Christ. Their examples serve as an inspiration to us today, reminding us that being a witness for Christ involves not just words but also actions and a willingness to live out our faith in a way that points others toward Jesus.

POINT 3: JESUS'S DISCIPLES ANTICIPATE THE RETURN OF THE SON (ACTS 1:9-11).

+ COMMENTARY

“The angels implied, until Christ comes again, the apostles must get on with their witness, for that was their mandate. There was something fundamentally anomalous about their gazing up into the sky when they had been commissioned to go to the ends of the earth. It was the earth not the sky which was to be their preoccupation. Their calling was to be witnesses not stargazers. The vision they were to cultivate was not upwards in nostalgia to the heaven which had received Jesus, but outwards in compassion to a lost world which needed him. It is the same for us. Curiosity about heaven and its occupants, speculation about prophecy and its fulfilment, an obsession with ‘times and seasons’—these are aberrations which distract us from our God-given mission. Christ will come personally, visibly, gloriously. Of that we have been assured. Other details can wait. Meanwhile, we have work to do in the power of the Spirit.”⁶

+ ILLUSTRATION

A lot of children are easily distracted, and it's difficult for them to stay focused on a task due to distractions and a lack of impulse control. Often minor details can take over and cause them to lose sight of the main goal or objective. You might send a middle schooler into a grocery store to buy bread, telling them to make sure they get back the right change, and they come out with a bag of chips, but with the right change.

Similarly, in the Christian life, we can become distracted by minor details and lose sight of the main goal of following Christ. We can become so caught up in doctrine and practices of our faith that we forget about the more important aspects of living a Christ-centered life seeking to fulfill Christ's commission for us to be His witnesses to the world.

One way we can easily be distracted from Christ's commission is by becoming overly focused on external religious practices. Jesus criticized the Pharisees and scribes for this very thing (Matt. 23:23). The Pharisees were so concerned with external practices that they forgot about the more important matters of living justly, showing mercy, and being faithful to God. They lost sight of what truly mattered in their relationship with God and others. Similarly, in our own lives, we can get caught up in minor details of religious practice and doctrine and become distracted from seeking to fulfill the commission Christ has assigned us to be His witnesses through the power of the Spirit.

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THE WAITING COMMENCES

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Jesus's disciples unite in prayer (Acts 1:12-14).
2. Jesus's disciples follow the Scriptures (Acts 1:15-22).
3. Jesus's disciples trust in God (Acts 1:23-26).

Background Passage: Acts 1

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

The disciples chose Matthias to replace Judas in accordance with the Scriptures and God's leading.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

As the disciples waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit, they chose Matthias to replace Judas and join them as witnesses of the resurrection. Belief in the resurrection of Christ is at the center of the gospel and defines all who are disciples of Jesus.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we believe that Jesus has risen from the dead, we unite with all who likewise believe in Jesus and live on mission together declaring the risen Lord.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **Have you ever had a waiting experience that was particularly transformative or impactful for you, and if so, what did you learn from that experience?** (waiting to get married; to have children; to hear back from a job interview; to retire; to have grandkids; to find a church; to build lasting friendships)

TRANSITION: No one likes to wait for God to move, but it is often a necessary step for our growth and ability to receive God's blessings. The disciples waited in Jerusalem as Jesus instructed so that they would receive the Holy Spirit and begin the task assigned to them. Even though they waited, they were not idle. We will see how they prepared themselves to discern God's will and effectively carry out Christ's great mission. We too can consider how we should use times of waiting to discover God's will for our lives.

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- After Jesus explained to the disciples that they would bear witness from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, Jesus ascended to heaven. As the disciples watched where Jesus had gone, two angels appeared and assured them of Christ's return. All of this led to today's text, where we see the disciples obeyed Christ's command to wait as they prepared for the ministry that would follow when the Holy Spirit arrived.



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POINT 1

JESUS'S DISCIPLES UNITE IN PRAYER (ACTS 1:12-14).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 1:12-14** from his or her Bible.

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.

EXPLAIN: Refer to **verses 12-13** as you explain the following (Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG] p. 66):

The disciples stayed in Jerusalem and waited in obedience to Jesus's command, revealing their genuine faith.

- The disciples confidently and expectantly followed Christ's command to wait in Jerusalem as they retraced their steps from the place of His ascension to the upper room, where they would await the coming of the Holy Spirit. Luke 24:52 states that following Christ's ascension, the disciples worshiped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.
- Luke listed the eleven individuals who gathered together to show that all the apostles—except for Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus and died—were faithfully following Christ with one accord.

ASK: (DDG p. 66)

Why is it sometimes hard to be obedient to Jesus? (we get distracted; we want immediate gratification; we are selfish and sinful; we are too busy with our lives; we forget about having an eternal perspective; we try to do things alone without help from other believers)

TRANSITION: Reread **verse 14** and explain that the disciples' dedication and unity in prayer prepared them to be used by God in a powerful way. After Jesus's resurrection, prayer had a whole new meaning because Christ's followers are now a part of the priesthood of all believers.

A SABBATH DAY'S JOURNEY

"A Sabbath day's journey" (Acts 1:12) was a Jewish expression referring to a distance of between $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile. The rabbinic law of the day stipulated that a Sabbath day's journey was not to exceed 2,000 cubits, with a cubit being approximately 22 inches.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Prayer is the key that unlocks all the storehouses of God's infinite grace and power. . . . Prayer can do anything that God can do, and as God can do anything, prayer is omnipotent. No one can stand against the one who knows how to pray and who meets all the conditions of prevailing prayer, and who really prays."¹

—R. A. Torrey (1856–1928)

HIGHLIGHT: To understand this more, read the key doctrine. Use the bulleted points to note how important prayer was for the disciples as they understood that they could now come directly to God (DDG p. 66):

Key Doctrine #82: Priesthood of the Believer: God’s intention for humanity is that we be a kingdom of priests, not just a kingdom with priests. Although God set up the priestly system in the Old Testament due to the sinfulness of humanity and people’s need for a mediator, His ultimate purpose is that we come to God directly, through the mediating work of Jesus Christ, thus eliminating the need of another priest. Because of the work of Christ on the cross, exemplified in the tearing of the curtain that prevented access into the holy of holies, Christians are free to approach God with boldness (Rom. 5:1-5; Heb. 4:14-16).

- Luke noted the first activity of the early church was focused prayer as he highlighted times of corporate prayer throughout the book of Acts (1:24; 8:14-17; 9:11-12; 10:4,9,30; 13:2-3).
- The text states that the disciples “all were continually united in prayer.” This concept reflects a shared heart and mind, not just a shared activity. Unified prayer intertwines the desires and wills of people as they seek God together (see also 2:46; 4:24; 5:12).
- The disciples’ emphasis on prayer reveals three important attributes that focused prayer brings to a group of believers: (1) expectancy as they dedicate themselves together to seek God’s answer; (2) unity as they focus their prayers together on a specific need; and (3) dependency upon God as they submit to God’s ultimate authority.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 66)

From Day 1 in the DDG: **How has praying with others helped you to deepen your sense of connection with God and with your community of believers?** (by knowing I’m not on God’s mission alone; by knowing I have strength from God and with others to live obediently; by helping me see beyond myself and to God’s glory)

CHALLENGE: Stop and take time to implement prayer by sharing prayer requests and praying for each other, or praying over Scripture, using a psalm for example.

TRANSITION: The disciples were obedient to Christ’s command to return to Jerusalem and used the opportunity to be dedicated to prayer while they awaited the Holy Spirit to come. But while they waited, they also sought to be obedient to follow and apply the Scriptures to the life of the community.

POINT 2

JESUS'S DISCIPLES FOLLOW THE SCRIPTURES (ACTS 1:15-22).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 1:15-19** from his or her Bible.

15 In those days Peter stood up among the brothers and sisters—the number of people who were together was about a hundred twenty—and said, **16** “Brothers and sisters, it was necessary that the Scripture be fulfilled that the Holy Spirit through the mouth of David foretold about Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. **17** For he was one of our number and shared in this ministry.” **18** Now this man acquired a field with his unrighteous wages. He fell headfirst, his body burst open and his intestines spilled out. **19** This became known to all the residents of Jerusalem, so that in their own language that field is called ‘Hakeldama’ (that is, “Field of Blood”).

HIGHLIGHT: Use the text below and **verses 15-19** to highlight (DDG p. 66):

Peter and the disciples understood that Judas’s betrayal and demise was part of the Scriptures being fulfilled because they believed the Scriptures to be true and God-inspired.

- The company of around 120 disciples (v. 15) likely included the 70 disciples commissioned in Luke 10:1-2, the Eleven, the women who followed Jesus (23:49,55), and Jesus’s mother and brothers.² Despite his role as a leader, Peter did not act unilaterally but in conjunction with the other disciples.
- Peter emphasized the divine authorship of the Scriptures, saying “it was necessary that the Scripture be fulfilled” (Acts 1:16), which is a common theme throughout the book of Acts (2:16; 3:18,21,25; 4:25; 15:7; 28:25).
- After witnessing the resurrection and Jesus’s appearances for forty days before His ascension, the disciples expressed great confidence in the fulfillment of Scripture and all the teachings that Christ revealed to them.
- The tragedy of Judas’s betrayal is not only that he created a vacancy among the twelve apostles, but also that he—chosen by Jesus and a firsthand witness to His ministry—would betray Jesus with a kiss and buy a field with the blood money.
- *Optional:* Matthew noted in his Gospel that Judas attempted to return the money, hanged himself, and that the priests purchased a field with the money, which became a burial ground for foreigners (Matt. 27:3-10). The apparent discrepancy between the two Gospel accounts should not cause a dilemma. It is likely that the priests purchased the field in Judas’s name, Judas hanged himself secretly so that his body began to decompose until it fell forward and opened upon impact, and the field purchased in Judas’s name was known to the people in association with his betrayal and was used for the burial of foreigners.

ASK: (DDG p. 66)

How does believing the Word of God is true affect how we live? (we will want to obey His commands more; we will worry less; we will live out our salvation and share the good news more; we will trust Him more)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 1:20-22** from his or her Bible.

20 “For it is written in the Book of Psalms: Let his dwelling become desolate; let no one live in it; and Let someone else take his position. **21** Therefore, from among the men who have accompanied us during the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us— **22** beginning from the baptism of John until the day he was taken up from us—from among these, it is necessary that one become a witness with us of his resurrection.”

EXPLAIN: Looking at **verses 20-22**, explain (DDG p. 67):

To continue to fulfill Scripture, the disciples knew they had to choose a replacement for Judas.

- Peter made the following observations from the Psalms concerning Judas: Psalm 69:25 says, “Make their fortification desolate; may no one live in their tents.” And Psalm 109:8 says, “Let another take over his position.” Peter and the disciples knew that they must take action because God’s Word had instructed them to do so: “it is necessary that one become a witness with us of his resurrection” (Acts 1:22).
- Peter’s use of the Psalms to argue for the need to replace Judas marked a new direction in his life. Prior to the resurrection, Peter was often doubtful (Matt. 14:31) and even argumentative (16:22) regarding Christ’s explanation of how God’s Word would be fulfilled. However, after the resurrection, Peter expressed great confidence in the Word of God. His sermons in the book of Acts (2:14-39; 3:11-4:4; 4:8-12; 5:29-32; 10:34-43) were filled with references that prove Jesus is the Christ of Old Testament prophecy and should be received as Savior by faith.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 67)

What are ways we can learn to obey Scripture more on a daily basis? (first we must study Scripture, praying through it; we can memorize Scripture or have it written in plain sight as reminders; we can choose to focus on a certain command each day and try to obey it, then continue with other commands; we can practice obedience)

TRANSITION: Someone needed to replace Judas. The disciples knew what they must do; now they needed to seek God’s leadership in how to do it.

POINT 3

JESUS'S DISCIPLES TRUST IN GOD (ACTS 1:23-26).

INTRODUCE: Some choices we face in life are easy. For instance, when we have to choose between something we know is good or bad for us, we may struggle with giving up the bad option, but we know the alternative is good. However, a more difficult choice arises when we must decide between two good options. This is the dilemma that the disciples faced in replacing Judas.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 1:23-26** from his or her Bible.

23 So they proposed two: Joseph, called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. **24** Then they prayed, “You, Lord, know everyone’s hearts; show which of these two you have chosen **25** to take the place in this apostolic ministry that Judas left to go where he belongs.” **26** Then they cast lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias and he was added to the eleven apostles.

RECAP: In verses 21-22, Peter laid out the prerequisites for Judas’s replacement to join the eleven apostles: the individual must have been a follower of Jesus throughout His entire ministry, from His baptism to His ascension. Two men met these qualifications: the first was known by three names—Joseph, Barsabbas, and Justus—and the second was Matthias. Both men satisfied the requirements.

HIGHLIGHT: Using **verses 23-25**, highlight the following main idea (DDG p. 67):

When faced with a major decision, the disciples sought God’s will in prayer.

- The need to replace Judas with another disciple demonstrated the understanding of the great task that Christ had commissioned the disciples with. The presence of all twelve apostles was necessary to bear the burden of teaching and leading once the Holy Spirit began to exponentially grow the number of disciples through the preaching of the gospel.
- God always provides what He demands, and the dilemma the disciples faced in deciding between the two candidates demonstrates God’s provision at work even before we realize our own needs.
- This passage serves as a reminder that there were many more disciples than just the Twelve who followed Jesus throughout His ministry. While some only followed for a short time, there were others who remained faithful to Christ throughout much of His ministry.
- The disciples’ prayer was simple yet rich in meaning. They began by acknowledging that God, in His sovereign wisdom, knows “everyone’s hearts.” They then made a specific request, asking God to show which man He had chosen.

ASK: (DDG p. 67)

When making a major decision, what are some helpful tips to help make the right decision? (praying; fasting; consulting other believers; waiting; seeking more knowledge about the situation)

ILLUSTRATE: Bring in a pair of dice and roll them a few times as you ask someone to reread **verse 26**. Ask: “The disciples cast lots in their decision-making. Do you think this is a method we should use today? Why or why not?”

- It is important to remember that the disciples at this time were operating with two disadvantages that we do not have today. First, the Holy Spirit had not yet come to indwell them as He does with all believers today. Second, they did not have the New Testament Scriptures to help guide their decisions as we do. Casting lots to seek God’s will today would be unwise as it was no longer instructed or demonstrated after this passage in the New Testament.

EXPLAIN: Use the bulleted points below to explain **verse 26** and the following statement (DDG p. 67):

After praying, the disciples made sure to act on God’s leading.

- After praying and casting lots, the disciples expressed their trust in the Lord by appointing Matthias, as the lot fell to him, as the twelfth apostle. Although Joseph was an excellent candidate, the disciples recognized and submitted to God’s will as He revealed it to them.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 67)

When in your life have you asked for God’s leading, He answered, but you didn’t want to obey and follow? (be prepared with an answer of your own to start the discussion; some examples may include: God’s leading to leave an incompatible boyfriend/girlfriend; praying for opportunities to share the gospel, receiving some, but not acting on it; decisions to change jobs or homes; God telling you to let go of something)

TRANSITION: While the disciples were called to wait, they were not idle. They used the opportunity to prepare for what God had in store for them next. The waiting period allowed them to become unified in prayer and install God’s chosen replacement for Judas, preparing for their future ministry. Like the disciples, we can rest on the fact that waiting on God’s timing is not a delay, but an opportunity to better prepare ourselves to faithfully accomplish all that He has in store for us.

CASTING LOTS

The practice of casting lots was mentioned seventy times in the Old Testament, although there was no direct command or instruction on how to use it. It is believed to be a cultural practice that God’s people used to seek His will in making decisions. However, this was the only time this practice was mentioned for God’s people in the New Testament since the Holy Spirit guided the church’s decisions after Pentecost.

MY RESPONSE

SAY: As the disciples waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit, they chose Matthias to replace Judas and join them as witnesses of the resurrection. Belief in the resurrection of Christ is at the center of the gospel and defines all who are disciples of Jesus. Because we believe that Jesus has risen from the dead, we unite with all who likewise believe in Jesus and live on mission together declaring the risen Lord.

HEAD:

The disciples' passion for knowing and believing God's Word models how we must trust that the Scriptures are true and reveal God's will to us. As we grow in faith and experience God's faithfulness, we should become increasingly dependent upon Him to fulfill all He has promised in His Word.

How has God proven His Word is true as you have trusted in the Scriptures' promises?

HEART:

It is easy to become frustrated with the Lord when we are waiting for His will to be revealed in our lives. Instead of doubt and frustration, we should seek God in prayer, individually and corporately. In doing so, our hearts will grow in faith and anticipation for God's will to be revealed. Including others in our expectant prayers builds unity and fellowship during times of waiting.

In what areas of your life are you frustrated or doubting what God can do and how can you confess it to Him today?

HANDS:

Genuine faith is demonstrated in a life that prayerfully seeks God's will, looks to know and follow the Scriptures, and acts accordingly because of trust in God as we follow His command to spread the gospel and further His kingdom.

How are you prayerful and active in furthering the church and the kingdom of God?

PRAY: Father, we thank You for revealing Your will to us. In times of difficulty and waiting, may we be reminded of the great privilege we have to gather before You in prayer. May we seek guidance from Your wonderful Word as we seek Your will. Strengthen and protect us as we obediently do all that You have called us to do so that You may be glorified in our lives. Amen.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Faith is a living, unshakeable confidence in God's grace; it is so certain, that someone would die a thousand times for it. This kind of trust in and knowledge of God's grace makes a person joyful, confident, and happy with regard to God and all creatures."³

—Martin Luther
(1483–1546)

EXTRA

POINT 1: JESUS'S DISCIPLES UNITE IN PRAYER (ACTS 1:12-14).

+ COMMENTARY

“Luke also indicates that the men and women were devoted to prayer. This devotion to prayer was an act of obedience to Christ (Luke 18:1). Trusting in the promises of the coming Holy Spirit, the group relied on asking God in prayer to guide their actions. It was because of the disciples’ devotion to prayer that the Lord began to work through them to build his church.”⁴

+ ADDITIONAL TEACHING RESOURCE

We can use the ACTS acrostic as a guide for prayer—Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. Looking at the context of the book of Acts, we can assume that the disciples incorporated these four concepts into their prayers.

- They **adored** God for sending Jesus to them and witnessing His ascension to the right hand of the Father. They experienced God’s grace through the death and resurrection of Christ and eagerly anticipated the coming of the Holy Spirit.
- **Confession** would have been a crucial part of their prayers, given their recent rejection of Jesus and the realization of their own sinfulness. Christ’s willingness to forgive their sins was a significant benefit of their restoration.
- Being in the midst of an incredible number of blessings from God, the disciples would have offered **thanksgiving** in their prayers for the life and ministry of Jesus that they experienced.
- **Supplication**, or asking God for things needed, would have been a frequent part of their prayers as they asked for guidance and wisdom to carry out Christ’s mission, even with the promise of the Holy Spirit.

Using a guide like the ACTS acrostic can be helpful to encourage prayer. Have you found any prayer models or guides that have helped you in your prayer life?

EXTRA

POINT 2: JESUS'S DISCIPLES FOLLOW THE SCRIPTURES

(ACTS 1:15-22).

+ COMMENTARY

“The primary place we can find God’s will is in the pages of the Bible. In his word he has revealed everything necessary for our redemption. That means we don’t have to wonder whether we should be making disciples, praying, living holy lives, bearing fruit, loving people who aren’t lovable, being faithful in our marriages, or caring for orphans. Those things and more are part of his revealed will, in the Bible. We can be confident that pursuing those things is always the right course of action.”⁵

+ ILLUSTRATION

Imagine that you are standing at a crossroads, trying to decide which path to take. As you look down each path, you notice that one is well-lit and clear, while the other is dark and treacherous. As you approach the path that is well-lit and clear, you begin to notice signs along the way that remind you of important lessons from the Scriptures. For example, you may see a sign that says “Love your neighbor as yourself,” “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” or “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” These signs would clearly direct you as to how you are to travel the path. As you walk down the path, you feel a sense of peace and clarity. The well-lit path provides a clear direction and a sense of purpose, and you feel confident that you are on the right track.

