



the **GOSPEL**PROJECT.

FROM MANY PEOPLE TO ONE PEOPLE

ADULTS / DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE / WINTER 2023–24 / VOL. 10



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SCRIPTURES ARE CONFIRMED

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

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

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Luke 24

+ **SETTING:**

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.

DAY 1

READ:

Luke 24:36-43

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 24:36

NOTES

I saved up \$700 for my first car and bought one from my dad's best friend. I sold that car to my sister and bought another from a family we'd known for years. I drove that car all through college, but after graduating I decided to move up in vehicle.

So at 22 years old, I was getting ready to sell a car to a stranger for the first time. The buyer had called, and we had scheduled a time to meet. I had the title in hand, and he assured me he had cash. But at the last minute, I got cold feet: What if this guy had bad intentions? Would he rob me and steal my car? So I did the only thing I knew to do: I asked my dad to be there for the transaction. I walked in with confidence and peace, not because of my own strength or confidence in the buyer's integrity, but because my bear-of-a-man father was standing there.

Perhaps that's the feel of today's focal passage: Though the disciples were startled, Jesus proclaimed peace over them. Jesus was present, and with Jesus present, peace was present. The same is true for us today.

In what situation are you lacking peace today? Can you see Jesus in this situation? How does that change your peace level?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"We may ignore, but we can nowhere evade, the presence of God. The world is crowded with Him. He walks everywhere *incognito*. And the *incognito* is not always hard to penetrate. The real labour is to attend. In fact, to come awake. Still more, to remain awake."¹

—C. S. Lewis (1898–1963)

DAY 2

READ:

Matthew 14:22-33

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 14:26-27

NOTES



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 (Isaiah 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.

In this week's focal passages, the disciples huddled together in a room were startled and terrified when Jesus appeared because they thought they had seen a ghost (Luke 24:37). It seems that's the first conclusion their thinly-stretched minds had locked on when the crucified and supposedly-dead Jesus appeared to them in bodily form.

The funny thing is that this wasn't the first time they mistook Jesus for a ghost. In Matthew 14, the disciples were in a boat headed across the Sea of Galilee, battered by a storm. When Jesus came, walking on the sea early in the morning (Matthew 14:25), again their brains went immediately to the conclusion that it was a ghost.

I had a similar experience years ago. While walking through a commercial haunted house with friends—already on edge—I was grabbed and lifted into the air by one of the “monsters.” Instantly paralyzed with fear, I couldn't for my life figure out how I would leave that amusement place alive. But then I heard a familiar voice whisper, “It's me, Denny.” One of my good friends had played a prank; I instantly felt peace.

Hear Jesus's words today in your own life: “It is I” (Matthew 24:27). Don't be afraid.

Have you taken time today to be truly still and hear the voice of the Lord?

DAY 3

READ:

Luke 24:36-43

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 24:38-40

NOTES

One of my friends has a really neat computer case. It's split down the middle vertically. The left side of the case says, "Left brain," and describes what a predominantly left-brain, or analytical, person tends to do or be or think. The color scheme on this side of the case is black and white, the typeface is traditional, and the background image appears to be something from a newspaper. The right side of the case is awash in brilliant colors. It's heading, "Right brain," is written in a scripted font, and it describes the characteristics of a predominantly right-brain, or artistic, person. I remember this case vividly because of the woman who owns it. Raleigh is the epitome of a right-brained person. Artistic, flamboyant, and colorful in all she does, her gorgeous personality lights up a room.

But that wasn't Jesus. He wasn't flashy and likely didn't stand out in a crowd. But He changed humanity forever. When He appeared to His disciples in Luke 24, He didn't appeal to the vivid, imaginary parts of their brains; He went to the logical side, inviting them to see and touch. Glory to the One who crafts each sunrise and still sets all the universe in order. We praise Him for His logic as well as His artistry.

How have you seen God through logic or analytics? How have you experienced Him in creativity?

DAY 4

READ:

Luke 24:44-49

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 24:44-45

NOTES

If you read the book of Matthew, you'll see the word "fulfilled" several times. It's a rich Greek word, carrying with it the idea of making full, complete, filled to the brim, or perfect. Matthew, our resident Hebrew writer of his Gospel, went out of his way to point out when something from the Old Testament Scriptures had been fulfilled (see Matthew 2:15,17).