On the other hand, if you were to choose the other path, you would be on your own as there is no light to help navigate the way, no wisdom outside of yourself to guide you, and no confidence that the path will lead you the right way. As you walk down the path, you feel a sense of confusion and fear. The darkness makes it difficult to see where you’re going, and you feel unsure of your direction.

Following the well-lit and clear path represents a commitment to living in alignment with the revealed will of God in the Scriptures. It requires a willingness to seek God’s guidance and to follow His commands, even when it is difficult or inconvenient. By doing so, we can experience the peace and clarity that comes from knowing that we are living according to God’s plan. On the other hand, ignoring the Scriptures and choosing to walk down the dark and treacherous path represents a rejection of God’s Word. It leads to confusion, chaos, and ultimately separation from God.

POINT 3: JESUS'S DISCIPLES TRUST IN GOD (ACTS 1:23-26).

+ COMMENTARY

“It is worth noting the cluster of factors which contributed to the discovery of God’s will in this matter. First came the general leading of scripture that the replacement should be made (16-21). Next, they used their common sense that if Judas’s substitute was to have the same Apostolic ministry he must also have the same qualifications, including an eyewitness experience of Jesus and a personal appointment by him. This sound deductive reasoning led to the nomination of Joseph and Matthias. Third, they prayed. For though Jesus had gone, he was still accessible to them by prayer and was recognized as having a knowledge of hearts which they lacked. Finally, they drew lots, by which they trusted Jesus to make his own choice known. Leaving aside this 4th factor, because the spirit has now been given to us, the remaining three (scripture, common sense and prayer) constitute a wholesome combination through which God may be trusted to guide us today.”⁶

+ ILLUSTRATION

Imagine you’re planning a road trip with your friends. You’re all excited to hit the open road and explore new places, but you haven’t decided on a destination yet. You start tossing around ideas and suggestions, but no one can seem to agree on where to go because no one has done any research or looked at guidebooks by experts or those well-traveled.

As the discussion continues, you start to feel anxious and uncertain. You don’t want to make the wrong decision and end up in a disappointing or dangerous situation. You start to doubt your ability to choose a good destination for the trip. This is what it is like when we attempt to live life and make decisions without considering God’s will for us as seen in His Word.

When we seek God through His Word, prayer, and the council of other godly people, and trust in His Spirit to guide us, we can know God’s will for our lives, and we can trust Him fully. We don’t need to worry about making the wrong decisions or taking the wrong path because we know that God is guiding us. This knowledge brings peace and confidence, which allows us to trust God more deeply. This trust allows us to experience the peace and joy that comes from walking in alignment with God’s will.

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THE SPIRIT ENABLES



+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Jesus's disciples obey Christ (Acts 2:1).
2. Jesus's disciples are filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:2-5).
3. Jesus's disciples reveal God's works (Acts 2:6-13).

Background Passage: Acts 2

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

The disciples obeyed Jesus and waited for the Holy Spirit to come as promised, an arrival that was marked by great power from God.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Jesus had instructed His disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit because He would empower them to be His witnesses on earth. As promised, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, filled them, and empowered them to complete the mission they had been given. God gives the Holy Spirit to all who trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior, and the Spirit changes us to be more like Jesus.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because the Holy Spirit changes us to be more like Christ each day, we rely on the Holy Spirit as we share the gospel, call people to repentance and faith, and live in community.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **What would you say is the most memorable day you have ever had?** (the day someone received Christ as Savior; graduating from a school or program; a wedding day; the birth of a child; an important event attended)

TRANSITION: Our lives are punctuated by various special days that hold significant meaning and shape us in many ways. In this session, we will focus on a momentous occasion in the lives of Jesus's disciples: the day of Pentecost. This event continues to impact us profoundly to this day. We will explore how this day marked the arrival of the Spirit of God, which empowered all those who follow Jesus, including believers today. The same empowerment that the disciples experienced on that day is available to us, enabling us to serve as Christ's witnesses.

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- For ten days following Christ's ascension to heaven, the disciples had been in Jerusalem. They were waiting for the Father's promise of the Holy Spirit, which would empower them to be Christ's witnesses to the whole world. During this time, they dedicated themselves to prayer and prepared for the next phase of their ministry by filling Judas's apostolic vacancy with Matthias. Finally, the day arrived, and they were about to experience the power of the Spirit in their lives.



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POINT 1

JESUS'S DISCIPLES OBEY CHRIST (ACTS 2:1).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 2:1** from his or her Bible.

1 When the day of Pentecost had arrived, they were all together in one place.

INTRODUCE: **Verse 1a** highlights that the time of the Pentecost celebration had arrived and we will soon read that this is the setting for the arrival of the Holy Spirit. Although the association of Pentecost with the Spirit's arrival is prevalent today, historically Pentecost was a celebration for Israel.

DISCUSS: Using the bullets below, explain the significance of Pentecost (Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG] p. 74):

At Pentecost, God's perfect timing reminded the disciples of their commission to go to the harvest of all nations.

- Pentecost had two meanings for the Israelites of Jesus's day. First, it was an agricultural festival of firstfruits at the completion of the grain harvest. Through God sending the Holy Spirit, the festival celebrating the wheat harvest was also a time for harvest and gathering for the disciples. On this day, a few verses later in Scripture, we see that 3,000 people came to faith in Jesus Christ as a result of Peter's preaching of the gospel (Acts 2:38-41).
- The Israelites also associated the giving of the law of Moses with Pentecost, as it occurred fifty days from when Israel would have left Egypt and come to Mount Sinai. The association of Pentecost with God's commands reminded the disciples that teaching was also part of their commission.
- Pentecost was the second of three great harvest festivals for Israel. It occurred between the Feast of Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles. It was one of the most popular pilgrimages as it occurred in a favorable weather season for travel to Jerusalem. Thus, Jerusalem was full and active at this time with travelers from foreign places.

ASK: (DDG p. 74)

How can knowing that God's timing is always perfect encourage us in our walk of faith? (we can patiently wait for His guidance; we can know everything has a purpose for His glory; we can be amazed by how He works so effortlessly; we can be assured that He is at work even when it might not seem like it)

DIG: Invite a volunteer to read Acts 1:4,12-13. Then looking at **verse 1b**, ask: "How were the disciples obedient to Jesus's instructions?" (they waited in Jerusalem together; they spent ten days together in prayer and worship; they waited all together in one place for what God would do next)

FEAST OF PENTECOST

The Feast of Weeks—the Feast of Pentecost in Greek—was the Old Testament celebration of firstfruits (Ex. 34:22). In Jesus's time, it was known as Pentecost, which means "fiftieth" in Greek, as it was observed 50 days after the Passover.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The Bible recognizes no faith that does not lead to obedience, nor does it recognize any obedience that does not spring from faith. The two are opposite sides of the same coin."¹

—A. W. Tozer (1897–1963)

EXPLAIN: Using the previous information and the points below, explain from **verse 1b** (DDG p. 74):

The disciples obeyed Jesus in staying together in one place, revealing their faith in Christ's promises.

- The disciples' obedience led to the promise and blessing of the Holy Spirit. It did not earn them this gift, but it enabled them to be at the right place and the right time to receive God's blessings, as God had ordered it. It is important to note that God's grace cannot be earned; however, when we walk obediently with Him, we can experience a greater presence and power of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, when we walk in disobedience to God's commands, we do not lose our salvation, but we limit our ability to experience all of His blessings.
- The disciples "were all together in one place." We are reminded that not only does the Holy Spirit empower us to do things individually, but He empowers us corporately as we strive to be unified as God's people with a unified mission to fulfill God's commission. The Holy Spirit can be grieved by our disunity and strife (see Eph. 4:30-32).

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 74)

How does obedience to God's Word affect our lives? (obedience to God's Word helps us grow in our relationship with Him; as we obey His commands and follow His ways, we become more Christ-like and develop a deeper understanding of His will for our lives; when we obey, our intimacy increases with the triune God)

REFLECT: Say: "Take a moment of reflection and ask yourself, 'In what areas of my life am I not obeying God's commands? What can I repent of or confess or change in order to live in greater obedience to Christ?' Consider what steps you can take to live in greater obedience to Christ and pray for God's help and guidance in this process."

TRANSITION: The disciples' obedience led to an incredible experience as they received God's promise of the Holy Spirit and began to fulfill the mission to be Christ's witnesses throughout the world.

POINT 2

JESUS'S DISCIPLES ARE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT (ACTS 2:2-5).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 2:2-5** from his or her Bible.

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.

EXPLAIN: A loud noise and rumble filled the house where the disciples gathered. Discuss from **verses 2-5** (DDG p. 74):

Christ's disciples experienced a complete and permanent presence of the Holy Spirit, enabling them to obey Jesus's commission to reach the nations.

- In John 3:8, Jesus told Nicodemus: "The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." At Pentecost, God illustrated the power and prerogative of His Spirit as He performed His mighty work. Surely something miraculous, something never seen or heard of before, was happening and stirring a commotion. If imagining the scene, it would have been extremely loud and bright.
- The experience of speaking in tongues clearly describes the disciples miraculously speaking in the various languages known amongst the vast geographical regions of the audience described in the following verses. Devout Jews who had come to celebrate the harvest would be an immediate field of harvest for the disciples freshly baptized in the Spirit. Though the disciples may have been able to communicate the gospel to all in the common language of Aramaic spoken in Jerusalem, God used this miracle for the disciples to share the gospel with the captivated crowd so they would be astonished that Galileans could communicate fluently in the various native languages represented.

ASK: (DDG p. 74)

Jesus told the disciples that they would experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit. How is the arrival of the Holy Spirit like baptism? (it is wholly immersing—externally and internally—as the Spirit lives in the believer; the disciples felt and experienced the physical presence of the Holy Spirit; it is a permanent experience as baptism serves as a one-time experience in a believer's life—a believer only experiences the initial indwelling of the Spirit one time)

TEACH: The Holy Spirit rested upon the disciples like tongues of fire, filled them, and empowered them to speak in different languages. God the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, did this, not some type of force. Use the information below to continue to teach the personhood of the Spirit (DDG p. 74–75).

Key Doctrine #63: Personality of the Holy Spirit: The Bible not only affirms the full divinity of the Holy Spirit but also His personhood. Many people have mistakenly believed that the Spirit is a force or power, not a person. However, Scripture affirms His personhood by acknowledging that He is treated as a person (Acts 5:3; 7:51; Heb. 10:29), acts like a person (John 14:26, 15:26; Rom. 8:14), has attributes of a person (1 Cor. 2:10-11; Eph. 4:30), and acts in personal ways (Isa. 63:10; Acts 13:2). In addition to these, the Bible also affirms that Christians relate to Him personally (Acts 5:3-4; 7:51).

- After the initial baptism of the Spirit at the day of Pentecost, believers receive the Spirit when they believe the gospel message of Christ and repent of their sins (Acts 2:38). Paul clearly taught that the Holy Spirit is received at the moment of salvation through Jesus Christ. First Corinthians 12:13 emphasizes that all believers, regardless of their background or status, are given the same Spirit. In Romans 8:9, Paul asserts that those who do not possess the Holy Spirit do not belong to Christ and are controlled by their sinful nature. Furthermore, Ephesians 1:13-14 teaches that the Holy Spirit is the seal of salvation for all who believe in Jesus, serving as a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the final redemption of God's possession.
- We often confuse the concepts of Spirit filling with Spirit baptism. While believers can experience a greater filling of the Spirit (Eph. 5:18), the initial reception, sealing, or baptism of the Holy Spirit is a singular event at the moment of salvation (1:13).

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 75)

Why is it important that Christ's disciples be filled with the Holy Spirit? (to receive the power to be His witnesses to the world; to be guided and reminded of the truth Christ proclaimed; to be comforted and led by God; to be assured of God's presence wherever they go)

TRANSITION: The indwelling of the Holy Spirit enabled Christ's disciples to experience God's power. After receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the disciples were able to begin fulfilling Christ's commission to be His witnesses. As God drew the attention of the crowds to them, the disciples immediately began their mission.

FIRE

John the Baptist foretold that Jesus would baptize with the Spirit and with fire (Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16). God often appeared as fire to His people. For example, an angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in a burning bush (Ex. 3:2-4). God also led the Israelites out of Egypt as a pillar of cloud and fire (13:22), as well as appearing on the tabernacle as fire (40:38).

POINT 3

JESUS'S DISCIPLES REVEAL GOD'S WORKS (ACTS 2:6-13).

READ: Due to some more difficult place names in this passage, read aloud **Acts 2:6-11** yourself from this guide or your Bible.

6 When this sound occurred, a crowd came together and was confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language. **7** They were astounded and amazed, saying, "Look, aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? **8** How is it that each of us can hear them in our own native language? **9** Parthians, Medes, Elamites; those who live in Mesopotamia, in Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, **10** Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts), **11** Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the magnificent acts of God in our own tongues."

DIG: Break into groups of 2-4 and ask: "Why do you think Luke wrote out so many of the different people groups listed?" (as examples of a variety of people and nations that needed to hear the gospel message; to acknowledge that all nations and cultures have a right to hear the gospel message; as a way to honor the importance of various cultures, that they may be seen; also see notes below)

EXPLAIN: Using **verses 6-11**, discuss (DDG p. 75):

The Holy Spirit empowers Jesus's disciples to witness to people from all backgrounds and cultures.

- Luke's list of nations in the Pentecost story was not intended to be an all-inclusive list, but instead, emphasized the significant communities where Jews had been residing since the period of Israel and Judah's captivity. Many Jews had returned to the nation of Israel, while others chose to remain in the places where they were taken during the captivity. Although some Jews who returned to Jerusalem may have viewed those who stayed in the lands of captivity as unfaithful, the disciples did not make any distinction.
- Luke highlights the importance of the disciples' witness to the diverse nations by listing five distinct Jewish groups of people from different regions: (1) the area east of the Euphrates River—Parthia, Media, Elam (Elymais), and Mesopotamia; (2) Judea; (3) Asia Minor, which includes Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, and Phrygia and Pamphylia; (4) Egypt and nearby Libya and Cyrene; and (5) those from Rome, from the European mainland.
- Throughout the book of Acts, we observe Christ's disciples dedicated to spreading the gospel to all people as the Holy Spirit empowered them as He continues to empower us today.



PENTECOST VS. THE TOWER OF BABYLON

Scan this QR code for an explanation of the events at Pentecost as a reversal of God's judgment at Babel.

PROSELYTES

Those who have changed from one religion to another. In this context, those who accepted the ways of Judaism but who were not Jewish by birth.

ASK: (DDG p. 75)

How can you develop more relationships with those of various cultures to share the gospel? (be intentional in seeking relationships of different cultures: ex., hosting an international student, volunteering to teach English, going to ethnic restaurants and befriending staff; seeking out mission trips to other cultures; studying other cultures to be prepared for an encounter)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 2:12-13** from his or her Bible.

12 They were all astounded and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” **13** But some sneered and said, “They’re drunk on new wine.”

HIGHLIGHT: In **verses 12-13**, those with a receptive heart were astounded, but others mocked the disciples and dismissed the power of God in their presence. Think about these different reactions as you highlight the following (DDG p. 75):

The Holy Spirit empowers Jesus’s disciples to share the gospel with people, no matter the response.

- Some of the people in the crowd were at a loss for an explanation, confounded and bewildered by the disciples’ fervor. The power of the Spirit of God is beyond what our minds can comprehend. This is the power that Jesus promised will accompany those who become His witnesses.
- We should not be surprised when we encounter individuals with hardened hearts. Some in the crowd, after witnessing the disciples’ miraculous speech that clearly testified to the power of God, mocked not only the disciples but the Spirit of God. They claimed that the disciples were drunken babblers.
- Given that the grape harvest would not occur for two more months, the accusation that they were full of “new wine” was not an attempt to explain the situation but a pejorative comment to dismiss what was obviously happening before them.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 75)

From Day 5 in the DDG: **How should the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives help us to not fear rejection or hostility when sharing the gospel with others?** (knowing He is with me would make me less fearful; knowing He empowers me would make me more confident; knowing the Spirit speaks to hearts would help me feel less overwhelmed)

TRANSITION: Peter was not distracted by the insults of the mockers but used their comments to share the gospel of Christ, leading to an amazing result, as we’ll see later.

MY RESPONSE

SAY: Jesus had instructed His disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit because He would empower them to be His witnesses on earth. As promised, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, filled them, and empowered them to complete the mission they had been given. God gives the Holy Spirit to all who trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior, and the Spirit changes us to be more like Jesus. Because the Holy Spirit changes us to be more like Christ each day, we rely on the Holy Spirit as we share the gospel, call people to repentance and faith, and live in community.

HEAD:

The disciples' faith in Christ's promises and obedience to His commands enabled them to experience God's power and the Holy Spirit's work. Unwavering faith in God's promises brings peace and trust in His guidance and provision, while obeying His commands gives a sense of purpose and direction in life. Aligning ourselves with God's will and obeying Him allows us to experience His transformative power and live a life aligned with His plan for us.

How does knowing God is trustworthy help you obey His commands for His glory?

HEART:

On the day of Pentecost, the disciples were impacted forever by the incredible work of God's Spirit that transformed them for gospel ministry to reach the world. Today, all of Christ's followers have the same Holy Spirit within us and the same command to reach the nations with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In what areas of your life can you confess your lack of obedience in carrying the gospel to the nations?

HANDS:

The disciples received the Holy Spirit not only for personal edification but for them to be Christ's witnesses. We have received the Holy Spirit to lead and empower us too. By relying on the Holy Spirit, we can participate in the harvest for God's kingdom.

What opportunities has God given you to share the gospel this week?

PRAY: Father, we thank You for the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. May we be faithful to Your Word, available for Your service, and empowered to share the gospel in both word and deed to everyone.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Should we not press it home upon our consciences that the sole object of our conversion was not the salvation of our own souls, but that we might become co-workers with our Lord and Master in the conversion of the world?"²

—Lottie Moon (1840–1912)

EXTRA

POINT 1: JESUS'S DISCIPLES OBEY CHRIST (ACTS 2:1).

+ COMMENTARY

“Pentecost was the day on which the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples (2:1-4). This event is perhaps one of the three most important moments in redemptive history. The first event was creation, the moment when God created the stage on which he would work out his sovereign plan. . . . The second most significant moment in redemptive history was the substitutionary death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. In the cross and resurrection of Christ, God accomplished redemption and ushered in the new covenant, fulfilling all the promises and expectations of the Old Testament. The third most significant event in redemptive history is the day of Pentecost—the birth of the church, the creation of God’s new covenant people.”³

+ ILLUSTRATION

The term “poser” is a slang word used to describe someone who pretends to be something or someone they’re not in order to fit in with a certain group or to gain attention or respect. For example, imagine you meet someone who claims to be a fan of a music group, but when you ask them about their favorite songs or albums, they don’t seem to know much. They may just wear a T-shirt with the band’s logo or attend their concerts without really understanding their music.

James 2:17 calls out “poser Christians.” Just like the music fan who follows a group without really knowing anything about them, this person may be drawn to the idea of being a Christian without fully understanding the commitment that it entails. They may be attracted to the social aspects of church or the idea of being a “good person,” but they haven’t yet allowed Christ to transform their heart and mind to move them to actions of obedience and service to the Lord.

As disciples of Christ, we are called to more than just superficially following Him. We are called to dive deep into His teachings, form a personal relationship with Him, and allow His love to transform our lives. This kind of faith is evident in Acts 2:1, and the disciples’ genuine faith allowed them to experience God’s power and blessing. Likewise, when we stop “posing” and live for Christ in obedience and service, we experience the Holy Spirit working in and through us as we tell others of the amazing good news of Jesus Christ.

EXTRA

POINT 2: JESUS'S DISCIPLES ARE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT (ACTS 2:2-5).