Jesus didn't just check off the list of Messiah prophecies (though there were hundreds); He completed them perfectly. Some of the prophecies even seemed contradictory: the promised One would come from Galilee, Egypt, and Bethlehem; God managed to make each of them come to pass when His Son was still an infant, dependent on the decisions of His earthly parents. Jesus lived perfectly, died sacrificially, and arose triumphantly.

When He appeared to His disciples, Jesus reminded them that He had told them that everything written about Him must be "fulfilled" (Luke 24:44). In pointing His learners back to the Scriptures, He reminded them not only that He is exactly who He said He was, but also that God is faithful. Even today, we can find confidence in studying the Old Testament and seeing signs pointing us to Christ. As Paul wrote in Romans 15:4, the past writings were written to give us hope through the endurance and encouragement of Scripture.

How can studying God's fulfilled promises in the Bible strengthen your faith even today?

DAY 5

READ:

Luke 24:44-49

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 24:46-49

NOTES

Jesus told His disciples that they would be witnesses to His suffering, death, and resurrection so that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed to all the nations starting in Jerusalem (Luke 24:47), the very city where He was killed. I wish I could see the visible reaction of the disciples to that city: Jerusalem was where they were hiding at that moment, locked in a room for fear of the local religious authorities. Jerusalem probably wasn't a desired location for anyone affiliated with Jesus. Perhaps some of them were looking to get out at the first opportunity.

But we cannot forget that God loved Jerusalem; it was David's city. God had stopped the angel bringing a plague as it got to the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite (2 Samuel 24:16), which is the exact place where David purchased the site for the temple. Hundreds of years before that, it had been called Mount Moriah, the place where Abraham had been willing to offer his only son as a sacrifice (Genesis 22:2; 2 Chronicles 3:1). In that same city, God would not resist the offering of His only Son.

So it wasn't much of a surprise that the best news ever—the offer of forgiveness for our sins—would also begin in Jerusalem.

**What place holds a special significance in your heart?
How has God shaped you there?**

GROUP

NOTES

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."²

—Harriet McEwen Kimball
(1834–1917)

POINT 1: The risen Messiah brings peace (Luke 24:36-38a).

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

? How can we know and experience the peace of Christ in the midst of panic, chaos, or confusion?

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 (Isaiah 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.

? How can we apply our knowledge of God's transcendence to our lives?

POINT 2: The risen Messiah overcomes doubts (Luke 24:38b-43).

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.

? What have you experienced in the past that made you doubt God and how did Jesus reveal Himself in it?

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.

? How do we help others (or ourselves) when we face doubts about God or His Word?

POINT 3: The risen Messiah fulfills Scripture (Luke 24:44-49).

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.

? From Day 4: How can studying God's fulfilled promises in the Bible strengthen your faith even today?

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

? How are we called to be witnesses today?

MY RESPONSE

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

- **HEAD:** How can you point your eyes back to the Lord when circumstances are stealing your peace?
- **HEART:** How can you praise God for how He pursues you and reveals Himself even in your doubts and fears?
- **HANDS:** What words or actions this week have revealed that you are a witness to Jesus our Lord?



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

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"There is no greater commission or higher calling than to help others find the way to experience God's presence."³

—Darrell L. Bock

DOUBTS ARE OVERCOME



+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

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

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

John 20

+ **SETTING:**

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.

DAY 1

READ:

John 20:24-29

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 20:24-25

NOTES

I wish I had known Thomas personally. I'd like to know if he was quick to believe or guarded in his trust. I see that he trusted Jesus in other Scripture passages, but it seems his trust perhaps didn't extend to the other disciples. Or perhaps he had simply lost his resolve when he lost his hope that Jesus was the Messiah. Or maybe he was tired of hearing their story of Jesus appearing in a locked room; maybe he was just tired of feeling left out.

We all have our own personalities, emotions, tendencies, and back stories. God made us beautifully individual, but often we take our quirks or natures and use them as excuses: "I can't believe because I'm skeptical." "I'll believe anything because I'm accepting."

Jesus sees our personality tendencies; He sees our frustrations and our emotions. He knows when we've tried to believe and when we've crossed our arms and simply refused. And yet He loves us regardless. But He doesn't allow us to sit in our unbelief or doubts simply because that is our first inclination. Jesus calls us to believe Him. That may mean a deeper study, more intense prayer, or simply waiting for His response.