+ COMMENTARY

“Holy Spirit brings new life to those who believe in Jesus Christ, and with that life comes a continuing power to those who are continually filled. It means fire in our lives, individually burning away the chaff and flaming out to those around us. It means the truth of God going forth from us in a way we would never have dreamed of—the divine utterance of God through us. It means communication, joy, thankfulness, submission.”⁴

+ COMMENTARY

“Pentecost also signals the breaking of barriers that have separated the human race since Babel, with the formation of a new humanity in Christ. In other words, Pentecost reverses what happened at Babel. In fact, as Conrad Gempf has shown, something greater happened. In a reversal of the scattering that took place at Babel, the Jewish pilgrim festivals, like Pentecost, brought people from the far corners of the earth to worship God. What is new here is that from now on, people would not need to come back to some central place to worship God—and in the Hebrew tongue. Rather, they could go to the far corners of the earth and worship God in their own languages. Moreover, people no longer need to build up to the heavens in search of the significance they lost when they were thrown out of the garden of Eden. God has now sent his Spirit down to us and lifted our experience to a new level of significance. ‘Babel and Eden are not “undone” as much as they are redeemed and their negative effects nullified.’ Pentecost, then, tells us that we, today, can have an intimate experience of God and can manifest power in ministry. Moreover, the barriers that divided the human race have been broken so that a new humanity is on the way to being created.”⁵

+ ILLUSTRATION

Imagine you are on a sailboat out at sea with unfurled sails, but no wind to fill them, leaving the boat stuck in one place, unable to move forward. Suddenly, a strong wind blows, filling the sails and propelling the boat forward with great speed and power. In the same way, when we are filled with the Holy Spirit, our lives are empowered to move forward as Christ’s disciples. Without the Holy Spirit, we would be unable to make progress or grow in our relationship with God. However, when we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we are able to accomplish things we never thought possible and move forward with great speed and power.

Just as the disciples in Acts 2 were filled with the Holy Spirit, we too can experience the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The Holy Spirit enables us to speak with love and grace, serve others selflessly, and share the gospel boldly. The Holy Spirit also works in us to help us overcome sin and temptation, grow in our faith and knowledge of God, and live a life that glorifies Christ.

Therefore, we should not underestimate the importance of the Holy Spirit in our lives and should seek to walk according to the Spirit so that we may be filled and empowered by Him.

POINT 3: JESUS'S DISCIPLES REVEAL GOD'S WORKS (ACTS 2:6-13).

+ COMMENTARY

“When the Holy Spirit comes in power, what we are to have is not some particularly intense experience. We don’t have to speak in tongues so that in a miraculous way everybody will hear our words in his or her language. Rather, we need to have a widespread speaking about Jesus. Everyone will hear as the gospel spreads through the testimony of those who are obeying the Great Commission. That is what you and I are called upon to do. That is the task to which the Lord Jesus Christ sends us.”⁶

+ ILLUSTRATION

A bridge serves to connect two separate points, allowing people to cross over to the other side. In a similar manner, the Spirit of God at work in Christ’s disciples has sought to connect people to God since the birth of the church at Pentecost. Through the empowerment of the Spirit of God, Christians have revealed the love and power of God throughout the world by building bridges between God and humanity.

Christians accomplish this is by spreading the gospel through acts of love, compassion, and service. They share the message of God’s love through Christ with people from all walks of life, breaking down barriers of fear, doubt, and unbelief. Moreover, Christians have also built bridges of understanding and reconciliation between people of different races, cultures, and backgrounds. They work toward promoting justice and equality, and creating a society that reflects God’s love for all people. Through their actions, Christians empowered by God’s Spirit have transformed the world and brought hope to countless individuals.

As we follow Christ and are empowered by the Spirit of God, we too can play a unique role in connecting people to the knowledge, love, and grace of God. By showing and telling others of His glory and grace, we can be used by God to build bridges between God and humanity, bringing people closer to Him, and seeing lives and communities changed by the gospel.

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THE SPIRIT EMPOWERS

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. The Holy Spirit convicts the world (John 16:7-11).
2. The Holy Spirit guides toward truth (John 16:12-14; 1 Cor. 2:14).
3. The Holy Spirit leads God's people (Rom. 8:12-17).

Background Passages: John 16; Romans 8; 1 Corinthians 2

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

The Holy Spirit begins the work of salvation through the ministry of conviction and then continues by guiding the person toward truth and leading those who trust in Christ.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

After Jesus completed His work of paying for sin on the cross, He returned to be with the Father, but sent the Holy Spirit. The Spirit convicts people of sin and guides them to truth so that they might trust in Christ and be saved. The Spirit then continues ministering to the believer by leading them and attesting to their newfound life through Jesus.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we have been saved by God, we seek to fulfill our mission of sharing the gospel—trusting not in our own power, but in the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit to change lives.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **If you could have a superpower, what would it be?** (expect answers that may be serious, “The ability to get all my work done in a day,” as well as silly, “I would like to fly”; you can follow up the question and ask how that power would help them in life)

TRANSITION: When Christ sent the Holy Spirit to empower His disciples, He gave them a supernatural ability to live for Him and to fulfill His purposes in their lives. The Holy Spirit convicts unbelievers of their need to follow Jesus and leads believers to become more like Christ.

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- The Old Testament prophets promised a day when the Spirit of God would dwell in God's people (Isa. 44:1-5; Ezek. 36:22-32; Joel 2:28-32), and Jesus modeled a life with the Spirit's presence and power (Luke 4:1,18; Matt. 12:28). Jesus promised that the Spirit would come (John 14:16-17,26; 16:7) and the church experienced this arrival at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). Today, the Holy Spirit works through all believers, empowering them to live for Christ and assisting them as they proclaim the gospel to all nations.



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POINT 1

THE HOLY SPIRIT CONVICTS THE WORLD

(JOHN 16:7-11).

INTRODUCE: What would it have been like to be one of Jesus's disciples, spending each day with Him, hearing His teachings, and witnessing the miracles He performed before their very eyes? The experience would have been truly extraordinary. Even with all of those incredible experiences, Jesus said that we are better off having the Holy Spirit with us. This is an amazing statement that invites us to explore the unique gift of the Holy Spirit.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **John 16:7-11** from his or her Bible.

7 Nevertheless, I am telling you the truth. It is for your benefit that I go away, because if I don't go away the Counselor will not come to you. If I go, I will send him to you. **8** When he comes, he will convict the world about sin, righteousness, and judgment: **9** About sin, because they do not believe in me; **10** about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will no longer see me; **11** and about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.

HIGHLIGHT: In **verse 7**, discuss (Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG] p. 82):

Christ sent the Holy Spirit as a helping presence to His disciples in His physical absence.

- John's use of the word "Counselor" must be understood both as a role of comforting as well as a forensic term as a witness advocate who testifies to Christ. Any understanding of one of these aspects without the other falls short of the usage John intended.
- During Jesus's day, trials were not conducted by lawyers representing the prosecution and defense. Instead, a judge would question witnesses who presented evidence in order to establish the truth. The role of an advocate or defense counsel for the accused was not that of a skilled professional, but rather someone who would speak the truth and defend the accused. In this historical context, the Holy Spirit is particularly well-suited to be the primary witness for Christ, given that He has been Jesus's constant companion from before the world began.
- Both Christ and the Holy Spirit are counselors to the believer. In John 14:16, Jesus stated, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever." Just as Jesus had been a helping presence to the disciples, the Holy Spirit would fulfill the same role as Jesus departed. To have the Spirit is to have Christ; to have Christ is to have the Spirit.

THE COUNSELOR

Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as the Counselor. This title is derived from a Greek word that can also be translated as "Advocate" or "Comforter." The word literally means "one who is called alongside," implying that the Holy Spirit comes alongside believers to offer help, support, and guidance.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Where there is no conviction by the Holy Spirit of sin, there is no saving faith in Christ. The Spirit of God so thoroughly convinces a man of his sinfulness that he gladly takes his place with the publican and cries, 'God be merciful to me; I am the sinner.'"¹

—Don Fortner
(1950–2020)

ASK: (DDG p. 82)

How is the Holy Spirit a counselor, helper, comforter, and advocate in our everyday life? (He reminds us of God's presence in our lives; He empowers us to live righteously; He guides us on good paths in life; He convicts us of sin; He gives us peace)

EXAMINE: In groups of 2-3, ask: "The Holy Spirit serves as a helping presence to believers, but what does He do in the world based on **verses 8-11** and your understanding?"

EXPLAIN: After groups share their answers, explain the three convictions of the Holy Spirit that Jesus described. Discuss (DDG p. 82):

The Holy Spirit convicts the world by showing them their sin and need to repent, showing them the path toward righteousness in Christ, and showing them the consequences of judgment.

- The "world" in verse 8 describes the kingdom of the world that rejects Jesus and stands opposed to the kingdom of God. John often drew a distinction between Christ's kingdom and the world's sinfulness (see John 7:7; 14:7; 15:18; 16:33; 18:36).
- The Holy Spirit exposes the sinfulness of the world, revealing that the world's values and behaviors are contrary to God's standards. The Spirit also convicts the world of righteousness, making it clear that true righteousness can only be found in Christ. Finally, the Spirit convicts the world of judgment, warning that all will stand before God to give an account of their lives.
- The role of the Spirit is so vital that in a previous passage, Jesus taught that "unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (3:5).

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 82)

From Day 2 in the DDG: **In what ways have you seen the Holy Spirit drawing others to faith in Christ?** (changed life of someone who simply one day decided to go to church or go back to church; someone who hits rock bottom and calls out to the Lord; someone who after looking at other philosophies and religions realizes that Jesus is the only way; a broken spouse deciding to love their spouse like Jesus does)

TRANSITION: The Holy Spirit not only brings conviction of sin, but also reveals spiritual truth to believe in Jesus as Savior and follow Jesus as Lord.

POINT 2

THE HOLY SPIRIT GUIDES TOWARD TRUTH

(JOHN 16:12-14; 1 COR. 2:14)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **John 16:12-14** from his or her own Bible.

12 "I still have many things to tell you, but you can't bear them now.

13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth. For he will not speak on his own, but he will speak whatever he hears. He will also declare to you what is to come. **14** He will glorify me, because he will take from what is mine and declare it to you."

DISCUSS: Use the bullet points below to discuss this main idea from **John 16:12-14** (DDG p. 82):

The Holy Spirit is given to guide us to the truth of Christ's purposes and teachings.

- John 16:14 says the Holy Spirit seeks to glorify Christ. The whole passage focuses on the Spirit's emphasis in bringing understanding of the teaching and ministry of Christ to individuals, so that Jesus would be glorified.
- Several references to Christ's glorification in the Gospel of John (7:39; 12:23; 13:31) are directly related to His glorification and exaltation at the cross and ascension. The role of the Spirit is to glorify Christ by guiding individuals to understand the significance of Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection.
- John 16:14 teaches that the Holy Spirit's work in believers is not limited to instructing them about what Christ taught and did, but also about what is to come. This is evident in the Spirit's work among the disciples in the book of Acts and is part of the ongoing ministry of the Spirit in leading believers to live for Christ and be His witnesses to all people in all places.
- Just as the Son came to do the will of the Father (John 6:38), the Spirit is sent to guide in the truth that the Son has proclaimed (16:13). Throughout the Gospels, the intention of each person of the Trinity is to glorify the others.

ASK: (DDG p. 82)

How can we walk in step with the Spirit's guidance? (by daily walking with the Lord in repentance and faith to align yourself with the triune God; by obeying when we are prompted by the Spirit's guidance; by reading and studying the Bible to know God's will; by seeking the counsel of mature Christians to discern between one's own promptings and the Spirit's promptings)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **1 Corinthians 2:14** from his or her Bible.

14 But the person without the Spirit does not receive what comes from God's Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to understand it since it is evaluated spiritually.

COMPARE: Divide a dry erase board and encourage your group to compare someone who is living in the Spirit and someone who is not. (acceptance vs. a rejection of Jesus as Lord and Savior; acceptance vs. a rejection of truth; wisdom vs. folly; living for God and others vs. for self and flesh; a life of peace vs. without peace; a joyful life vs. a fearful and worrisome life)

HIGHLIGHT: Use **1 Corinthians 2:14** and the points below to highlight the following point (DDG p. 82):

Without the Holy Spirit's guidance, we cannot comprehend the things of God.

- Scripture describes a person without the Spirit as being fleshly; and as such, men and women without spiritual transformation cannot experience or enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3,5,36; 8:51). First Corinthians 2:14 describes unbelievers as blind and insensitive to the realities of the Spirit-governed kingdom of God—failing to understand or accept the nature of spiritual reality.
- The world resists the things of God because the things of God are discerned only through the Spirit. This verse implies that the things of God cannot be understood merely through human wisdom or intellect.
- People who reject the gospel do not necessarily have a problem with understanding it intellectually, but rather there is a spiritual deficiency that causes them to reject Jesus. As believers share the gospel with others, they must be mindful of the need for a spiritual transformation to occur in order for individuals to accept the message. This is why prayer is so important. Believers should continually pray for the Spirit of God to work in people's hearts, bringing conviction of sin and faith in Jesus, as they share the gospel.

DISCUSS: Reflecting on the answers of the chart on the board, ask (DDG p. 82):

What are you thankful for in regards to the Spirit? (He leads me to truth; He keeps me from sin; He gives me wisdom; He is God with me; He reminds me of God's love and truths)

TRANSITION: Christ has given the Holy Spirit to convict us of sin and help us know and apply the Scriptures. Moreover, the Holy Spirit also empowers us to live for Christ and endure all difficulties we may encounter in our lives.

POINT 3

THE HOLY SPIRIT LEADS GOD'S PEOPLE (ROM. 8:12-17).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Romans 8:12-13** from his or her Bible.

12 So then, brothers and sisters, we are not obligated to the flesh to live according to the flesh, **13** because if you live according to the flesh, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

DISCUSS: In groups of 3-4, ask: "What is the struggle of the flesh and the Spirit in **Romans 8:12-13**?" (it is a conflict between two opposing forces within a believer; the flesh represents our sinful nature, while the Spirit represents the Holy Spirit who dwells in us; living in the flesh leads to death while living in the Spirit leads to life) Then come together to share answers.

HIGHLIGHT: Discuss the key doctrine below (DDG p. 82-83):

Key Doctrine #64: Work of the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Christian:

The Spirit's work in the life of a Christian begins in 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.

- In Romans 8:9, Paul teaches that if we have the Spirit of God in us, we are no longer to live according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. Because of this, we have no obligation to live according to the flesh (v. 12). Instead, the opposite is true: we owe a debt to the Spirit to live according to Christ, who has redeemed us from sin.
- Verse 13 portrays a life and death situation. If we live according to the flesh, we will die, but if we die according to the Spirit, we will live. This passage encourages us to put to death the very acts, thoughts, and motivations that would lead to our spiritual deaths.

ASK: (DDG p. 83)

How do we put sins to death? (by confessing and repenting of sin; by not putting ourselves in places or situations where we are more prone to sin; by reflecting on our strongest sins and daily practicing with the Spirit's help the act of resistance)

READ: Ask your group to quietly read **Romans 8:14-17** from their Bibles.

14 For all those led by God's Spirit are God's sons. **15** For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Instead, you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, "'Abba', Father!" **16** The Spirit himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God's children, **17** and if children, also heirs—heirs of God and coheirs with Christ—if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

REFLECT: Guide your group to reflect on their understanding of who they are in Christ, led by God's Spirit, as seen in these verses. Lead your group in a time of prayer, praying through these verses, thanking God for the blessings listed.

EXPLAIN: After your time of prayer, explain the following idea (DDG p. 83):

The Holy Spirit leads believers as they are newly identified as children of God, heirs of God, and coheirs with Christ.

- It is important to practice interpretation before application when reading Romans 8:14-17. Although it describes a progression of spiritual experience unique to each believer, the primary point of the passage is to describe the common experience of faith. All Christians are led by the Spirit (v. 14), have received the Spirit of adoption (v. 15), cry out "Abba, Father" as the Spirit bears witness to them (v. 16), and are therefore heirs with Christ (v. 17).
- Our adoption through Christ allows us to "cry out, 'Abba, Father!'" Crying out refers to a strong, loud, spontaneous, and emotional release, emphasizing that our familial status as God's children allows us to approach Him with urgency to receive His attention.
- The latter part of verse 17 emphasizes the connection between suffering and glory. Christ's suffering led to His glory, and the same is true for His disciples. Christians should view suffering for Christ as an opportunity to identify with Him, to grow in faith, and to remind us that we are not of this world and our true home is with Him in heaven. Suffering for Christ is a way to share in His mission of redemption, bringing God glory.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 83)

How does the knowledge that we are heirs with Christ through adoption by the Holy Spirit give us hope for the future? (we will always be part of God's family; with a Father like the Almighty God, we can feel safe and be at peace; knowing we can have a close relationship with the Sovereign Lord allows us to ask what we want; knowing as a Father He is always for us should help with any worry)

TRANSITION: The Holy Spirit helps us overcome our sin and assures us of our identity in Christ as children of God. Wherever He leads, we can boldly follow.

ABBA

An Aramaic term of endearment from a child for a father. By addressing God as Abba, believers express their status as adopted children of God and coheirs with Christ, the Son of God. This reflects a relationship of both intimacy and reverence. Jesus Himself practiced using this word and modeled it to the disciples (Mark 14:36).

MY RESPONSE

SAY: After Jesus completed His work of paying for sin on the cross, He returned to be with the Father, but sent the Holy Spirit. The Spirit convicts people of sin and guides them to truth so that they might trust in Christ and be saved. The Spirit then continues ministering to the believer by leading them and attesting to their newfound life through Jesus. Because we have been saved by God, we seek to fulfill our mission of sharing the gospel—trusting not in our own power, but in the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit to change lives.

SING: Pass out copies of **PACK ITEM 10: TRINITY HYMN** and sing it together to praise the Father, Son, and Spirit for their good works.

HEAD:

The Holy Spirit plays a vital role in our spiritual growth. Before we can fully embrace the truths of the gospel, the Holy Spirit brings conviction of sin and helps us to recognize our need for a Savior. Once we place our trust in Christ, the Holy Spirit begins to work in our lives, leading our minds to spiritual truths and illuminating the teachings of Scripture. We are able then to deepen our understanding of God's Word and grow in knowledge of Him.

How can you cultivate a deeper reliance on the Holy Spirit in your life and grow in your relationship with Him?

HEART:

The Holy Spirit convicts the world—and us—of sin. We need Him to help us discern right from wrong and prompt us toward lives of service and mission. Many times though, we might choose to not listen or obey His promptings.

What can you confess that happened recently when you felt a prompting from the Spirit and chose to not act upon it?

HANDS:

The Spirit equips us with spiritual gifts, such as teaching, serving, and encouraging, which enable us to minister to others. We are empowered to resist temptation and live in obedience to God's commands, even in the face of adversity. As we walk in step with the Holy Spirit, we are able to boldly be Christ's witnesses to all people everywhere.

In what ways can you use your spiritual gifts to serve others around you this week?

PRAY: Father, thank You for giving us the Holy Spirit. May we seek to live guided by the Spirit, bringing glory to Your name. Help us be sensitive to the Spirit's leading, reflecting Your love and grace to those around us.



VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Without the Spirit of God, we can do nothing. We are ships without wind, or chariots without steeds, like branches without sap, we are withered; like coals without fire, we are useless; as an offering without the sacrificial flame, we are unaccepted. . . . We are but the stones and he the sling, we are the arrows, and he the bow."²

—Charles H. Spurgeon (1843–1892)

POINT 1: THE HOLY SPIRIT CONVICTS THE WORLD

(JOHN 16:7-11).

+ OPTIONAL DISCUSSION

Ask for volunteers to share how they sensed the Holy Spirit's conviction in their own personal salvation experience. After a few people have shared their testimony, open up the discussion to the group as a whole. Emphasizing the role of the Spirit to bring conviction that leads to salvation, ask questions such as: (1) What common themes or experiences did you notice among the different testimonies? (2) What did you learn about the Holy Spirit's role in conviction from these stories? (3) How can we apply what we've learned to our own lives and ministries?

POINT 2: THE HOLY SPIRIT GUIDES TOWARD TRUTH

(JOHN 16:12-14; 1 COR. 2:14)

+ ILLUSTRATION

Jigsaw puzzles are a relaxing and fulfilling activity for many people. Puzzles are available in varying levels of difficulty; however, one type of puzzle is particularly challenging: the mystery puzzle. Unlike other puzzles, a mystery puzzle does not come in a box with an image of what the puzzle is supposed to look like. Without the finished image, it is nearly impossible to complete and a frustrating process to endure.

The mystery puzzle is much like the disciples' situation before Jesus's resurrection and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. They had Jesus's teachings but did not have a complete picture of God's plan. But the disciples were not left alone in their confusion. Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth and to empower them to remain faithful and carry out His mission in the world. Through the Holy Spirit's indwelling, they were able to proclaim the gospel with clarity and conviction, and to live out their faith with purpose and power.

References

1. Donald S. Fortner, *Grace for Today: Daily Devotional Readings* (Danville, KY: Grace Baptist Church of Danville, 1986), 168.
2. Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit: Sermons* (United Kingdom: Passmore & Alabaster, 1875), 16–17.

EVERY DAY

THE LORD ADDED

TO THEIR NUMBER

“With Miracles, Wonders, and Signs”

by Allyson M. Howell

+

After Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples were left with the promise that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and conquered sin will be given to them (Acts 1:8). What will happen when this power from the Holy Spirit comes upon the disciples? Since this power is from God, its use will be beautiful and will bring salvation to many. And how will the power of the Holy Spirit work to bring salvation? Through the church. It is through the proclamation of the gospel by God’s people that the nations will hear the good news!

For many of us, this is a scary and almost unbelievable truth. “You mean God will use me? But I am so weak. I am so scared. I am worried about my reputation. I don’t know how to do it.” While your fears may feel overwhelming, the reality is that God’s power rests on you! And when God’s people obey His commands and proclaim the gospel, God brings about repentance, baptism, fellowship, miracles, praise, and boldness—all with the purpose of bringing the nations into His kingdom.

We see each of these gifts from God played out in the book of Acts as God gave the disciples power through the Holy Spirit—the same power we have today!

THROUGH REPENTANCE, BAPTISM, AND FELLOWSHIP

When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, existing followers of Jesus were filled and begin speaking in many different languages. When the crowd misunderstood why this was happening, the disciples did not get offended, but instead shared the whole gospel—that Jesus came to save the world from sin and death. And because God’s power through the Holy Spirit was at work, thousands of people repented from their sins, obeyed Jesus’s command to be baptized, and gathered with God’s people to share everything they had and to fellowship.

These seemingly ordinary acts were incredible displays of God’s power. Every time a person understands and believes the gospel and turns away from a life of sin, it is an outworking of God’s power. Every time someone decides to proclaim

publicly their trust in Christ through baptism, that is an outworking of God's power. Every time we obey in gathering together to love, care for, and enjoy each other's presence, that too is an outworking of God's power. All these things are a result of the Holy Spirit working. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we can joyfully obey God's commands, trusting that obedience is more valuable than our feelings and our fears. This obedience by the power of the Spirit is what brought thousands into the church after Jesus ascended to heaven, and it is what brings people to salvation today.

THROUGH MIRACLES THAT PRODUCE PRAISE

God not only displays His power through repentance, baptism, and fellowship with the church, but also through miracles. Miracles are sometimes hard to understand. It is easy to swing on a pendulum of false teaching about them. On one end, there are those who believe miracles are not real, so they dismiss anything supernatural or unexplainable. On the other end, there are those who believe miracles are so essential to salvation that they make up fake spiritual gestures or mix them with evils such as witchcraft and divination.

When God's power is at work, even the fiercest opposition cannot destroy or thwart the gospel going forward.

But what we know from Scripture and the book of Acts is that miracles exist for the purpose of repentance from sin and for praising God. Any time a miracle occurs, it is an opportunity for believers to say: "Look at what God did! He is worthy of all of our praise!" For when God's power is on display, the response should not be to shrug it off. Instead,

as it was for all who were at the temple when a man who was lame began to walk, God's power in miracles should bring about repentance and praise. Miracles are one way that God chooses to draw many to Himself and lead them to the salvation they need.

THROUGH BOLDNESS DESPITE OPPOSITION

Our proclamation of the gospel might not always look like thousands repenting and miracles abounding as in Acts. Sometimes proclaiming the gospel brings about persecution. While most Americans are unfamiliar with the life-threatening persecution going on in many parts of the world, every Christian who has shared the gospel is familiar with opposition.

Despite imprisonment, Peter and John in Acts 4 stood boldly before the Jewish leadership and proclaimed the truth about Jesus. When they were released, they shared with the church about what happened to them, and the church did not waiver.

When God's power is at work, even the fiercest opposition cannot destroy or thwart the gospel going forward. There is a well-known quote by Tertullian, a member of the early church, saying, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."¹ What this implies is that persecution often has a reverse effect. Instead of silencing Christians or causing them to fear, their faithfulness and boldness in the face of opposition actually serves to strengthen the church and send the gospel out even further.

There is nothing that can come against the power of God and still stand. It is the call of every believer to grip firmly to God's power and declare the gospel so that many would be added to the church every day.

1. Tertullian, *Apologeticus pro Christianis* (Apology), Ch. 1, quoted in John Hunt, *AMG Concise Church History* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2008), 78.



THE CHURCH GROWS



+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. God's people are empowered to proclaim Jesus boldly (Acts 2:22-31).
2. God's people are empowered to call others to repentance (Acts 2:37-41).
3. God's people are empowered to live together as one (Acts 2:42-47).

Background Passage: Acts 2

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

Both the bold preaching of Peter and the large number of people who trusted in Christ reveal the transformative power of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of people.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Peter's sermon at Pentecost, a mere fifty days after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, demonstrates the Holy Spirit's power to change those who trust in Jesus. The power of the gospel changed Peter, whom God used to preach Jesus to the crowd so that thousands would believe and be changed as well. All who believe in Jesus are changed, never to be the same.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we are a new creation in Christ, we seek to live according to our new identity as we put our old selves to death day by day.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.



INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **When were you able to do something that you thought was impossible and what gave you the power to do that task?** (gave a speech in front of a large audience where the power came from preparation; asked someone to marry me where the deep love I felt overcame my fears; grieved the death of a loved one where people around me supported and cared for me)

TRANSITION: The disciples were given a massive mission to take the message of Jesus to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). In order to accomplish this mission they would need God's power and help. He promised the help would come in the person of the Holy Spirit (1:4-5). The Spirit came (2:1-13), and the unique power of the Spirit rested upon people to such an extent that witnesses thought, "These people are drunk!" Their accusation provided the backdrop for Peter's first recorded sermon, in which he argued that the Christians were not drunk but filled with God's Spirit. The Spirit's activity, Peter would contend, was evidence that God's saving plan for humanity came into the world through Jesus Christ.

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- The Holy Spirit came to the first followers of Jesus. They then had the power they needed to take the gospel to the nations (Acts 1:8). This work started with Peter, who boldly and clearly proclaimed the good news about Jesus to the people who had gathered for the Pentecost celebration. God's power through the Holy Spirit was on display, both in the message Peter proclaimed and in the response of those who believed.



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POINT 1

GOD'S PEOPLE ARE EMPOWERED TO PROCLAIM JESUS BOLDLY (ACTS 2:22-31).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 2:22-24** from his or her Bible.

22 “Fellow Israelites, listen to these words: This Jesus of Nazareth was a man attested to you by God with miracles, wonders, and signs that God did among you through him, just as you yourselves know. **23** Though he was delivered up according to God’s determined plan and foreknowledge, you used lawless people to nail him to a cross and kill him. **24** God raised him up, ending the pains of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by death.

DISCUSS: In groups of 3-4, ask: “What would have made it difficult for Peter to share this message to this group?” (many Jews still were antagonistic toward Jesus and His disciples; the leaders were still trying to dismantle the group of Jesus followers; there was a real threat of danger to their lives; Peter’s message put guilt on the people)

EXPLAIN: Discuss **verses 22-24** and the following main idea (Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG] p. 94):

Peter’s focus was that the death and resurrection of Jesus was the fulfillment of God’s promised plan to save sinners and redeem the world.

- Peter—who had abandoned and denied Jesus, was restored by Him, and here, was empowered by the Holy Spirit—is recorded as one of the first Christians to proclaim the good news boldly.
- Peter was clear that Jesus’s death was due to both the people’s actions and God’s intention. Jesus was delivered up “according to God’s determined plan and foreknowledge” (v. 23), which shows us that nothing that happened to Jesus was an accident or somehow a deviation from God’s will. Yet, the Jews “used lawless people to nail him to a cross and kill him.” In other words, the Jews and the Romans were complicit in Jesus’s death, active participants in the tragedy of the cross. But Peter ended his sermon by once again returning to God’s plan. Yes, evil men killed Jesus, but God raised Him up.
- Peter continued by saying that death could not hold Jesus. Death was no match for Him, proving that Jesus is God the Son.

ASK: (DDG p. 94)

What do we learn about what is needed to share the good news of Jesus through Peter’s sermon? (boldness; clarity; cultural contextualization; language of our audience; fact that we need to share about Jesus as a real man of history, that Jesus was crucified and resurrected, and that this was all a part of God’s plan; that Jesus saves us from death)

VOICES from THE CHURCH

“Christ’s death was a stumbling block to the Jews. The apostles responded to this issue by presenting it as a victory that had been planned by God. It was not the unfortunate defeat of a good man who had no power to save himself from such a death.”¹

–Ajith Fernando

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 2:25-31** from his or her Bible.

25 For David says of him: I saw the Lord ever before me; because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. **26** Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices. Moreover, my flesh will rest in hope, **27** because you will not abandon me in Hades or allow your holy one to see decay. **28** You have revealed the paths of life to me; you will fill me with gladness in your presence. **29** Brothers and sisters, I can confidently speak to you about the patriarch David: He is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. **30** Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn an oath to him to seat one of his descendants on his throne. **31** Seeing what was to come, he spoke concerning the resurrection of the Messiah: He was not abandoned in Hades, and his flesh did not experience decay.

CHALLENGE: In groups of 3-4, ask: “Why might Peter have used David to illustrate his point here?” (Peter knew his audience; the Jews honored David but needed a reminder that he too was waiting for a Messiah; Peter was bridging the gap between their understanding of Jewish history and Jesus)

EXPLAIN: Use the main idea below and **verses 25-31** to explain (DDG p. 94):

Peter, knowing his audience, spoke of David to point to Jesus as the true King who conquered death.

- David was the great king of Israel. Though he was flawed, there was no one worthy of more respect than this man after God’s own heart. He’d been used by God to usher Israel into one of the greatest chapters of peace and prosperity in its history. However, David was now dead. His body was in the ground—decayed in a tomb.
- Even David knew that this would be his fate. That’s why Peter quoted David in Psalm 110:1, where David looked to the heavens and saw the Messiah, who would rule and reign on His throne forever. David could rejoice in this future reality. Though David would die, there would be One who would come after him who would conquer death. The reality of David’s death surely made the people long for the true King who would never die.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 94)

Why is it important to know our audience to better spread the message of the gospel? (understanding your audience helps in contextualizing your message through their cultural lens; rich or poor, educated or uneducated, someone with a Christian background or no religious background, all need a starting point and a bridge to help them understand the message of salvation)

TRANSITION: Because of the power of the Holy Spirit, many of those listening to Peter’s sermon did not merely hear with their ears, but also with their heart.

HADES

Greek word for the place of death, where disembodied souls go. Its Hebrew equivalent was *Sheol*. Ultimately God reigns over all places, including Hades.

POINT 2

GOD'S PEOPLE ARE EMPOWERED TO CALL OTHERS TO REPENTANCE (ACTS 2:37-41).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 2:37-38** from his or her Bible.

37 When they heard this, they were pierced to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” **38** Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

ILLUSTRATE: Read Hebrews 4:12 aloud. In Hebrews 4:12 and in our passage, the Word of God acts like a sharp knife or sword. In the wrong hands, a sharp blade can do all sorts of harm. But in the right hands, a sharp knife is desirable, even useful. In a master chef's hands, a sharp knife makes way for a delicious meal. The Word of God in the mouth of a Christian works much the same way. It can be used powerfully to change the lives of those with whom we share.

HIGHLIGHT: Discuss from **verses 37-38** the main idea below (DDG p. 94):

Those whose hearts are pierced by the gospel message repent and are baptized in Jesus's name.

- In Matthew 13:1-23, Jesus described the spread of the gospel like a farmer scattering seed. Some seed fell in hard places and failed to produce fruit. Other seed fell on fertile soil and produced a harvest. Here Peter's message fell on fertile soil. He didn't even have to ask them to respond—rather, they asked him and the other apostles what they should do about the message they just heard.
- It's worth pausing to notice what the apostles did not do here. They did not give the people a lengthy list of moral objectives to obey. They didn't send them to a class. They did not ask them to develop intricate theological positions or doctrinal statements. The call was simple—repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.
- Repentance starts on the inside. The word denotes a complete change of direction—someone is walking one way and they turn around and walk in the opposite direction. To make this change, the heart must be willing to admit that pursuing sin is to go in the wrong direction. The heart must also see that a relationship with God through Jesus Christ is the best and right way to live. This isn't to suggest that repentance is purely inward. Any true inward repentance will demonstrate itself in external change.
- Baptism is outward. The word denotes immersion under water and follows the pattern of Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection by placing the person under the water and then raising them up again. Baptism is an outward sign of inward repentance. Those who are baptized say to the world that they have turned from sin and are now united with Jesus and following Him.

ASK: (DDG p. 94)

Why do you think Peter combines repentance and baptism as a response to the gospel? (because that was John the Baptist’s message and Jesus’s as well; with repentance we see our sinful nature and need of a Savior to help us turn our life around, and baptism is a tangible action point that shows a public display of our faith; both involve confessions of our heart)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 2:39-41** from his or her Bible.

39 For the promise is for you and for your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” **40** With many other words he testified and strongly urged them, saying, “Be saved from this corrupt generation!” **41** So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand people were added to them.

EXPLAIN: Using **verses 39-41**, explain the main idea below (DDG p. 94):

The promise of the Spirit is for everyone who chooses to believe, until Jesus returns. And through the work of the Spirit, God’s kingdom will grow.

- The blessing and hope given to humanity is that those who choose to believe can have this promise of the Spirit as well, for generations and generations who choose Jesus.
- Peter continued to speak, although Luke doesn’t record what he said except to exhort the crowd to “be saved from this corrupt generation,” a bold warning indeed.
- It’s astounding to think that we could have 3,000 people baptized all on the same day. The sermon wasn’t unique—it was a simple and clear message about Jesus Christ. The power came from the work of God’s Spirit in the lives of those who heard. God transformed lives and these transformed lives were the foundation of the early church.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 94)

From Day 3 in the DDG: **How does the Holy Spirit shape your life?** (He helps me be bold in sharing the gospel; He reminds me of God’s presence; He keeps me kingdom-minded; He guides my life choices; He convicts me when I’m not doing what I’m supposed to, or when I’m doing what I’m not supposed to)

TRANSITION: Sinners were changed in an instant by the Holy Spirit, and as God’s newly formed people, they continued to live dramatically transformed lives.

POINT 3

GOD'S PEOPLE ARE EMPOWERED TO LIVE TOGETHER AS ONE (ACTS 2:42-47).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 2:42-45** from his or her Bible.

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. **43** Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. **44** Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. **45** They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need.

IDENTIFY: Invite the group to identify and call out various facets of the life of the early church as seen in **verses 42-45** while you record them on the board. Note that this passage is not meant to be a full treatment of everything the church did, nor is it intended to be the sole guide for what the church should do today.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read the key doctrine below (DDG p. 95). Then use the points below to further highlight the activities mentioned in this passage.

Key Doctrine #79: Body of Christ: The New Testament describes the church as the body of Christ. The church lives and operates as Christ's representative here on earth, with Christ as its head (Col. 1:18). This means that the church is an extension of Christ's ministry, carrying out His work by fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). In addition, the picture of the church as the body of Christ shows us the interconnectedness of individual Christians, with each member dependent upon one another for growth and sanctification (1 Cor. 12).

- "Devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" (v. 42) shows that the Word of God marked the life of the church; the people were regularly submitting themselves to God's truth.
- "The fellowship" shows that the people were not only together, but they were invested in meaningful relationships.
- "To the breaking of bread" shows that they shared meals together, and that perhaps they partook of the Lord's Supper together.
- "To prayer" shows that they did not merely pray individually but they spent time praying with other Christians.
- Luke ends his list of activity to describe that all these led to awe and wonder from those around them as the apostles continued to perform miracles.
- In addition, we see the fact that these Christians were sharing their possessions with one another (vv. 44-45). This practice was not necessitated by the apostles or church. Rather, it was the outworking of the generous hearts of those who had been transformed by the gospel. They cared for each other in real and tangible ways.

ASK: (DDG p. 95)

How can you be a part of building up the body in your church? (serving in different ministries; not gossiping; opening my home for a small group; being committed in prayer; being intentional in relationships with other believers)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 2:46-47** from his or her Bible.

46 Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, **47** praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

INSTRUCT: Look at the characteristics of the early church members' hearts in **verses 46-47** and explain (DDG p. 95):

Devotion, joy, and sincerity are the fruit of believers as they strive to be one body and grow with the Lord's power.

- Luke wanted us to know that the early church was devoted, joyful, sincere, praising, and enjoying. Doing Christian activities isn't a check-off list to do with a bad attitude. The people were filled with joy and thankfulness for their new life in Christ and the new family of believers they were called into.
- In verses 43 and 47, we see the Lord performed wonders. In verse 43, those wonders are not defined, but one would surmise that they were a continuation of the acts of healing done by the apostles in the Gospel accounts. In verse 47, these wonders are the conversion of sinners. The signs and wonders done by the apostles were meant to validate their message about Jesus, leading to the salvation of those who would believe. Like in the Old Testament account of God's deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, God often uses signs and wonders to help others believe His message.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 95)

With what attitudes do you perform Christian activity or service?
(be prepared to give your honest answers to start off the group)

SUMMARIZE: Use **PACK ITEM 11: SEEING THE OLD IN THE NEW** to summarize the first three lines under the heading, showing how God has always planned to build Himself a people from many nations. The Spirit, poured out on the disciples, emboldened Peter to preach the good news. And the coming of the Spirit, in contrast to the events at the Tower of Babylon, allowed people to hear the gospel in their own language. In this way, God fulfilled His promise of the Holy Spirit. Remind your group to keep this handout for future sessions.



MY RESPONSE

SAY: Peter’s sermon at Pentecost, a mere fifty days after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, demonstrates the Holy Spirit’s power to change those who trust in Jesus. The power of the gospel changed Peter, whom God used to preach Jesus to the crowd so that thousands would believe and be changed as well. All who believe in Jesus are changed, never to be the same. Because we are a new creation in Christ, we seek to live according to our new identity as we put our old selves to death day by day.

HEAD:

We’ve seen that the resurrection validates that Jesus is who He says He is—the long-awaited promised Messiah who would sit on David’s throne and rule and reign over God’s people. Those who believe this truth allow God to reign over their lives as well. We repent of sin and turn to Jesus in faith, both to begin our journey as a Christian and throughout our lives as Christians.

Where are you being asked to repent and believe today?

HEART:

Those who first heard this message were pierced to their heart. The Word of God has the power to do just that. When we see our sin and Jesus’s holiness, we are exposed in our innermost being. The thoughts and feelings that we often like to keep locked inside are exposed when we compare our lives to the resurrected King Jesus.

How is your heart pierced as you think about what Jesus has done for you?

HANDS:

God’s people live out the practices of Acts 2:42-47 in the local church. There they submit to the Word preached and taught, live in fellowship, share their possessions, pray, and break bread with others. These are the normative habits of all of God’s people, and these should be marked by joy and thankfulness. And when the church does such things in such a way, they might see God multiplying His people in numbers.

How can your engagement with the local church lead to kingdom growth?

PRAY: Father, thank You for saving sinners through Jesus Christ. We praise You for Your Son who overcame death and proved that He is the God-appointed Savior. We ask that You would give us the humility to repent of our sins and the joy to model Your love toward us in our relationship with Your church. Amen.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“They made the grace of God credible by a society of love and mutual care which astonished the pagans and was recognized as something entirely new. It lent persuasiveness to their claim that the New Age had dawned in Christ.”²

—Michael Green
(1930–2019)

POINT 1: GOD’S PEOPLE ARE EMPOWERED TO PROCLAIM JESUS BOLDLY (ACTS 2:22-31).