What reminds you to cling to Jesus when you're struggling to have faith?

DAY 2

READ:

Luke 24:1-12

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 24:11

NOTES

My husband does wildlife education programs, and a few days ago he was giving a presentation to a group of eight-year-old boys. He asked a question about a particular animal, and one of the boys answered it perfectly. "Great job," he told the youngster. "How did you know that?" The boy, chest out, replied, "Well, I am older than all these other kids."

We Christians sometimes look like that: we're proud of our great knowledge of God and our faith. We see the same idea in John 20:25, when Thomas wouldn't believe and the other disciples continued to testify that they had seen Jesus. If you took this passage out of context, you might want to commend those ten for believing so quickly. But a quick glance at Luke 24 reminds us that they too didn't believe the first time. The women who went to the tomb and saw it empty and encountered the angels there told the disciples about their experience, but the disciples didn't believe them (v. 11).

And so we take off our own pride, our own pretension, and our oh-so-holy faith and sit with that person who has legitimate doubts. We remember the struggles we had in our own faith, and we share those. We point to the Bible, but we also point to God's grace to lift us when we fall.

When have you struggled to believe and with whom can you share that this week to encourage them that sometimes it's okay to doubt if you're truly searching for truth?

DAY 3

READ:

John 20:24-29

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 20:26-27

NOTES

I love the power of a group of friends. When I started college, I claimed that I wanted to start running so that I could avoid the “freshman fifteen.” (I say “claimed” because I had not actually started running.) One day in class, I heard a girl sitting nearby say that she wanted to run in the mornings. I jumped into her conversation: “I’ll run with you! What time?” When she told me 6 am, I had to ask myself if I really wanted to run. It was going to take intentional action on my part. But I found that though the 5:45 alarm clock seemed to hurt every morning, I would faithfully get up and run because I knew she would be waiting for me.

Being part of a group can encourage us to do things we may never otherwise do individually. That can have positive or negative effects on our lives. But the group of disciples who had followed Jesus for three years had done a great thing: for two Sundays in a row, they had gathered. The one guy who felt left out—Thomas—was there in the middle of them.

What are you doing to bring others into your group?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“We have abundant assurance that we shall receive all the strength we need to perform any duty of obedience; and refusing to do anything which we ought to do, we find ourselves at once out of harmony with God’s law and God’s providence, and cannot escape the consequences of our failure.”¹

—J. R. Miller (1840–1912)

DAY 4

READ:

John 20:24-29

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 20:28-29

NOTES



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.

My daughter and I are reading through a middle-school-level book on logical reasoning. One main point of a lesson was: go to the firsthand accounts. You want to hear about that car wreck from someone who saw it, not from someone whose brother knew someone who saw it.

Firsthand accounts are a powerful testimony. They work better in courtrooms, and they tell truer stories. Thomas had heard more than ten firsthand accounts of Jesus's resurrection, but he didn't believe. Jesus was loving enough to show up and give him proof. Jesus reminded Thomas that though he saw and thus believed, blessing will come to those who have not seen but still believe.

That's where the firsthand account comes in: the Gospels are full of firsthand accounts that we can trust in their historical validity.

Matthew and John were Jesus's disciples who had firsthand accounts. Paul heard Jesus on the way to Damascus. Jude and James were Jesus's half-brothers. And all these wrote down their firsthand accounts.

In considering the Old Testament, Moses spoke with God face to face (Exodus 33:11), the prophets heard Him speak to them individually, and David's relationship with God was unlike any other. So as you pick up your Bible, remember the faithfulness of those testimonies: they are firsthand accounts written in Scripture for us!

How does the historical resurrection of Jesus and its validity bring you peace and encouragement?

DAY 5

READ:

1 Peter 1:3-9

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Peter 1:6-9

NOTES

Out of nowhere, my cell phone stopped working yesterday. With no access to any internet through my phone, I began to realize just how blind I felt without it: How would I navigate traffic during rush hour? Was my husband safely where he set out to go? Was a friend trying to reach me? I am embarrassed to admit how very quickly my life, which seemed to be so full of faith, felt so very faithless simply because I didn't know for sure what was going on.