+ COMMENTARY

“In the paradox of divine sovereignty and human freedom, Jesus died as the result of deliberate human decision made in the exercise of their God-given freedom of choice. The Jewish crowd at Pentecost could not avoid their responsibility in Jesus’ death. Nonetheless, in the mystery of the divine will, God was working in these events of willful human rebellion to bring about his eternal purposes, bringing out of the tragedy of the cross the triumph of the resurrection. The Jews were not alone in their responsibility for Jesus’ death, however. They worked through the agency of ‘lawless men’ (‘wicked,’ NIV), a term used by Jews to designate Gentiles. Jesus died on a Roman cross; Gentiles too shared in the guilt. Peter carefully balanced all the participants in the drama of Jesus’ death—the guilt of the Jew and Gentile alike, the triumphal sovereignty of God.”³

+ ILLUSTRATION

Pick any latest news story or event in your church and ask what caused that event to come to pass. Nothing in life has a singular cause. We might guess at the most important cause, but it’s impossible to isolate a single cause for any event. For example, try to isolate a cause for a school shooting or other act of violence. Obviously dozens of factors not only influence the act itself, but also influence when and where the act takes place. We can’t say it’s either this cause or that cause, when it’s almost always many different causes conspiring together. Or consider the factors that go into a child growing up to being a mature and contributing member of society. It’s not one cause alone, such as a stable home life, but multiple factors working together. This is the point Peter is making regarding Jesus’s death. His death was caused by human agents and by the supreme purposes of God. Both were at work and neither negates the other.

+ ILLUSTRATION

Russell Brownworth recounts a story:

“While I was attending seminary, our two older children (ages 9 and 7) seemed to attract every other child in the mobile-home park for after-school games of hide-and-seek. Our youngest, Carrie, was not quite 3—and (in the minds of the older siblings) always in the way. It was

EXTRA

something you could count on; ten minutes into the games our little one would get pushed aside or skin a knee. One afternoon she came through the front door crying for Mommy. She had gotten the worst again. My wife, Elizabeth, attempted to comfort her by giving her two freshly baked cookies. “Now, don’t tell the big kids yet,” she cautioned. “I haven’t finished; I haven’t got enough for everybody yet.” It took less than three seconds for Carrie to make it to the screen door, fling it wide, and announce to the big kids, “Cookies, I gots cookies!” Great news should be shared with enthusiasm!”⁴

Like the child proclaiming good news, so did Peter proclaim the good news of Jesus in his sermon, out of passion, joy, excitement, and exhilaration. So, also, must we proclaim the good news to those around us today.

POINT 2: GOD’S PEOPLE ARE EMPOWERED TO CALL OTHERS TO REPENTANCE (ACTS 2:37-41).

+ **COMMENTARY**

“The context of Peter’s statement is that he is responding to the question posed by the crowd in verse 37: ‘Brothers, what must we do?’ At this point the crowd had already come under conviction, accepting as true the theological conclusion Peter had stated in verse 36: ‘God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah!’ Now, in response to their question and realizing that faith had already dawned in their hearts, Peter shares the application that is to follow belief in Christ. The application has three basic parts: (1) repent, (2) be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and (3) receive the gift of the Spirit.”⁵

+ **ILLUSTRATION**

Ask your group to imagine that they were part of taking the gospel to a remote village who had never heard the name of Jesus. After presenting the gospel message akin to Peter’s sermon in Acts 2, you notice that many of your hearers are moved by the message about Jesus. They appeal to a translator and ask what they should do now. What do you tell them? The simplicity of the context allows for a simple response. They don’t have big churches or all of the practices that seem to attach themselves to faith in many developed contexts. You would need to start with the very basic aspects of salvation. They simply need to repent and be baptized. This is where faith always starts. From there, you can encourage them with many of the habits that are found later in the book of Acts. The place to begin, however, is repentance and baptism. The reality of these simple directives should cause consideration for how we respond to those who want to trust Jesus today. Do we give them many hoops they have to jump through, or do we simply invite them to repent, be baptized, and follow Jesus?

POINT 3: GOD'S PEOPLE ARE EMPOWERED TO LIVE TOGETHER AS ONE (ACTS 2:42-47).

+ COMMENTARY

“Luke presents in this paragraph an ideal picture of this new community, rejoicing in the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit. The community, the apostolic fellowship, was constituted on the basis of the apostolic teaching. This teaching was authoritative because it was the teaching of the Lord communicated through the apostles in the power of the Spirit. For believers of later generations the New Testament scriptures form the written deposit of the apostolic teaching. The apostolic succession is recognized most clearly in those churches which adhere most steadfastly to the apostolic teaching.”⁶

+ OPTIONAL TEACHING ACTIVITY

Ask the group to reflect on their best church experience. People tend to enjoy sharing about some of the hurts they've experienced in the church in the past. In fact, #churchhurt has become a common way for people to discuss the complexity of life in the church. It's important that we hear, listen, and learn from these stories; but there are countless examples of good that people have experienced through the ministry of the local church as well. The group may not be made up of people who have a background in the local church, but even those who have not grown up in and around the church are often impacted by local church ministry. For example, they may have visited a church as a kid or gone on a youth camp in the summer. These positive stories help give us hope of what the church can become. As people share, hold up the marks of the church found in Acts 2:42-47 to show your group that many of the things we love the most about the church are habits of the people of God from the first century until today. Consider ending the time praying and giving thanks to God for the gift of the church.

+ ILLUSTRATION

General Colin Powell wrote:

On the speech circuit, I tell a story that goes to the heart of America's longing. ABC correspondent Sam Donaldson was interviewing a young African-American soldier in a tank platoon on the eve of the battle in Desert Storm. Donaldson asked, “How do you think the battle will go? Are you afraid?” “We'll do okay. We're well trained. And I'm not afraid,” the GI answered, gesturing toward his buddies around him. “I'm not afraid because I'm with my family.” The other soldiers shouted, “Tell him again. He didn't hear you.” The soldier repeated, “This is my family, and we'll take care of each other.”⁷

How much more should the family of God take care of each other!

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3. John B. Polhill, Acts, vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 112.
4. Russell Brownworth, quoted in PreachingToday.com, More Perfect Illustrations: For Every Topic and Occasion (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2003), 121–22.
5. Darrell Bock, “Apologetics Commentary on the Gospel of Luke,” in The Gospels and Acts, The Holman Apologetics Commentary on the Bible (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2013), Acts 2:38.
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THE CHURCH MEETS NEEDS



+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. God's people serve others to display God's works (Acts 3:1-7).
2. God's people challenge others to recognize God's Son (Acts 3:11-16).
3. God's people invite others to experience God's presence (Acts 3:17-20).

Background Passage: Acts 3

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

In healing the man who was lame, Peter and John displayed God's power to him and all those around and pointed to a greater, spiritual healing found in Christ.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

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

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we have experienced the miracle of our salvation from sin and new life in Jesus, we boldly and graciously proclaim the gospel and minister to those in need.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **What are different ways society views those who are poor or those who beg for help?** (many may be prone to ignore the poor; some may think they are taking advantage of others; maybe they are just lazy; maybe they desire the fate they are experiencing; some might know friends who have been poor and needy so they are prone to want to help; others may feel themselves overcome with compassion and they may seek to help everyone they can)

TRANSITION: Jesus told His followers that they would always have the poor among them (Matt. 26:11). This may sound like a defeatist posture, but Jesus was honest about the implications of sin and brokenness in the world. Until He returns and puts the world back together again, there will always be those who are needy and hurting among us. This reality should come as no surprise to us when we consider our world. We truly do always have the poor among us. Every place, regardless of how whole and beautiful it might seem from the outside, has an underbelly of brokenness. How should Christians respond to such pain?

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- As we continue in the book of Acts, we notice brokenness entered the story quickly. The first Christians had been together—sharing their resources and possessions with one another as any had need (Acts 2:42-47). They now moved out into the world, and there they met a man who had been lame from birth. Through this story, we will see how the generosity that marked the people of God in the church spilled over into their care for those on the outside, especially those who were hurting and broken.



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POINT 1

GOD'S PEOPLE SERVE OTHERS TO DISPLAY GOD'S WORKS (ACTS 3:1-7).

INTRODUCE: The early church was together—celebrating God's goodness, sharing in fellowship, praying, learning, and meeting one another's needs (Acts 2:42-47). Empowered by the Spirit and the love of the people, the apostles now ventured out into the world. They had been tasked with the mission of taking the good news of Jesus from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. Now, in Acts 3, we start to see the impact of the gospel message.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 3:1-3** from his or her Bible.

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.

EXPLAIN: In **verses 1-3**, we see Peter and James about to engage with a man who was lame, begging for money. Disciples today should know that we too are called to engage in social concerns. Invite someone to read the key doctrine (Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG] p. 102):

Key Doctrine #94: Social Concern: 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 oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. We 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. Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. In order to promote these ends, Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth (Mic. 6:8; Eph. 6:5-9; 1 Thess. 3:12).

HIGHLIGHT: Using the notes below, continue to explain **verses 1-3**:

- Peter and James still regularly went to the temple, including for times of prayer. They did so as pious Jews and also to engage with fellow Jews for opportunities to spread the gospel to them.
- The Beautiful Gate would have been a prime place for this beggar to come as it was at a place where people were coming to and going from the temple.

HOURLY OF PRAYER

The temple schedule, in the time of the early church, daily had Jews come for the offering of the morning and evening sacrifices, one after dawn and one mid-afternoon, around 3 pm. Both would include a time of prayer and a time to wait for the blessing from a priest.

The beggar probably assumed that worshipers of God would be most likely to meet his needs. Gates in Jesus's day marked a primary means of entering a city and various essential locations within the city. So the gate was a heavily trafficked area. We aren't told how long the man had been coming there, only that he had been born lame and was carried there every day.

ASK: (DDG p. 102)

How is our social concern a testimony of our love for Christ? (we love others because He loved us first; we are the hands and feet of Jesus; in following Jesus, we do as He would in loving the marginalized; the Bible is full of passages of our need to serve the poor and helpless; loving those who can't really love us back is a testimony of the unconditional love of Christ in our lives)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **verses 4-7** from his or her Bible.

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.

DEBATE: Break into two smaller groups. Each group debate will their reasons for each side of the argument: "What would have been better? For the man to receive money or to receive healing?"

EXPLAIN: Referring to **verses 4-7**, explain the main idea below (DDG p. 102):

As we are called to social concerns, our ultimate goal is to display God's work and point to Jesus, our Savior.

- The beggar asked for money, but the apostles offered healing "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth." Here the apostles were representing Jesus Christ and pointing to Him in a way reminiscent of His own ministry (Matt. 8:16-17; 12:22; Mark 1:29-31; 3:1-6,10-11; 7:31-37; Luke 5:12-14; 7:11-18; John 4:46-54).
- If we continued in Acts 3:8, we would see the man walking, leaping, and praising God, beginning to understand the power of Jesus and who He is. Miracles shine the spotlight on Jesus and His great power.

TRANSITION: Like in Acts 2, where a miracle (2:1-13) was followed by a sermon (2:14-36), after Acts 3:1-7, the focus shifted to another sermon by Peter.

POINT 2

GOD'S PEOPLE CHALLENGE OTHERS TO RECOGNIZE GOD'S SON (ACTS 3:11-16).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 3:11-12** from his or her Bible.

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?"

EXPLAIN: Using **verses 11-12**, point out the humility in Peter's tone as he questioned the people's astonishment. Explain the point below (DDG p. 103):

We humbly serve others to testify about Jesus.

- Peter did not allow the people to stew in their astonishment; instead, he addressed the Israelites directly. He would go on to connect Jesus's healing of this man to the story of God's work with the Israelites and mention key figures in their history: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

ASK: (DDG p. 103)

How can we remain humble in ministry successes? (pray often in those endeavors; be the person in the group that acknowledges God as sovereign in our successes or failures; let the Holy Spirit guide us to a posture of humility)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 3:13-16** from his or her Bible.

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."

LIST: Ask groups of 2-4 to look over verses 13-16 and list various aspects of Peter's sermon that would help us know how we should share the gospel today. Invite groups to share their list.

HIGHLIGHT: Using your group's answers from **verses 13-16**, add any additional items from the list in the main idea on the next page. Then explain that main idea (DDG p. 103):

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"If indeed it was all the prophets and not only one of them who said this, it follows that, although the event took place through ignorance, it did not take place contrary to God's ordinance. See how great is the wisdom of God, when it uses the wickedness of others to bring about what must be."¹

—Chrysostom
(c. 347–407)

Sharing the gospel includes contextualizing and focusing on Jesus's death and resurrection and the need for faith to believe in Him.

- Once again, Peter reminded the people—witnesses of Jesus's miraculous healings when He lived—of their complicity in Jesus's sham trial and crucifixion. But he also mentioned how God has now glorified Christ, pointing to both Jesus's death and resurrection.
- It would have been easy for Peter and the apostles to grow inflated with pride as they healed this man in front of a busy crowd. Instead, they gave all the glory to Jesus. Christians today should live to deflect attention away from themselves and onto the risen Christ. They should know, like the apostles surely knew here, that Jesus is the source of life, not them.
- Faith and trust are close synonyms. They are both active words. People model faith when they get on an airplane. We can say that we believe planes can fly or even understand the laws of aerodynamics, but it's not faith until we are willing to trust the plane and step inside. In the same way, in the Bible faith is an active word. It describes a strong belief in something or someone that compels action.
- Notice the three-fold repetition of "Jesus" and "his name" in verse 16. It is faith "in his name." "His name" is what made the man strong. And again, faith comes "through Jesus." The apostles were not healing in their name or power, but in Jesus's. And their faith had a clear object—Jesus Christ. It's unclear from the passage who had the faith; perhaps it was the apostles' faith and the faith of the man, but Jesus performed the action. This is why many suggest that the book of Acts is a continuation of Jesus's work that Luke summarized in his Gospel. Even though Jesus is in heaven He continues to work in the world through His people.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 103)

How can our service point more directly to Jesus? (if serving in a church ministry capacity, we can encourage others to join that they may see how Jesus is working in the lives of church members and their growth; if serving in the community, we can point to Jesus as why we are serving—because our love for Christ compels us to joyfully serve strangers; if we are serving in our job, we can live differently than the world, expressing the love of Christ as the reason we work with joy and strong ethics; if we are serving our family, we can point to Jesus as the reason for our rules and discipline as well for His provision and joy in our family life)

TRANSITION: Peter followed the pattern of his sermon in Acts 2 by pointing his hearers to the work of Jesus Christ. In the first instance, the sermon ended with the hearers asking what they should do, and Peter responded that they should repent and be baptized. Now in Acts 3 that same theme would conclude Peter's sermon once again.

POINT 3

GOD'S PEOPLE INVITE OTHERS TO EXPERIENCE GOD'S PRESENCE (ACTS 3:17-20).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 3:17-20** from his or her Bible.

17 “And now, brothers and sisters, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your leaders also did. **18** In this way God fulfilled what he had predicted through all the prophets—that his Messiah would suffer. **19** Therefore repent and turn back, so that your sins may be wiped out, **20** that seasons of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send Jesus, who has been appointed for you as the Messiah.”

EXPLAIN: Reiterating a previous session, though the people were complicit, God was also fulfilling His plan through the death of Jesus. And because it was all God's work to save humanity, we are called to share that good news. Using the points below as seen in **verses 17-19**, discuss (DDG p. 103):

Jesus's forgiveness extends to all when they repent.

- The Jews in Peter's audience were guilty in condemning Jesus. However, Peter highlighted a theme common in the Scriptures. He said that the people “acted in ignorance.” Paul used the same language in Acts 17:30-31 in speaking about the time before Jesus's death and resurrection. But God was gracious by not destroying those who killed Jesus in that moment. But even sinning with ignorance necessitates repentance. Sin is sin and those who sin, which is everyone, except Jesus, need to repent.
- God had a plan. The Messiah would suffer, and Jesus did, fulfilling prophecy. Because He did, many can return to the Lord through repentance.
- God's mercy is seen in this passage, allowing people to repent to find forgiveness. How amazing to think that all of our sins, all of our failures, can be wiped out like this.

ASK: (DDG p. 103)

How can we help lead others to repentance? (tell them of the gift of true forgiveness; tell them of God's love and mercy; tell them that God desires to have a relationship with them; tell them eternal life is a gift through Jesus; tell them of the need to find a better way to live life)

HIGHLIGHT: Paul continued with some reasons why they should repent. Discuss from **verse 20** (DDG p. 103):

With repentance comes refreshment from God's presence as we await the day of Jesus's return.

DIG: In groups of 2-4, ask: "What does *refreshing* look like or feel like?" (peace; calmness; satisfaction; fullness; fulfillment; an iced cold sweet tea on a July day)

- Peter says that with repentance and forgiveness comes a refreshing because of "the presence of the Lord." This presence could be God's manifest presence in a variety of ways, as well as the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Both bring that type of refreshment that we were all talking about it.
- This season of refreshing will culminate with the second coming of Jesus, where God will again "send Jesus" to bring to completion this season of refreshing with His reign. When Jesus returns once again, the time for repentance will be over and all those who've been forgiven will enjoy eternity with Him.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 103)

From Day 5 in the DDG: **If Christians have been forgiven, why do some often feel weighed down instead of refreshed?** (some may continue to live under the condemnation of sin and guilt, not trusting in Christ's forgiveness; some may lack faith and think it seems too easy; we sometimes feel like we need to work for forgiveness; we have strongholds we need to battle to not repeat the cycle of sin and repentance; some addictions need medical or therapeutic help through the work of Christ)

TRANSITION: Everything we do for the Lord, He did first for us. Jesus loved us, served us, helped others, forgave us. As we continue to be Jesus's hands and feet, we are reminded that our strength and power comes from Him. So we point to Jesus in everything we do. And that's how we do everything for His glory and not our own.

MY RESPONSE

SAY: Once the Holy Spirit was given, the disciples began boldly proclaiming Jesus as Lord and Savior. The Holy Spirit displayed the power of God’s kingdom through the miracles the disciples performed in Jesus’s name for His glory and praise. Because we have experienced the miracle of our salvation from sin and new life in Jesus, we boldly and graciously proclaim the gospel and minister to those in need.

HEAD:

The good news of Jesus reminds us that we were all like the beggar in Acts 3—poor and needy. Jesus came and did more than merely give us blessings in this life, He offered His people forgiveness of sins. Now we are called to be like Jesus and Peter and John in truly seeing others, feeling broken for their sin, and calling them toward spiritual healing through the power of Christ.

What are your thoughts about those who are broken and need Jesus?

HEART:

For us to live with care and concern for those around us, we must feel their burden at a heart level. We can’t merely turn up our nose at them or pass by in pride thinking that we are better. Rather, we should move into the world with humility, counting others as more important than ourselves (Phil. 2:4). Like Peter and John who saw the lame man and pointed him toward Jesus, we too must show humility in the way we approach our daily life.

What pride issues reside in you today?

HANDS:

God’s people show concern for those who are hurting by caring for them and, more importantly, by pointing them to Jesus—who can do more than help their physical bodies by also forgiving their sins. It’s imperative that Christians extend the love of Christ to all people; we must not overlook those whose needs are obvious or those marginalized by society.

Who can you serve this week who are considered marginalized?

PRAY: Father, open my eyes to see people as You do. Give me a heart that is broken by the pain and suffering of people around me. Empower me to find ways to serve others, and as I serve, give me the courage to speak about Jesus.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

“Before the church is called to do or say anything, it is called and sent to be the unique community of those who live under the reign of God. The church displays the firstfruits of the forgiven and forgiving people of God who are brought together across the rubble of dividing walls that have crumbled under the weight of the cross. It is the harbinger of the new humanity that lives in genuine community, a form of companionship and wholeness that humanity craves.”²

—Daniel L. Guder

EXTRA

POINT 1: GOD’S PEOPLE SERVE OTHERS TO DISPLAY GOD’S WORKS (ACTS 3:1-7).

+ COMMENTARY

“Then instantly, Dr Luke continues, the man’s feet and ankles became strong (7b)—so strong and agile that he jumped to his feet and began to walk, which he had never done before. Not only so, but he now accompanied the apostles into the temple courts, all the time walking and jumping, and praising God (8). It was an outstanding fulfilment of the Messianic prophecy: ‘Then will the lame leap like a deer.’”³

+ ILLUSTRATION

On a sunny day, a pair of sunglasses is imperative. The sun is so bright that you can’t interact with the world without a filter. The sunglasses help you see the world and move through your day. Glasses are a good illustration for the way we make sense of the world around us. There is great pain, suffering, and brokenness around every corner. People will have to make sense of these realities in some way. Whatever filter, or glasses, they choose to put on will transform the way they act and interact with the world. If they think the issues and solutions are primarily political, then they are seeing the world through political glasses. Everything they experience will be interpreted on the basis of politics. If the issue is one of economics, then they will process life through economic lenses. If, however, the primary issue is human sin and the solution is forgiveness found through Christ, then we will filter our experiences through this lens. Rather than bemoaning the poor among us, we should find ways to attend to their physical and spiritual needs and point them to the One who can deal with their sinful states, as He did with ours.

EXTRA

POINT 2: GOD’S PEOPLE CHALLENGE OTHERS TO RECOGNIZE GOD’S SON (ACTS 3:11-16).

+ COMMENTARY

“Verse 16 explicitly mentions ‘faith’: the man walks because of faith in Jesus. But whose faith—Peter’s or the lame man’s? The answer is both. The initial ‘by faith in his name’ refers to Peter’s faith that Jesus would heal the man, through Peter, in Jesus’ name. Peter goes on to say that ‘the faith that is through Jesus’ has given this man perfect health. We are not given access to the lame man’s thoughts, but, given the way that faith on the part of the healed is noted at times in the Gospels (cf. Matt. 9:28; John 9:35) and in light of the man’s reaction to the disciples after he is healed (cf. the Samaritan leper in Luke 17:11–19), there is reason to see the faith of Peter, John, and the lame man as all being referenced by Peter.”⁴

+ OPTIONAL TEACHING ACTIVITY

What’s the most amazing thing you’ve ever witnessed? Over the course of life, people witness many amazing moments. Maybe it’s a wedding or the birth of a child. It might be a dramatic sunset or a snow covered mountain. Some may have stumbled upon a moment where the world seemed to stop and beauty was all around. There are even those who have witnessed someone pull through a dark time or a tragic accident when death seemed imminent.

No one living today has witnessed a resurrection, however. This is what Peter claimed had happened in his day. God raised up the Source of life whom the people had killed. And all the disciples were witnesses to this miracle. Those who’ve witnessed far lesser things than resurrections will continually talk about what they’ve seen. How much more should those who witnessed and those who believe God raised up Jesus testify about the things they have seen?

+ ILLUSTRATION

Water is often described as the source of life. People can’t live long without it. This is especially true in harsh climates, such as a desert, where people need extraordinary water intake in order to survive. Peter describes Jesus as the source of life. Like those living in a desert, people inhabit a harsh world that leaves them feeling exhausted. By killing Jesus, they’d cut off the source of life. Jesus is water for the human soul, yet the people chose to kill him. This would be akin to a thirsty traveler in the desert stumbling upon a water source only to pour it out.

POINT 3: GOD’S PEOPLE INVITE OTHERS TO EXPERIENCE GOD’S PRESENCE (ACTS 3:17-20).

+ COMMENTARY

“In the first part of his sermon Peter gave his hearers abundant evidence that Israel had reached the wrong conclusion about Jesus Christ. Then he called on them to repent and reverse their verdict concerning Jesus Christ and place their faith in Him. To help persuade them, he gives them promised results if they repent: God will forgive their sin, the kingdom will come, Messiah will return, judgment will be avoided, and blessing will be realized.”⁵

+ OPTIONAL DISCUSSION

Kids often act in ignorance. They are kids after all. There are so many things that they simply don't know, don't understand, or don't know how to do. We expect this level of immaturity as children progress through these early years of development. When children act in ignorance, a good parent does two things. First, the parent shows mercy. They understand and appreciate that the child has to learn and they don't hold the child accountable for adult levels of maturity. But, they also hold the line. They make it clear to the child that they can't stay in a state of ignorance forever. They point out clear standards and direct the child to obedience. They also press the child to admit wrong and seek forgiveness. In this passage, Peter says the people living in Jesus's day acted in ignorance. Like an adult relating to a child, God was merciful to them in giving them space to repent, and He was intentional about holding them accountable for their sins as well. He gave them space to repent and now was the time.

+ ILLUSTRATION

It happened once, it can happen again. There are certain events that happen that you might never expect, like a team coming back from a huge deficit in the final minutes or a person achieving a Guinness World Record. Even if the event is hard to believe, the fact that it happened once ups the likelihood that it could happen again. Especially if the same people are involved.

For example, if someone is able to perform a world record feat once, then it stands to reason that the same person could do it again. You might not expect any other person to be able to perform at the same level, but surely this person could do it again.

In Acts 3, Peter says that God performed a miracle in sending Christ to the world the first time. Ignorant people killed Him according to God's preordained plan. Those who are forgiven are promised seasons that will culminate in God sending Jesus again. Since God sent Jesus the first time, it would make sense that we should trust Him to send Jesus again. The first coming was marked by a victory over the price of sin, the second coming will be marked by victory over the presence of sin. Jesus will usher in a new world where peace, righteousness, and love will abound forever.

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3. John Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World, The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 91.
4. James M. Hamilton Jr. and Brian J. Vickers, *John-Acts*, eds. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, vol. IX, *ESV Expository Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 371.
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THE CHURCH STANDS FIRM



+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. God's people testify about the risen Savior (Acts 4:8-12).
2. God's people refuse to be silenced about the risen Savior (Acts 4:18-22).
3. God's people pray for boldness to proclaim the risen Savior (Acts 4:23-31).

Background Passage: Acts 4

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

When Peter and John were arrested and warned not to preach Jesus, they responded that they could not stop proclaiming the risen Savior.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Although they were warned to stop preaching Jesus, Peter and John responded that they could not keep silent about their experiences with the risen Savior. The gospel is great news that must be shared by those who have come to believe in Jesus Christ.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we have experienced the great news of salvation through Jesus, we seek to tell all others about how they too can believe in Jesus and be forgiven of their sin.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **When have you witnessed someone do something bold and how did you respond to their boldness?**

(a teenager who stands up to peer pressure and doesn't give in to temptation; an athlete who testifies to faith in Jesus in the public spotlight; a person who takes a risk to advocate for children in the foster care system; a person who gives away financial resources for the sake of world missions; their boldness often inspires, but it can also bring conviction)

TRANSITION: Boldness is a quality many admire in others but find difficult to develop in themselves. Even Christians find it difficult to be bold when circumstances call for it. The apostles after Jesus's resurrection and filled with the Spirit, however, turned their previous cowardice into boldness.

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- Much like Jesus Himself, the apostles soon faced hostility from worldly leaders. The Jewish leaders, in particular, were threatened by those who followed Jesus. Jesus's disciples were seen as a rebellious sect who would not submit to the Jewish leaders. In light of the recent healing of the man born lame, Jewish leaders arrested the apostles and questioned them the next day. Peter and John used these questions to once again proclaim the truth about Jesus.



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POINT 1

GOD'S PEOPLE TESTIFY ABOUT THE RISEN SAVIOR (ACTS 4:8-12).

INTRODUCE: After Peter and John were arrested for healing the man who was lame, the Jewish leaders gathered the next day and asked the apostles by what power or name did they heal him. This was Peter's response.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 4:8-12** from his or her Bible.

8 Then Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders: **9** If we are being examined today about a good deed done to a disabled man, by what means he was healed, **10** let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified and whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing here before you healthy. **11** This Jesus is the stone rejected by you builders, which has become the cornerstone. **12** There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved."

HIGHLIGHT: Highlight in **verses 8-10** the role of the Holy Spirit (Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG] p. 110):

Those who experience Jesus's love, through the Holy Spirit, testify about Jesus's death and resurrection.

- The apostles were now speaking before Jewish leaders. The Jewish leaders were in a position of power, so it would be riskier for Peter to testify in front of them than it would have been to say the same thing before the crowd at large. But Luke mentions the role of the Holy Spirit's filling Peter so that he could speak boldly.
- The apostles were also subverting the Jewish leadership by saying that healing had come through Jesus alone and not through the religious system these Jewish leaders oversaw. They also pointed the finger at the Jewish leaders for Jesus's death. Only through the power of the Spirit could they speak the truth so directly.
- The crippled man also testified to the work and power of Jesus simply by standing there: "by him this man is standing here before you healthy." His healing was a testament to Jesus.

ASK: (DDG p. 110)

How can you more boldly proclaim Christ with the Spirit's power?
(first, pray for the Spirit's guidance and for opportunities to share; cultivate my heart for evangelism and mission in finding opportunities to go; get trained in growing in evangelistic skills; talk to other believers about growing our passion for mission)

DIG: Both Peter’s newfound boldness and the healing of the crippled man show us that we are transformed and made new as we trust in Jesus and His work on the cross. Read the key doctrine below (DDG p. 110):

Key Doctrine #83: New Identity of the Believer: When a person places faith in Christ, that person undergoes a fundamental change of identity. He or she goes from being an enemy under God’s wrath (Eph. 2:1-3) to being welcomed into God’s family as a beloved child (Eph. 2:19). The believer in Christ is declared righteous on account of Christ’s perfect life and substitutionary death and resurrection. No longer is the person a slave to sin, defined by past failures or present struggles. The person has been delivered from the realm of darkness and now belongs to the kingdom of light (Col. 1:13). Anyone who is in Christ is a “new creation” in whom the old, sinful self is passed away and the new, redeemed self is alive and progressing, becoming more and more like Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).

ILLUSTRATE: Look up an image of a cornerstone. Use the image (and additional verses if desired: Ps. 118:22; Luke 20:9-19; Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:7-8) and the points below to understand the symbol of a cornerstone in **verses 11-12** (DDG p. 110):

Believers proclaim Jesus as the cornerstone—salvation is found only through Him.

- A perfect stone was essential for the cornerstone. This would have been the first stone set and would have marked the intersection of walls going in perpendicular directions. If the stone was off, the entire building would be unstable. If, however, the cornerstone was set correctly, it would give shape to all of the other stones.
- Jesus is God’s appointed cornerstone. God chose His Son as the only means of salvation and forgiveness of sins. He is the foundation from which all of Christianity derives its structure and support (Eph. 2:19-22). Making this point, the apostles linked their statement to the work they had done in Acts 2–3, when they preached that salvation is only found in Jesus.

TRANSITION: Earlier, some in the crowd who heard the apostles’ message were cut to the heart and asked what they should do in response (Acts 2:37). Here, however, the religious leaders had a very different response.



STONE IMAGERY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Scan this QR code for an explanation of the relationship between Jesus and His church using the metaphor of stones.

BUILDING STONES

In contrast to buildings constructed with wood, buildings made with stone were stronger, but they needed the right stones. It was easy for the rough edges of stones to make an entire building unsteady. Stonecutters would need to ensure that the stones were cut to the exact specifications. Stones that were deemed too unshapely to be used would have been discarded—rejected by the builders.

POINT 2

GOD'S PEOPLE REFUSE TO BE SILENCED ABOUT THE RISEN SAVIOR (ACTS 4:18-22).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 4:18-22** from his or her Bible.

18 So they called for them and ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. **19** Peter and John answered them, "Whether it's right in the sight of God for us to listen to you rather than to God, you decide; **20** for we are unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." **21** After threatening them further, they released them. They found no way to punish them because the people were all giving glory to God over what had been done. **22** For this sign of healing had been performed on a man over forty years old.

EXPLAIN: Remember the disciples who hid in a locked room after Jesus was crucified? In **verses 18-20**, before the same council that had accused Jesus and sent Him to die, Peter and John spoke with boldness. When the council ordered them not to speak or teach in Jesus's name, they boldly answered they could not stop speaking about Jesus. Explain the following main idea (DDG p. 110):

In spite of the world's threats, believers continue to testify to Christ in obedience to God.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"The gospel is a story of what has happened in history for the whole world. This kind of message needs to be announced as truth by witnesses. While arrogant and aggressive approaches to evangelism have been only too real in modernity, this does not abolish the task to tell the true story of the world and to seek to convince others of its truth and to aim at response, conversion, and discipleship. This is not an act of dogmatic arrogance but simply the discharge of the task that we have been chosen to do. Not to discharge this task is betrayal."¹

—Michael W. Goheen and Timothy Sheridan

- The classic story of teenage peer pressure is an appropriate illustration for the decision faced by the apostles here. A teenager might know his parents' expectations, but the influence of peers can be overwhelming. The teen must decide—"Will I listen to my parents and do what is right, or will I follow the crowd and do what I want to do, knowing it would bring harm?"
- Like Jesus often did when questioned by the religious leaders, the apostles turned the command back to them and put the religious leaders in a bind. Peter and John said, "Whether it's right in the sight of God for us to listen to you rather than to God, you decide." Surely the religious leaders wouldn't say that Peter and John should disobey God. To do so would be to expose that they weren't really intent on obedience. But the contrast also exposed them. The apostles were clearly pointing out that these leaders and God weren't on the same team.
- Most people in America today are not facing the type of persecution described in this passage. Many do not have leaders breathing down their neck telling them to stop talking about Jesus. Yet, even without such external pressure, many are often silent about Jesus Christ. When Christians today see the boldness of the apostles in Acts 4, it should challenge them to testify about the truth of Jesus wherever God has them. If Jesus is good news, Christians can't be silent.

ASK: (DDG p. 111)

What happens when we fear people rather than God? (we are pulled to do things we might not otherwise do based on the preferences of people; the weight of people's opinions can paralyze us to make decisions, especially if some people say one thing and others say something else; we might disobey God because of the pressure we feel to appease others)

CHALLENGE: In Matthew 27:15-26, the pressure of the crowd worked against Jesus. In **verses 21-22**, things have changed. The crowd saw the miracles associated with Jesus's resurrection, Pentecost, and the healing of the lame man. They gave glory to God and advocated for the apostles, who were released but warned to stop talking about Jesus. Discuss the following point (DDG p. 111):

Despite threats, those who witness the Messiah's work can't stop talking about Him.

- Even with continued threats, the apostles continued in obedience in spreading the good news of Jesus.
- Because of the apostle's obedience, this time the crowd praised God, especially after seeing the healing of the man who was over forty years old and who had been crippled all his life.
- When we share the good news of Jesus in obedience, we may not know the outcome, but God knows. In His perfect timing, He will harvest those who are ready to trust in Jesus.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 111)

From Day 3 in the DDG: **What are some ways people face persecution today for telling the good news of Jesus?** (being labeled a religious fanatic; being type-casted; being seen as weird; having people roll their eyes; feeling awkward in the moment)

TRANSITION: Though the religious leaders only threatened and didn't harm the disciples this time, the apostles knew that such persecution was coming. Jesus had warned them that their fate would involve suffering and persecution similar to what He suffered (Matt. 24:9).

POINT 3

GOD'S PEOPLE PRAY FOR BOLDNESS TO PROCLAIM THE RISEN SAVIOR (ACTS 4:23-31).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 4:23-31** from his or her Bible.

23 After they were released, they went to their own people and reported everything the chief priests and the elders had said to them. **24** When they heard this, they raised their voices together to God and said, "Master, you are the one who made the heaven, the earth, and the sea, and everything in them. **25** You said through the Holy Spirit, by the mouth of our father David your servant: Why do the Gentiles rage and the peoples plot futile things? **26** The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers assemble together against the Lord and against his Messiah. **27** For, in fact, in this city both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, assembled together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, **28** to do whatever your hand and your will had predestined to take place. **29** And now, Lord, consider their threats, and grant that your servants may speak your word with all boldness, **30** while you stretch out your hand for healing, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus." **31** When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God boldly.

EXPLAIN: After being brought before the chief priests, Peter and John returned to the church with a report of everything that had transpired. In light of **verses 23-28**, think about the following point (DDG p. 111):

The body of Christ prays for each other to receive God's power to pursue kingdom objectives.

- The first thing the apostles and their friends did was pray. Surely, the apostles had already prayed privately while they were being threatened, but notice here that as soon as they got back and reported to the others what had happened, they all stopped and prayed together.
- When they prayed, the church (1) acknowledged God for who He is—their Master, (2) worshiped Him for His sovereign power over everything He created, (3) believed the truth of His Word—that the nations will always rage against God's Messiah, and His people, as Scripture has foretold (see Ps. 2:1-2), (4) looked to Jesus as an example of how to endure unjust suffering, and (5) admitted their trust in the Lord's purpose and plan.
- The place to look for boldness during difficult circumstances isn't yourself, but to the Lord. He is the One who grants the power by His Holy Spirit to have courage even in the face of bodily harm. Whatever difficult thing Christians face, they can trust God for boldness through prayer.

ASK: (DDG p. 111)

How do we cultivate more corporate prayer for the work of God’s mission in our lives? (plan prayer meetings within our small group or just with friends; make sure we pray for the growth of God’s kingdom as we pray for our own prayer requests; make sure every ministry or service opportunity begins and ends with prayer, as well as the in-between times)

HIGHLIGHT: Using **verses 29-31**, discuss the following point (DDG p. 111):

In any service to God, we respond in obedience through prayer and proclaiming Christ, but God is the One working in hearts and changing lives.

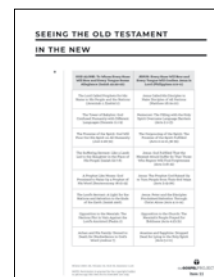
- The apostles waited until the end of the prayer to ask for boldness. It would have been tempting for them to start with this prayer, but they focused their affections on God and His Son, Jesus Christ, first. Once they were properly oriented toward God, they could ask Him for what they needed with confidence.
- Notice again the role of God and of people in this passage. The apostles asked that God would stretch out His hand, heal, and perform signs and wonders. In turn, they asked God that they would have boldness to speak. In other words, the work of salvation is God’s, the work of boldness was theirs.
- As a result of their focused prayer, the place was shaken; all were filled with the Spirit and they continued to speak with boldness. In other words, God answered their prayers immediately, confirming His presence and agreement, as they were in tune with His will and mission.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 111)

What are ways we can respond in obedience to God’s plan to bring salvation to others who don’t yet know Him? (learn more on evangelism and mission to equip us with tools; pray for daily opportunities; find the joy and passion of our faith that we would naturally share this good news; be intentional about proclaiming Christ, knowing it is God’s will)

SUMMARIZE: Use **PACK ITEM 11: SEEING THE OLD IN THE NEW** to summarize how Peter and John preached about Jesus as the Suffering Servant and only through Him can salvation come—yet still opposition would come their way. All this, however, had already been revealed in Scripture. (Remind your group to keep this handout for a future session.)

TRANSITION: The continual filling of the Spirit in God’s people today still gives us boldness to speak the gospel (Eph. 5:18).



MY RESPONSE

SAY: Although they were warned to stop preaching Jesus, Peter and John responded that they could not keep silent about their experiences with the risen Savior. The gospel is great news that must be shared by those who have come to believe in Jesus Christ. Because we have experienced the great news of salvation through Jesus, we seek to tell all others about how they too can believe in Jesus and be forgiven of their sin.

HEAD:

The apostles were compelled by the truth of what they'd seen and heard. They couldn't stop talking about Jesus because they knew He is God's Messiah, resurrected from the dead. These realities compelled them to speak, even as they were persecuted for their message. These apostles asked the Lord for boldness, not merely to endure suffering, but to continue to speak boldly about Jesus.

Why does the truth of the resurrection compel Christians to speak about Jesus?

HEART:

Boldness is a trait of the heart before it is something that we do. The Holy Spirit strengthens the human heart to love the message of the gospel. He always enables the heart to press through fear and do what is right regardless of the cost. Boldness doesn't come easy. In fact, it's a trait that God has to cultivate in the life of Christians long before they actually need it.

In what ways can you confess that you haven't been bold for Jesus?