Thomas may have felt the same way in John 20:24-29; everyone had seen Jesus except for him. And though Jesus made a special trip just to bring back Thomas's faith, He gave a warning: the blessing comes not from seeing, but believing despite not seeing.

Peter, who was in that room, later wrote about the same idea in today's passage. Grief is something all people face, even believers. Peter assured us that when we suffer, our faith is tested and strengthened like gold tried in a furnace. Those trials refine us because we find joy in believing Jesus though we can't physically see Him (1 Peter 1:6-8).

So whether it's down cell service, an out-of-control child, health concerns, or a financial crisis, we choose to believe Jesus is with us. He offers us peace. He hears those prayers. Our faith leads to blessing.

How is Jesus asking you to believe even without sight?

GROUP

NOTES

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."²

—Elizabeth Charles (1828–1896)

POINT 1: Belief is passed down by faithful witnesses (John 20:24-25).

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

? Why is it difficult for some people to be faithful witnesses of the gospel?

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

? How does knowing God honors our search for truth remind us that our faith is not blind?

POINT 2: Belief is based on the historical resurrection of Jesus (John 20:26-27).

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

? From Day 4: How does the historical resurrection of Jesus and its validity bring you peace and encouragement?

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.



Knowing the Bible is true and reliable, what are some ways we can encourage ourselves and others to read and study it more?

POINT 3: Belief is grounded in confessing Jesus as Lord (John 20:28-29).

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.



How have you submitted to Jesus as your Lord and God this past week?

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



How do you feel "blessed" through your faith in Jesus?

MY RESPONSE

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:** In what spiritual situation or question have you chosen to doubt because you haven't seen proof?
- **HEART:** How can you worship Jesus now for answering a cry of your heart this past month?
- **HANDS:** How does today's text encourage you to speak the truth of Jesus to someone who doubts?



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

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."³

—Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

PEOPLE ARE RESTORED



+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

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

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

John 21

+ **SETTING:**

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 (Matthew 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.

DAY 1

READ:

John 21:1-19

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 21:1-6

NOTES

John sets up the story by explaining that Jesus had “revealed” Himself by showing up on the shore near His former-fishermen disciples. In verse 6, the revelation comes: Professional fishermen who had been skunked in an entire night of fishing had, in an instant, caught more than they were prepared to gather.

Jesus reveals Himself to us in the same way: when something happens that would never occur without His hand. Recently, I was walking my dog down the road at daybreak, choosing to praise Jesus aloud in the silence of the morning. After a few minutes I turned around at the very-uneventful place where I always turn around, but stood in shock: the sky was alight with orange, pink, purple, and blue—a sunrise that made my jaw drop. Jesus had revealed Himself to me, and that left a lasting mark.

I don’t know about you, but often I’m too quick to chalk things up to luck or science or being in the right place at the right time. Maybe this passage should remind me that Jesus still reveals Himself to us.

When was the last time you saw, heard, tasted, or felt something that pointed you to Jesus and how did you respond?

DAY 2

READ:

Luke 5:1-11

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 5:4-7

NOTES



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 Corinthians 12:26; Galatians 6:2). In addition, edification takes place through the church's preaching and teaching of Scripture (Ephesians 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.

Many Bible commentaries draw parallels between John 21:1-6 and Luke 5:1-11. They fit together nicely, and we are blessed to look at a few of the details.

The Luke passage took place early in Jesus's earthly ministry; you see in verse 10 that Jesus was just at that moment inviting the fisherman Simon (later called Peter) to quit fishing for fish and instead to fish for people. In this passage, there were only four fishermen, and they were cleaning up after a hard night of fishing with no results (v. 5). Yet the men were willing to obey Jesus's instruction; the result was an overabundant blessing.

The John passage took place at the very end of Jesus's earthly ministry, and actually happened after He had been crucified and resurrected. The same original four fishermen were there, joined by a few friends. Again, they fished all night with no catch. Again, Jesus had advice for them and made their haul successful. Again, they listened to what He said and saw the fruits of their labor.

May we all see the repeated themes of Jesus's interaction with the fishermen. He knows what you need to do your job well, so seek His face, listen to His voice, and enjoy the blessings that follow.

What do you need to ask of Jesus to help you get through today or this week?

DAY 3

READ:

John 21:1-19

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 21:7-14

NOTES

Today's passage is what the teenagers would call an "LOL" story. If you don't giggle—at least inwardly—I don't think you're reading it with your whole heart.