HANDS:

Powered by boldness, Christians speak. They don't merely do good things in the world, but they testify that Jesus is the Savior and call others to turn from their sin and trust in Him. It is a waste of the gift of boldness if God promises to give it, but people never take a risk to speak. Christians should first pray that God would give boldness and then seek out those around them with whom they can share the saving message of Jesus.

To whom in your life can you boldly share the good news of Jesus?

PRAY: Father, we know that Your Word tells us that we can ask in Jesus's name, and You will grant our requests in keeping with Your wisdom. We trust that You will continue to empower those who testify about Jesus, and we ask that You give us all boldness to speak truth to those You put in our path.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Suffering . . . is the badge of the true Christian. The disciple is not above his master . . . Luther reckoned suffering among the marks of the true church, and one of the memoranda drawn up in preparation for the Augsburg Confession similarly defines the church as the community of those 'who are persecuted and martyred for the gospel's sake.' . . . Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ, and it is therefore not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer."²

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer
(1906–1945)

POINT 1: GOD’S PEOPLE TESTIFY ABOUT THE RISEN SAVIOR (ACTS 4:8-12).

+ COMMENTARY

“Luke makes it plain that both waves of persecution were initiated by the Sadducees (4:1 and 5:17). They were the ruling class of wealthy aristocrats. Politically, they ingratiated themselves with the Romans, and followed a policy of collaboration, so that they feared the subversive implications of the apostles’ teaching. Theologically, they believed that the Messianic age had begun in the Maccabean period; so they were not looking for a Messiah. They also denied the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, which the apostles proclaimed in Jesus (2b). They thus saw the apostles as both agitators and heretics, both disturbers of the peace and enemies of the truth.”³

POINT 3: GOD’S PEOPLE PRAY FOR BOLDNESS TO PROCLAIM THE RISEN SAVIOR (ACTS 4:23-31).

+ ILLUSTRATION

You’ve probably played sock puppet with a young child before. The hidden hand is doing the work, but the kid thinks that the puppet is doing it all. Their little minds easily miss the invisible hand at work. So too people tend to miss the invisible hand of God at work in the world. In verse 28, the apostles entrusted themselves to God who can do whatever His hand has purposed to come to pass. The hand of God is executing the will of God from the foundations of the world. Christians remember that God is always at work. He is not standing at a distance and watching the world spiral out of control; rather, God is active and at work in this very moment to bring about His purposes. This should bring us great hope and confidence that the Lord is attentive to the needs and concerns we face. He is able to bring about good in any circumstance.

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1. Michael W. Goheen and Timothy M. Sheridan, *Becoming a Missionary Church: Lesslie Newbigin and Contemporary Church Movements* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2022), 170.
2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (United States: Touchstone, 2012), 91 [eBook].
3. John Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World, The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 95.

THE CHURCH WORKS TOGETHER



+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. God's people practice generosity (Acts 4:32-37).
2. God's people confront sin (Acts 5:1-9).
3. God's people display reverence (Acts 5:10-11).

Background Passage: Acts 4–5

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

God judged Ananias and Sapphira for lying about the gift they gave, protecting the purity of the early church.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Ananias and Sapphira's deceptive action was a sin and came not from a heart of generosity but from a heart of greed. Followers of Jesus share their resources and give generously to those in need, following the example of Jesus who gave up heavenly riches to share His inheritance with all who trust in Him.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because God has lavished us with riches of salvation and new life in Christ, we live in unity, being generous and honest as we reflect Christ's truth and love.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **When have you seen radical generosity on display, and how did it make you feel?** (people have rallied to support others who endured a tragedy; hosting fundraisers for unexpected medical expenses; giving someone a job or a place to live when they'd fallen on hard times; bringing food or offer to keep the kids after the birth of a child; providing a financial gift so someone can go on a mission trip; this generosity often humbles us, makes us feel thankful, and prompts us to want to be generous to others)

TRANSITION: People on the receiving end of generosity know the joy of people rallying around them in a time of need. For example, someone experiencing a medical crisis or an unexpected job loss often finds it humbling to see others come to their aid. In our day, it's common to see fund-sharing accounts launched to meet critical needs, where well-wishers can pray, write notes of encouragement, and give money to meet needs. In the era before technology, needs were seen in the communities in which one lived. This was certainly the case in Bible times, and one of the marks of God's people throughout history has been the willingness to meet needs especially among the people of God.

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- After Peter's preaching and the group's prayer for boldness and for God to act in miraculous ways, the group felt a sense of further oneness, and one of their first actions was to give generously to meet the needs of their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. The first picture of generosity was given in Acts 2, where all the believers shared everything they had, even selling their possessions to give to all "as any had need" (v. 45). Here in Acts 4, this pattern continued, though not all would be generous.



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POINT 1

GOD'S PEOPLE PRACTICE GENEROSITY (ACTS 4:32-37).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 4:32-37** from his or her Bible.

32 Now the entire group of those who believed were of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but instead they held everything in common. **33** With great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was on all of them. **34** For there was not a needy person among them because all those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the proceeds of what was sold, **35** and laid them at the apostles' feet. This was then distributed to each person as any had need. **36** Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus by birth, the one the apostles called Barnabas (which is translated Son of Encouragement), **37** sold a field he owned, brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

EXPLAIN: Use the following idea seen in **verses 32-33** to explain (Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG] p. 118):

When individual believers see themselves as one unified body in Christ and act as such through generosity, God's power and grace will be present.

- The connection between unity and generosity is clear. The Christian community gave to meet the needs of others because they were united in Christ. To care for others was a way of enhancing the unity and health they shared.
- Note all the words of entirety and oneness in verse 32: "entire," "one," "no one," "own," "everything," and "common." Luke was making sure we understood that the early church was one, and they acted in generosity to show love to one another as well as to show those around them that Christ's love transformed them to live differently than the world.

ASK: (DDG p. 118)

From Day 1 in the DDG: **How can we, as a body of believers, feel and act more unified?** (be more intentional at welcoming new people or people we don't know; be consistent in asking people's prayer requests to not only pray but see if we can meet those needs tangibly; be in learning mode and in care for those in the church who are different from us in race, culture, or socioeconomically)

HIGHLIGHT: Luke continued by giving examples of how this early group of believers were one in heart and mind. Referring to **verses 34-37**, highlight the key doctrine of stewardship (DDG p. 118).

Key Doctrine #88: Stewardship: God’s intention for mankind is that we serve Him as faithful stewards of His creation (Gen. 1:28; 1 Cor. 4:1-2). We are to invest the time, talents, and material possessions God has given us for His kingdom work (Matt. 25:14-29), knowing that God is the true owner of all we have, and that our true treasure is found not on earth but in heaven (Matt. 6:19,21; Luke 12:16-21). Motivated by God’s generosity to us made most clear in the gospel, we are to give God the best of what we have (Prov. 3:9), regularly (1 Cor. 16:2), sacrificially (Matt. 12:41-44), humbly (Matt. 6:1-4), and cheerfully (2 Cor. 9:6-7), praying that God may be glorified in our stewardship of His provisions.

- The apostles were entrusted with a great responsibility. Rather than merely meeting needs individually, the believers brought their assets and gave them to the apostles and trusted them to meet the needs of the group.
- This practice parallels the way Christians today can give to their church and trust the church’s leaders to use those resources to meet needs. There are times when church leaders are more aware of needs than individual members may be. This need not mean that members don’t give directly to meet needs, but it’s worth noting how even the giving of the church was done collectively through the church.
- Luke introduced Barnabas (also known as Joseph), who would be an important figure in the early church. Barnabas sold his field and gave the proceeds to the apostles. As a Levite, Barnabas was part of the religious aristocracy, and one could assume he was a wealthy man. As a Christian, however, Barnabas considered the growing church to be more important than his own wealth.
- Notice that Barnabas’s act wasn’t coerced. No one forced or pressured him to sell his land. His actions were not the result of a social program or political pressure. Rather, he was willing to sacrifice his material blessings in this life in order to bless the whole body.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 118)

What does it take to sacrifice worldly goods for the sake of needs in the church body? (belief that the needs are worth it; an eternal perspective that doesn’t place undue value on the pleasures of this life; seeing that blessing others is worth more than your own pleasure, and in actuality would give you more pleasure; belief that leaders would use the resources with the Spirit’s direction to help those in need)

TRANSITION: Barnabas was a leader who encouraged others by giving generously. His generosity was indicative of the life of those in this early church, who were selling and giving to meet the needs of others. However, as Luke will show next, there were still those who did not follow this pattern of radical generosity.

BARNABAS

Not only was Barnabas generous in his stewardship, he was also compassionate in introducing Saul to the Jerusalem church when other disciples were skeptical (Acts 9:26-27). He also gave a good report when he was sent by the Jerusalem church to check up on the Gentile believers in Antioch (11:19-23). Luke describes him as “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith” (11:24).

POINT 2

GOD'S PEOPLE CONFRONT SIN (ACTS 5:1-9).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 5:1-9** from his or her Bible.

1 But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property. **2** However, he kept back part of the proceeds with his wife's knowledge, and brought a portion of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. **3** "Ananias," Peter asked, "why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the proceeds of the land? **4** Wasn't it yours while you possessed it? And after it was sold, wasn't it at your disposal? Why is it that you planned this thing in your heart? You have not lied to people but to God." **5** When he heard these words, Ananias dropped dead, and a great fear came on all who heard. **6** The young men got up, wrapped his body, carried him out, and buried him. **7** About three hours later, his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. **8** "Tell me," Peter asked her, "did you sell the land for this price?" "Yes," she said, "for that price." **9** Then Peter said to her, "Why did you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out."

COMPARE: Make a quick chart on the board to discuss: "What is similar and different about this event and the one about Barnabas at the end of Acts 4? (both sold property; both received payment for the property; both brought resources to the apostles; Barnabas gave everything and was honest; Ananias and Sapphira gave a portion and lied to Peter, the church, and the Holy Spirit)"

HIGHLIGHT: Using **verses 1-6**, highlight the following main idea below (DDG p. 118):

Part of the role of the church is to combat and confront sin in the church and in the life of individual believers.

- Though it is not specifically stated in verse 2, the implication is that Ananias and Sapphira kept some of the proceeds but led the apostles to believe they were donating all of it. The Holy Spirit, however, saw through their deceit and gave Peter discernment to figure out what they did and confront Ananias.
- *Optional:* Use **PACK ITEM 11: SEEING THE OLD IN THE NEW** to show how a similar action occurred in the Old Testament when Achan stole the spoils of war at Jericho and hid them inside his tent. The Israelites didn't know why they were defeated by their next enemy, but God revealed that someone was disobedient. Achan was selected and judged by death (Josh. 7).
- Peter noted that Satan had filled Ananias's heart to lie to not only the church but to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3). Ananias didn't have to sell his land and give all the proceeds. Peter stated plainly that it was his while he owned it, and the money from selling the land was his too. But Satan filled his heart to do evil to disrupt the unity of the early church in his spiritual pride.



VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"As to those feeble spirits who, though they cannot be said to prefer earthly possessions to Christ, do yet cleave to them with a somewhat immoderate attachment, they have discovered by the pain of losing these things how much they were sinning in loving them. For their grief is of their own making."¹

—Augustine (354–430)

- Ananias died on the spot (v. 5). He didn't have an opportunity to respond to Peter's questioning. In this instance, sin led to immediate death. Immediate death does not always follow human sin in the Bible, but it does happen in extreme circumstances.
- The result of Ananias's death was great fear (v. 5). The young church was just forming, and God wanted to make it clear that He took sin seriously.

ASK: (DDG p. 119)

How easy or difficult is it to confront sin in others and why? (very difficult because we don't want to seem judgmental or prideful in pointing out others' sin, knowing we have sin ourselves; sometimes we show too much grace and sometimes not enough; speaking truth in love is difficult)

EXPLAIN: From **verses 7-9**, explain the following point (DDG p. 119):

God gives us opportunities to repent, but confronted unrepentant sin will lead to dire consequences.

- Sapphira may not have known what happened to Ananias, but she knew what he had plotted. Looking back to verses 1-2, they committed the sin together. She was part of the decision to sell the property and keep some of the proceeds, while saying they were giving all the proceeds.
- Peter, led by the Spirit, asked Sapphira if they had sold the land for the amount they offered the church. This time, God did give her an opportunity to confess sin. She chose poorly in lying to Peter, which Peter understood as lying to the Holy Spirit. Peter then pronounced upon her the same consequence that her husband suffered.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 119)

When confronted with sin, why do we sometimes fall into more sin when we are unrepentant? (we excuse ourselves with other lies; we don't want to get in trouble so we try to do all we can to escape wrath; we rely on ourselves instead of the power of God)

TRANSITION: The early church had experienced grace from the Lord, and they then witnessed His power in another way—His judgment over sin. How would the church respond to God now?

POINT 3

GOD'S PEOPLE DISPLAY REVERENCE (ACTS 5:10-11).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 5:10-11** from his or her Bible.

10 Instantly she dropped dead at his feet. When the young men came in, they found her dead, carried her out, and buried her beside her husband.

11 Then great fear came on the whole church and on all who heard these things.

ASK: In groups of 3-4, ask: "Why do you think the punishment for Ananias and Sapphira was so severe?" (God takes sin seriously; the early church was the beginning of God's new covenant people and needed to start out right; God is not to be trifled with; God needed to set a precedent for His people)

EXPLAIN: Using **verse 10**, discuss the following point (DDG p. 119):

God made it clear that He is almighty and all-holy, and He will continue to take sin seriously.

- Some commentators have speculated that Ananias and Sapphira dropped dead because Peter cursed them, or perhaps they were so overwhelmed by their own guilt and anxiety, they died on the spot. Luke made it clear, however, that their deaths were divine judgment. And in general, the longterm consequences of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). Death is the proper result of sin—death now or death later.
- Similar to Adam and Eve at the beginning of creation, here at the beginning of the church, there was an opportunity to be faithful and honest to God or not. Choosing the latter would lead to dire consequences. And death was the result in both instances. Sapphira was held to the same standard as Ananias and was condemned, just as both Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden of Eden to experience toil and death.
- For those who may be offended by these events or deem that God was being unfair, remember the church was in its newborn stage. The people were unified and growing in favor among the unbelievers. But "falsehood ruins fellowship. If the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira had not been publicly exposed and punished, the Christian ideal of an open fellowship would not have been preserved, and the modern cry 'there are so many hypocrites in the church' would have been heard from the beginning."²

EXPLORE: (DDG p. 119)

How do we balance a seriousness for staying away from sin and grace to forgive when sin happens? (by understanding more of who God is in His holiness as much as His mercy; by knowing God is grieved by sin and being truly repentant when it occurs; by accepting God's forgiveness when we sin but putting things in motion to not repeat the same sin)

SHARE: In groups of 2-4, ask: “How has the Lord taught you to hold Him in fear and reverence?” Then share with the group some responses.

HIGHLIGHT: Using **verse 11** and the points below, explain (DDG p. 119):

Christians should live in awe of God’s grace among them while maintaining a reverent fear for His holiness and hatred of sin.

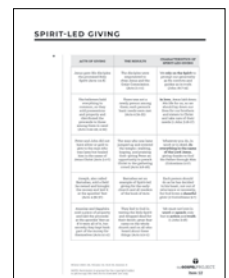
- Proverbs talk about the fear of the Lord: The fear of the Lord is the “beginning of wisdom” (9:10) and “prolongs life” (10:27). The opposite of the fear of the Lord—disdain or flippancy—produces foolishness and a life cut short. Often, since we don’t see immediate and fatal consequences of our sin, we believe that God is not that serious about sin.
- Fear of the Lord is good. The holiness of God and His judgment of sin helps us walk faithfully, and it reminds Christians of the price Jesus paid to forgive sin. In light of Jesus’s gruesome death on the cross, we as Christians should keep in the forefront of our minds how serious God truly is about sin. Like John Owen famously stated, “Be killing sin or sin will be killing you.”³ As Christians, we are no longer under condemnation for sin, but we are called to die to sin daily.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 119)

How can the church instill more understanding of reverent fear of the Lord to its people? (by incorporating praying more for a reverent fear; by holding people accountable with truth and love; by offering help to those with addictions; by holding up the weight of God’s character including His holiness with His mercy)

DIG: A reverent fear of God compels us to be generous and a good steward of all that God has given us. Use **PACK ITEM 12: SPIRIT-LED GIVING** to highlight the characteristics of what it means to give generously in the Spirit. As we’ve looked at the early church over the past weeks, we can understand that because God has given so much to us, we surely should be willing to give back to Him and His people as there is need.

TRANSITION: The early church sought to work together as one with one Lord and one mission. May our church have the same heart and mission.



MY RESPONSE

SAY: Ananias and Sapphira's deceptive action was a sin and came not from a heart of generosity but from a heart of greed. Followers of Jesus share their resources and give generously to those in need, following the example of Jesus who gave up heavenly riches to share His inheritance with all who trust in Him. Because God has lavished us with riches of salvation and new life in Christ, we live in unity, being generous and honest as we reflect Christ's truth and love.

HEAD:

The good news of Jesus compels radical generosity. Paul wrote about Jesus: "Though he was rich, for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). Jesus is the perfect One—the One who possessed all the riches of God—yet He willingly laid that aside to meet the needs of sin-impoorished people. As Christians reflect on the gospel, they are compelled to follow His example of generosity as an act of worship.

How was Jesus generous, and how can we imitate Him?

HEART:

Generosity starts with the heart on at least two levels. Christians are generous because their hearts are moved by what Jesus has done. Also, their hearts are broken over the needs of those around them. A heart moved by these realities can't help but seek ways to see needs and meet needs, especially needs within the body of Christ. As Paul wrote: "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us work for the good of all, especially for those who belong to the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10).

How have you experienced the generosity of the church body that you can thank God for?

HANDS:

It's not enough to understand God's generosity or feel broken by the needs of the poor. We must also open our hands and give. Like Barnabas, we can consider the resources that are at our disposal. Then, we live in community with others so that we are aware of their needs. Finally, we give as an act of worship, returning to God the resources He has entrusted to us in the first place and asking Him to bless our giving so He receives the glory.

Where do you need to demonstrate increased generosity?

PRAY: Father, thank You that You care about transforming us into the image of Jesus. Protect us from selfishness and, if needed, pry our hands from our earthly resources to bring about Your goodness in the world.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"But progress means getting nearer to the place where you want to be. And if you have taken a wrong turning, then to go forward does not get you any nearer. If you are on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road; and in that case the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive man."⁴

—C. S. Lewis (1898–1963)

EXTRA

POINT 1: GOD'S PEOPLE PRACTICE GENEROSITY (ACTS 4:32-37).

+ COMMENTARY

“The Spirit-filled community exhibited a remarkable unanimity which expressed itself even in the attitude to private property. Whereas the institution of a communal purse was explicitly regulated in writing at Qumran, the action taken by these early disciples of Jesus was intended to be voluntary. Members regarded their private estates as being at the community’s disposal; those who owned houses or lands sold these in order that they might be more conveniently available to the community in the form of money. The richer members thus made provision for the poorer, and for a time no one had any need to complain of hunger or want.”⁵

+ ILLUSTRATION

Luke describes the church as being of “one heart and one mind.” The closest biblical parallel for this language is that of marriage. Genesis 2:23-24 describes it this way: “Then the man said: This one, at last, is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; this one will be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken from man. This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh.”

A married couple is one flesh. This supernatural unity means more than merely that they live together or work together to raise kids. They are, in the eyes of God, one. A similar concept is true of Christians. They are not merely attending the same church or working together in ministry, but they are united by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and fellowship with Jesus Christ. The local church today continues to embody this unity as people join together to love the Lord.

+ OPTIONAL TEACHING ACTIVITY

Glue is a picture of oneness. Take two pieces of wood and strong wood-resin glue and affix them together. If you give the glue time to adhere to the objects, it’s virtually impossible to pull them apart and, when you do, there are splinters and broken pieces everywhere. The same should be true for relationships within the church.