Peter, known for sticking his foot in his mouth and speaking when he should listen, took center stage in this scene. Upon John's recognition that the man on the shore giving them fishing advice was Jesus, Peter put on his coat and jumped into the lake. Not carefully, either; some translations say Peter threw himself or plunged into the sea (v. 7), leaving the other six to guide the boat, barely able to drag the fish, toward the shore.

When Jesus told them in verse 10 to go get some fish, Peter alone heroically brought up the whole net. Over-achiever? Probably. Leader? Definitely.

But I see something else in Peter: desperation. He desperately needed the Lord Jesus. Peter had seen himself under pressure as Jesus was arrested, and he didn't like what he saw. Peter knew that Jesus alone could make it right, and he was desperate to show his devotion.

How desperate for Jesus are you today and how is that exemplified in your life?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"To see Jesus, under the revealing influences of the Spirit, is to commit the soul to him, resting the whole weight of its salvation upon him, and to decide to be his, wholly his, only his, and his forever. These effects are always produced by a sight of Christ."¹

—James Smith (1802–1862)

DAY 4

READ:

John 13:1-23

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 13:12-17

NOTES

The Gospel of John, written by the disciple John, contains some form of the word “love” thirty-nine times; his epistles (1, 2, and 3 John) have it thirty-three times. Obviously, love is a theme of John’s writings.

It was also a theme of his own life. John’s record of the last supper (John 13:1-23) began with a declaration of love: “Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (v. 1). Though one of Jesus’s own disciples had already started the betrayal process, Jesus got up from supper and took on the role of a servant, washing the feet of His followers. He washed the feet of them all, even the betrayer. Jesus then reclined to explain what He had done, and John revealed that the disciple whom Jesus loved was sitting close to Jesus (v. 23). That was John himself: close to Jesus, describing himself as someone beloved by the Lord.

It’s not surprising, then, that John chose to include the story of Peter’s restoration (John 21:15-19), again focusing on the love of Christ. We find ourselves and our faith in His love.

What kind of personal statement can you make about yourself that is centered in the love of Jesus?

DAY 5

READ:

John 21:1-19

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 21:15-19

NOTES

Sometimes we just need to hear something more than once. If you are married, you've heard your spouse say, "I love you," over and over and over again. Your kids want to hear you say, "I'm right here," when the lights are out and they're frightened by a bad dream. And hopefully our friends don't mind when we ask, "How can I pray for you?" Some things are best when repeated.

But that's not the attitude Peter had when Jesus asked him three times, "Do you love Me?" We know enough about Peter to see his persona: he was a leader, he was the bold one, and he was the speak-first-think-about-it-later type. So he probably wasn't digging the introspection that Jesus was pressing.

I'm sure most of us would be just as frustrated or "grieved" (v. 17) that Jesus kept asking, particularly since Jesus knew the answer. But let's step back for just a second. We see what Peter couldn't: Jesus was getting ready to reveal how Peter would die, should he choose the life of faith.

Only love for Christ would compel a mortal man to willingly step into death.

When has bold faith because of love for Christ led to persecution or trials in your life?

GROUP

NOTES

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.”²

—Hugh Black (1868–1953)

POINT 1: The risen Messiah reveals Himself (John 21:1-6).

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

? What are some reasons we might struggle to recognize the presence or work of Jesus in our lives?

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

? When has Jesus led you to do something odd or contrary to a societal norm and how did you respond?

POINT 2: The risen Messiah enjoys relationship (John 21:7-14).

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

? How do you respond when you experience Jesus’s presence in any given moment?

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

? What does it look like to enjoy fellowship with Jesus and others today?

POINT 3: The risen Messiah restores fellowship (John 21:15-19).

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

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 Corinthians 12:26; Galatians 6:2). In addition, edification takes place through the church's preaching and teaching of Scripture (Ephesians 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.



What can we be doing to minister to other believers, whether or not we're called to full-time service?

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



From Day 5: **When has bold faith because of love for Christ led to persecution or trials in your life?**

MY RESPONSE

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:** How has a regret from your past led you to live more fully in His path and plan today?
- **HEART:** How do you know that you love Jesus?
- **HANDS:** With whom can you enjoy a meal this week to enjoy fellowship in Christ?



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

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."³

—Tony Evans

GOD IS HERE

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

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

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGES:**

Isaiah 55; Matthew 28

+ **SETTING:**

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.

DAY 1

READ:

Isaiah 55:6-11

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Isaiah 55:8-10

NOTES

Nothing changes plans like a good rain. My cousin and his then fiancée (now wife of almost a quarter century) planned to get married in an outside ceremony in May. We arrived a few hours early for pictures; the day was cool, cloudy, and created a gorgeous background for photos. But an hour before the ceremony, a storm blew in and took with it chairs, tables, and almost every decoration. It took chain saws to clear the road to the ceremony, and all the long dresses had mud stains around the hem.

But I'll never forget that wedding. As I studied Isaiah 55:10 today, my initial thought was: "Lord, send Your Word down in my life. Let it overwhelm me just like a downpour." I don't want a sprinkle of the Bible in a devotion; I want a flood of His almighty, life-changing, wonder-working Living Word in my life! I want it to rearrange my mind, my heart, and my soul.

The next time it rains hard, maybe you'll pray the same prayer. Maybe you'll realize how parched you are, and it will remind you that your parched spirit is in deep need of His Word.

How are you seeking that deep-down saturation from God's Word in your life?

DAY 2

READ:

Isaiah 53:6-11

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Isaiah 53:4-8

NOTES

Isaiah 55:8 tells us that God's thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are not our ways. At first glimpse at this verse, we might think that it's not a big deal to be off God's path. Perhaps we just wobbled a little, got lost, or maybe it seemed like we had a couple of paths to choose from.

If you've ever taken the wrong path, you know it can lead to disaster. A group of my cousins went hiking in a state park years ago. They all thought they knew where they were going, but they were wrong. Turning right would have led to the trail's end; turning left instead led to thousands of acres of wilderness. What should have been a three-hour hike ended up with a midnight rescue and panicked parents.

Isaiah 53:6 reveals that we all do the same thing in our own lives at times. It's not that we got sidetracked or veered off; we intentionally choose the path of sin, the path of self, and the path away from God. It's good every now and then to consider where we would be today without His loving-kindness to gather us—His wayward sheep—and bring us back to His path of life.

Where can you see your obstinate insistence to go on your own way?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"You are still in the quarry and not complete, and therefore to you, as once to us, much is inexplicable. But you are destined for a higher building and one day you will be placed in it by hands not human, a living stone in a heavenly temple."¹

—Lettie Burd Cowman
(1873–1960)

DAY 3

READ:

Matthew 28:16-20

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 28:16-18

NOTES

Mountains are a common backdrop for God's earthly encounters. They were a source of refuge, as in the case of Noah and his ark coming to rest after about a year on open water (Genesis 8:4) and Lot's family racing to hide from Sodom's certain destruction (19:17). God proved He would provide the appropriate sacrifice on the mountain for Abraham (22:14), and Jacob offered a sacrifice and invited his entire family to have a meal with him on top of one (31:54).

Moses came face to face with God in the burning bush on top of the mountain (Exodus 3:1) and that's the same spot where he brought the Israelites as they walked out of Egyptian bondage (3:12). Jesus preached a famous sermon on a mountain (Matthew 5:1), prayed on mountains (14:23), and, for just a moment, appeared in all His heavenly glory on one (see Matthew 17).

If you've ever hiked to the top of a mountain, or even a significant hill, you understand why: everything is different up there. From that perspective, we see more macro and less micro. Isn't it fitting, then, that Jesus gave His final identity, instruction, and promise from a mountain?

What are some of your own spiritual "mountaintop" experiences and how did they change your faith?

DAY 4

READ:

Daniel 7:9-14

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Daniel 7:11-14

NOTES

There are two images of Jesus: there's the Jesus who walked on earth, seen by thousands of people. And then there's the Jesus of heaven; only a few men have seen that scene.

You probably know that Isaiah saw into heaven, as did John and Daniel. God pulled back the veil between earth and heaven and allowed these men to glimpse into what was going on in the heavenly, spiritual reality. As we read Daniel's account carefully, we see that the Ancient of Days was seated on the throne (Daniel 7:9), and "one like a son of man" was brought before him (v. 13). That Son of Man, of course, was Jesus (Matthew 8:20). From God the Father, the Ancient of Days, Jesus was given "dominion and glory and a kingdom" that would last forever (Daniel 7:14).