Today it’s common for people to bounce between churches and move rapidly from one location to the next. Also, it’s common for hard relationships and conflict to cause people to leave one

EXTRA

church for another. When people move from place to place, especially when they are leaving frustrated or bitter, there are splinters that are left, both in the heart of the individuals involved and in the church as a whole. It's common today to go into churches that have been fractured by disunity and the implications linger for decades. If we see ourselves as one with the church, it changes the way Christians work through hard relationships with the church and the way they seek to forgive and fight for unity over the long haul.

POINT 2: GOD'S PEOPLE CONFRONT SIN (ACTS 5:1-9).

+ COMMENTARY

“When all is said and done, there is no ‘comfortable’ solution to the passage. It is a unique story. There is nothing like it elsewhere in Acts, or for that matter in the New Testament. But nowhere in the story are Ananias and Sapphira condemned to eternal perdition. Their death did not necessarily involve their loss of salvation. Still, the judgment that befell Ananias and Sapphira was severe, and one is all too aware that today’s churches would be much emptier if such standards were consistently applied. It is part and parcel of Luke’s ideal portrait of the early church in Acts. None of the standards fit the church of our experience—‘one in heart and mind,’ no one ‘claimed that any of his possessions was his own.’ Luke depicted it as a unique period, the new people of God in Christ, filled with the Spirit, growing by leaps and bounds. There was no room for distrust, for duplicity, for any breach in fellowship.”⁶

+ ILLUSTRATION

Viral videos often deter crime or wrongdoing of all sorts. We live in a time where there’s always a camera around, regardless of where you are in the world. People can catch you doing all sorts of heinous acts that you might think you were getting away with. Body-cam footage from the police often captures the intricacies of the circumstances surrounding an arrest. Our actions are shaped when we know someone is watching.

Sadly, we are prone to forget that God is watching us as well. He is aware of our lives, knows the corners we tend to cut, and is aware of the motives of our hearts. Like Ananias and Sapphira, many assume that God isn’t aware of the way we’ve purposed in our hearts to disobey. We might think we are getting away with selfishness, but it’s important to know that God is watching, is active, and can judge.

POINT 3: GOD'S PEOPLE DISPLAY REVERENCE (ACTS 5:10-11).

+ COMMENTARY

“The deaths of Ananias and Sapphira provide more evidence of the shift from the old covenant to the new. Judgment is carried out not on the temple grounds or in the council of Israel’s leaders but in the community of believers led by the apostle Peter. He is the one with the authority to speak on God’s behalf, and through him comes God’s judgment for unfaithfulness. God is with the believers in both salvation and judgment. The word ‘fear’ appears after both deaths (Acts 5:5, 11) and connotes the healthy fear of the Lord that comes from knowing who he is and recognizing what he is able to do. This fear now grows in the company of believers, apart from the temple and those who rejected Jesus Christ of Nazareth.”⁷

+ OPTIONAL DISCUSSION

Obituaries rarely tell the whole story. Many obituaries describe the good of someone’s life—highlight their various accomplishments, their family, and their vocation. But obituaries often neglect to mention how someone died, especially if the circumstances surrounding the death were somehow tragic. It’s common to want to mask the pain of an untimely death that resulted from sinful choices.

Imagine reading an obituary for Ananias and Sapphira. The Bible records nothing about them other than this scene. It would be hard to summarize their death in a favorable light. The circumstances are the kind that you’d love to hide in secret. What might happen, however, if the obituary were honest? What if it held up their sin and exhorted others to avoid following a similar path? While the obituary might not be a pleasant read, it would be a standing reminder of the high price of sin. In our day, it’s important that we not vilify people, especially those who’ve passed from this life, but it’s also important that we are honest in appropriate ways about the high price of sin and the cost of rebellion.

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THE CHURCH PREACHES THE GOSPEL



+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. God's people are to pray for the world with compassion (Matt. 9:35-38).
2. God's people are to go into the world with assurance (Matt. 10:1-14).
3. God's people are to preach to the world with urgency (Matt. 10:15; Rom. 10:14-15).

Background Passages: Matthew 9–10; Romans 10

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

God has sent His people into the world to tell others about Christ.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Just as Jesus came into the world so that people might come to have saving faith in Him, the church has been sent throughout the world to proclaim salvation that can only be found in Jesus Christ.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we have come to know Jesus at least in part through the faithful evangelism of others, we embrace the duty and privilege of making Jesus known to the nations.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **What comes to mind when you think about evangelism?** (fear because people might have questions that I don't have answers to; shame for not doing it; embarrassment at being too immature in faith to share; awkward; useless because these conversations sometimes don't go anywhere)

TRANSITION: Christians know that they should tell others about Jesus, but there's often a gap between what they should do and what they actually do. The book of Acts is filled with people who told others about Jesus. Throughout Acts, the apostles primarily focused on the resurrection to show others that Jesus really is the Savior of the world. This message is good news. This week's session will help us see Jesus's example in evangelism—both His motive, actions, and promise—so that we can more consistently share the greatest news of all.

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- In Matthew 9–10, Jesus taught about the kingdom of God and showed the kingdom's power through deeds of love and mercy. Jesus also set up and commissioned His disciples to follow the example He set for sharing the good news of the kingdom. Romans 10 reveals a glimpse of Paul's heart for evangelism. Paul was the foremost example of evangelism and church planting after Jesus's resurrection. His work spread the church through the known world of his day. Paul echoed Jesus's call for Christians to share the gospel to others.



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POINT 1

GOD'S PEOPLE ARE TO PRAY FOR THE WORLD WITH COMPASSION (MATT. 9:35-38).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 9:35-38** from his or her Bible.

35 Jesus continued going around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness. **36** When he saw the crowds, he felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. **37** Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few. **38** Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest."

EXPLAIN: Call attention to **PACK ITEM 13: THE HARVEST** as you use **verses 35-38** and the main idea below to explain how we are to emulate Jesus (Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG] p. 126):

Knowing Jesus had compassion on people should compel believers to have compassion and share the good news of Jesus.

- Verse 35 describes the practices that Jesus had done throughout His ministry. First, Jesus taught in synagogues about the kingdom, urging people to "repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matt. 4:17). Second, Jesus demonstrated the work of the kingdom through deeds of mercy and compassion. As He healed diseases and sickness, He painted a picture of what life in the eternal kingdom of God would look like.
- The word "compassion" is fairly mundane to most modern readers. But the term here means that Jesus's insides churned; He was torn up about the reality of the suffering and brokenness these people experienced. Jesus did not merely look at the crowd and move on; rather, He allowed their experience to touch Him deeply.
- Jesus used the image of "sheep without a shepherd" to describe the people as "distressed and dejected." Sheep without a shepherd are in a rough spot. They do not know how to find the safe paths on their own. They are in danger of being stolen by thieves or preyed upon by wolves and lions.
- Jesus used a metaphor of a crop overflowing and ready to be harvested, but there were too few people to go out and do the work to bring in the harvest. In other words, God is actively seeking and saving distressed and dejected people. But He chooses to use redeemed people to declare the message of Jesus they so desperately need to hear.
- Jesus instructed His disciples thus to pray that the Lord would send out more harvesters for the work of evangelism. The solution is prayer. This point should amplify what was modeled by the apostles in Acts 4. When confronted with persecution and threats, the church prayed for boldness (Acts 4:23-31).



ASK: (DDG p. 126)

From Day 2 in the DDG: **How can you be diligent in praying for God to send more workers into the harvest?** (set a note on my calendar or schedule; ask a friend to remind you; make a note of it in your prayer journal)

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: Take time here to lead your group in prayer for those workers who are already laboring in the harvest. Prepare beforehand to have a list of missionaries your church supports. Pray also that God would raise up more who would go, as well as for your group to be a light in their community, taking opportunities to share the gospel message.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read the key doctrine (DDG p. 126).

Key Doctrine #87: 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.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 126)

How can we see evangelism as a privilege? (knowing that we get to partner with God in His work and mission; knowing that we get a part in rescuing people from death and eternal punishment; knowing God has a purpose for us and can use our gifts and talents in sharing the gospel to others)

TRANSITION: Jesus reminded His people that we must pray for God to raise up more who will declare and demonstrate the kingdom's power and presence. Matthew 10 describes how Jesus commissioned His twelve disciples to commit to the work of the harvest.

POINT 2

GOD'S PEOPLE ARE TO GO INTO THE WORLD WITH ASSURANCE (MATT. 10:1-14).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 10:1-14** from his or her Bible.

1 Summoning his twelve disciples, he gave them authority over unclean spirits, to drive them out and to heal every disease and sickness. **2** These are the names of the twelve apostles: First, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; **3** Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; **4** Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him. **5** Jesus sent out these twelve after giving them instructions: "Don't take the road that leads to the Gentiles, and don't enter any Samaritan town. **6** Instead, go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. **7** As you go, proclaim, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' **8** Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you received, freely give. **9** Don't acquire gold, silver, or copper for your money-belts. **10** Don't take a traveling bag for the road, or an extra shirt, sandals, or a staff, for the worker is worthy of his food. **11** When you enter any town or village, find out who is worthy, and stay there until you leave. **12** Greet a household when you enter it, **13** and if the household is worthy, let your peace be on it; but if it is unworthy, let your peace return to you. **14** If anyone does not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that house or town."

HIGHLIGHT: Jesus had ushered in the kingdom of God by teaching, healing, and casting out demons. But He knew that He would die on the cross, rise again, and return to the Father. In light of that, highlight the following as seen through **verses 1-4** (DDG p. 126):

Jesus entrusted to His disciples the responsibility to carry on His mission and empowered them to do the work.

- It's tempting to get lost in the details here, like casting out demons and healing the sick. One is tempted to spend time discussing how these realities are seen today. Space does not permit a full consideration of this question, but it's worth noting that the disciples were doing what Jesus had been doing.
- With Jesus's arrival and the birth of the church, the manifestations of God's presence were distinct and clear. Don't get lost in the "what about" questions, but instead focus on the fact that God uses people to do what He's doing in the world. And notice the people that Jesus uses—these are a random assortment of humans with no known connection or status except for the fact that they'd been with Jesus. Even here we see mention of Judas, who would betray Jesus. How astounding that Jesus would give this level of authority to someone like Judas.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Jesus commands us to be his witnesses. It's going to be easier than we think and harder than we imagine. But Jesus does not send us out empty-handed. He gives us the divine means we need to obey his divine command."¹

—Rebecca Manley Pippert

ASK: (DDG p. 126):

As disciples, what are examples of things we can do to carry out the mission and work of God? (pray for people and their needs; meet their tangible needs as we share about meeting their spiritual needs; support those who need funds to carry out the message to the world; support churches and organizations that are doing God's work; study and learn the Word more to be ready to preach the gospel when opportunity arises)

CHALLENGE: Looking at **verses 5-14**, in groups of 2-4, ask: "Why might Jesus give these instructions?" (so that they would trust in God more; so that they wouldn't trust in themselves; so they could move quicker with a lighter load; so they remembered that their mission was the primary focus; so they might pray more; so they would find the right people that God wanted them to)

INSTRUCT: Understanding some of the reasons why Jesus instructed His disciples the way He did, explain from **verses 5-14** (DDG p. 127):

Jesus sent out His disciples with authority, but He wanted them to understand that both the power and the provision for the work came from God.

- Jesus's instructions might have been the worst packing tips ever! Take nothing but the good news and the power to heal the sick and drive out demons. We do not know how long the disciples were gone, but by sending them out, the news of Jesus's identity and His kingdom could spread more broadly than He could spread it alone.
- Christians today live out this mission in places around the world, seeking to plant the seeds of the gospel. We should pray for them and also seek the Lord as to how we should best partner with them in the work.
- All Christians are called to testify to the truth of Jesus where we live, learn, work, and play. So whether we go far or stay local, we all should depend on God to provide for the needs of our mission, whether it be funds, or the right words, or the right opportunities.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 127)

How can we take steps toward trusting God in equipping us for evangelism? (praying for help and opportunities; planning alone or with a group an activity to engage with nonbelievers; reading books on evangelism or mission; taking a class to learn more)

TRANSITION: It was not just those who knew Jesus and ministered alongside of Him who were sent to share the gospel, but all subsequent followers of Jesus who seek to obey Him by proclaiming the availability of the kingdom through faith and repentance.

POINT 3

GOD'S PEOPLE ARE TO PREACH TO THE WORLD WITH URGENCY (MATT. 10:15; ROM. 10:14-15).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 10:15** from his or her Bible.

15 “Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.”

FOCUS: Jesus warned His disciples that some villages where they would take the good news would not welcome them. The hostility would not be aimed at them per se, but it would be a spiritual rejection of the truth about Jesus. As you read **verse 15** focus on this point (DDG p. 127):

God rightly judges those who reject Him and the good news of Jesus.

- Matthew 10:15 followed the exhortation in verse 14 that the apostles should shake off the dust from their feet and move on from villages and towns that responded to the gospel message with hostility. The image of shaking off the dust is a visual picture of judgment. The dust of their sin would remain on them, and the apostles would move on to other areas and people.
- Verse 15 provided the rationale for the disciples moving on. God will judge those who reject His gospel and His messengers. The implication of the text is not merely that these people are failing to show hospitality, but that they were rejecting the message of the apostles concerning Jesus.
- The fate of those who reject the message about Jesus today is the same—death, judgment, and hell. Every person who fails to respond in faith and repentance to the message of Jesus will be judged. And their judgment will be worse than that of Sodom and Gomorrah because the rejection is against Jesus Christ, the Son of God in the flesh, God's fullest revelation of Himself.
- Note that it is God who judges and condemns, not us. God judges rightly for He knows the hearts of each person. We do not, so we continue to have compassion and patience as we trust in God's sovereign will in their lives.

SODOM AND GOMORRAH

The judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah was total and decisive for their excessive wickedness, where not even ten righteous could be found (Gen. 18:20-32; 19:23-25). The people were given time to turn from their wickedness, but they did not, and God judged. His judgment was not arbitrary or excessive, but a measured and just response to their wickedness.

ASK: (DDG p. 127)

Why is it right for God to judge those who reject Him? (because He is Almighty God who is holy and sovereign, deserving to be praised and worshiped; those who reject Him show pride and wickedness in their heart for not believing what is true; only with God can there be true life)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Romans 10:14-15** from his or her Bible.

14 How, then, can they call on him they have not believed in? And how can they believe without hearing about him? And how can they hear without a preacher? **15** And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.

HIGHLIGHT: The progression of **verse 14-15** is very common in Paul's writing: sending, preaching, hearing, believing, and saving. Highlight the progression as you explain (DDG p. 127):

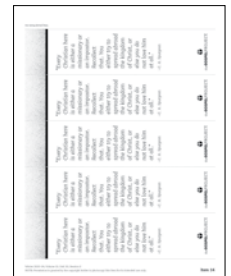
If we have hearts attuned to God's heart, we will want others to know Him, and yet, they can't know Him unless someone tells them of Jesus.

- Paul's intention of the progression in verse 14 was to highlight that each step is essential. People can't be saved unless they believe. And they can't believe unless they hear. And they can't hear unless someone preaches. And they can't preach if they aren't sent.
- We should praise God for those who have been sent. As Paul stated, these individuals have beautiful feet. Those who have lived on mission, bringing the message of Jesus to others are to be commended. The church should actively pray for, support, and encourage those who evangelize.
- Another way to be involved in the work is to make it possible for others to go. Our financial investment in the local church and in support of missionaries can make it possible for them to evangelize near and far. Also, those who are younger and more mobile might consider how to leverage their lives for the sake of the gospel. Maybe they aren't pastors or church planters, but they should consider how to use their vocation and family to be a part of the work of local church ministry in difficult places around the world as meaningful members and gospel witnesses.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 127)

How can we stress the importance of evangelism to ourselves and others in the church? (by sharing testimonies of evangelistic or mission work; by giving people stats and stories of how people are coming to Christ locally or abroad to stir hearts; by researching opportunities for ourselves or others to give or go; by studying Scripture to see the importance of evangelism)

CHALLENGE: Before you finish this session, make sure to challenge your group to think about the mission they are called to wherever they live. Pass out **PACK ITEM 14: MISSIONARY** bookmarks as a reminder of our desire as believers to be missionaries. We might think about the process of Romans 10 as applying solely to full-time missionaries or pastors, but the paradigm applies to our mission. We can be sent in just the same way when we take the gospel to our neighbors or coworkers. After all, how are they going to hear unless someone tells them, and how will they believe unless we are sent? Time permitting, ask your group to think of ways they can be on mission this week individually or as a group.



MY RESPONSE

SAY: Just as Jesus came into the world so that people might come to have saving faith in Him, the church has been sent throughout the world to proclaim salvation that can only be found in Jesus Christ. Because we have come to know Jesus at least in part through the faithful evangelism of others, we embrace the duty and privilege of making Jesus known to the nations.

HEAD:

The message about Jesus is good news. If we understand the truth about Jesus—that He is the only way one can be saved and apart from Him people are destined for destruction—then it must shape our actions. Those who have been saved by Jesus should be abundantly grateful for the hope they have to receive life and avoid God’s wrath, and they should long for those they love to experience this great salvation.

How does your salvation change the way you think about the work of evangelism?

HEART:

Like Jesus, we should be moved with compassion for those who have rejected Him. We should look at them with a broken heart that sees them as people who are distressed and dejected—sheep without a shepherd. If we don’t feel this sense of compassion, we should ask God to give us His heart of love for others.

How do you need to grow in genuine compassion for the lost?

HANDS:

Evangelism is fundamentally something we do. It’s not enough to merely acknowledge that Jesus is the only way to be saved, we have to actively do something about that knowledge and talk to others about Jesus. We should pray for others, look for ways to share truth with them, and give a clear witness to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

How can you grow in the work of evangelism?

PRAY: Father, we believe that You can save any and all who come to You in humble faith. We ask that You empower us to share the good news about Jesus while we have time. We pray for those who have been sent to difficult places around the world where they are living on mission. Help us speak up when opportunities to share the gospel present themselves.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

“In light of God’s coming judgment, Jesus knew the desperate condition of those to whom He ministered. These were people who were separated from God and who, if nothing changed, would one day stand before God in their sin and be cast into eternal darkness. This is why Jesus had such compassion on them. How much more so should this be true in our day?”²

—David Platt

EXTRA

POINT 1: GOD’S PEOPLE ARE TO PRAY FOR THE WORLD WITH COMPASSION (MATT. 9:35-38).

+ ILLUSTRATION

The image of people as sheep isn’t the most encouraging picture. Sheep are not smart animals. Without the care of a shepherd, they are lost. They will wander aimlessly without someone pointing them in the right direction. They can’t find food to eat on their own. Often they will follow other sheep off a cliff to their death if no one redirects them to safety. People are like this. The big crowd Jesus saw was distressed and dejected because they were aimless just like sheep. They had no one leading them, pointing them in the right direction, helping them avoid harm, and leading them to places where they could flourish.

POINT 2: GOD’S PEOPLE ARE TO GO INTO THE WORLD WITH ASSURANCE (MATT. 10:1-14).

+ COMMENTARY

“His . . . disciples’ suggests that the Twelve have already been chosen (see under 5:1), but to date they have apparently always accompanied Jesus. Now he is sending them out on their own in twos (Mark 6:7). Matthew pairs their names accordingly. This grouping no doubt enabled the disciples to support, protect, and empower each other better than if each went alone, and it perhaps was patterned after the law that required at least two witnesses (Deut. 19:15). By not staying together as a larger group, the disciples also maximized their ability to reach large numbers of people. Timeless principles for discipleship and missions appear here.”³

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- Unit 29:** You Will Be My Witnesses
- Unit 30:** Every Day the Lord Added to Their Number

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- Unit 32:** The Power and the Wisdom of God
- Unit 33:** A Prisoner of Christ Jesus

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FROM MANY PEOPLE TO ONE PEOPLE

God so loved the world that He sent His Son into the world to save the world, to die for our sins and rise again, just as He had foretold. And then the resurrected Savior sent His people into the world to share this good news. Yet He did not send them out alone. God the Son promised to be with them, so He sent them God the Spirit, who would give them words, power, and boldness to proclaim His gospel. In this way, the church was born and the church grew, just as it does today. God takes sinners saved by grace through faith and joins them with His one people to serve Jesus together, to love one another, and to share His good news with many more.

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