Yes, Daniel lived six hundred years before Jesus came to earth. But the eternal things, taking place in the kingdom of heaven, were revealed on earth in our time line. When Jesus revealed in Matthew 28:18 that He had all authority, He meant that He already had it—had always had it. God's authority given to the Son was a promise from Daniel, but a certainty forever.

How does this peek into heaven give you a different understanding of the power of Jesus today?

DAY 5

READ:

Matthew 28:16-20

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 28:19-20

NOTES



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.

The Christian Standard Bible (CSB) records Jesus's final assurance like this: "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). A quick study of the word translated "remember" reveals that its inherent definition isn't what you might think. Other translations render it "look," "behold," "lo," "surely," or "be sure of this." Matthew used the word dozens of times in his Gospel. It's derived from the root word that means to know, see, behold, look, or perceive.

In Matthew 28:20, though, the verb is an imperative verb (a command) in the second person singular. Now, not everyone loves grammar and verb conjugation, but second person singular is "you" in the singular sense, as in "You, Johnny, go shut the door." Jesus, in telling us to consider that He always is with us even to the ends of the earth, invited each person individually to hear His plea: Look into it! Know it! Remember it! Believe it! Not simply as a corporate body, but individually. What a passionate reminder for each of us to know even today—know for sure—Jesus is with us all and with each of us individually.

How does Jesus's promise "I am with you" give you courage to make disciples?

GROUP

NOTES

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."²

—Francis Chan

POINT 1: The Lord is with His people from high above (Isaiah 55:8-11).

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

? How does knowing God is beyond us encourage you?

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

? How do you respond to knowing God always had a plan of redemption because of His love for His people?

POINT 2: The Lord is with His people with full authority (Matthew 28:16-18).

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

? How do obedience, worship, and doubt mix in someone's walk of faith?

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

? If we know and believe that Jesus has all authority, how should that change our prayer life and spiritual walk?

POINT 3: The Lord is with His people forever and always (Matthew 28:19-20).

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



What are some practical ways to make disciples?

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.



From Day 5: How does Jesus's promise "I am with you" give you courage to make disciples?

MY RESPONSE

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:** How can you choose to acknowledge and believe Jesus to be your authority today?
- **HEART:** What can I confess to God concerning my devotion, or lack thereof, to Jesus's Great Commission?
- **HANDS:** What can you do to start on a journey to make more disciples this week?



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

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."³

—Matthew Henry (1662–1714)

UNIT 29

+

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 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” (Matthew 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 (Matthew 28:20b). Specifically, Jesus promised the disciples

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

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 Corinthians 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.

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

As those united now
to Christ by faith,
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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 intercedes for us in prayer when our thoughts are inexpressible (Romans 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 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 COMMISSION RECEIVED

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

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.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Acts 1

+ **SETTING:**

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.

DAY 1

READ:

Acts 1:1-5

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 1:1-2

NOTES

In basketball, good teams must have a strong center. The center is the player who is positioned in the middle of the court and is responsible for anchoring the team's defense and offense. Without a strong center, the team can quickly become disorganized and lose its focus.

Acts 1:1 reminds us that Jesus is to be at the center of all Christian faith. In this verse, Luke clearly states that his Gospel account was focused on all that Jesus began to do and teach. Likewise, the book of Acts focused on the ministry of Jesus as He established the church through His disciples. For Luke, it is "all about Jesus."

This is a great reminder of the importance of keeping Jesus at the center of our faith. It can be easy to get caught up in our own opinions, our own preferences, or the teachings of others. However, as Christians, we must always remember that Jesus is the foundation of our faith, and everything else is secondary.

As we go about our days, let us remember that Jesus is the center of our faith. Just as a basketball team needs a strong center, we need Jesus at the center of our lives to keep us focused, strong, and effective. Let us keep our eyes fixed on Him and trust in Him alone, for He is the One who gives us hope, purpose, and meaning in this life and the next.

How can we intentionally keep Jesus at the center of our faith and daily life, despite the distractions and temptations of the world?

DAY 2

READ:

Acts 1:1-5

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 1:4-5

NOTES

Have you ever waited for an extravagant gift? Something that you knew was coming, but you weren't quite sure when or how it would arrive? The waiting can be difficult, but when the gift finally arrives, it is all the more precious.

The Holy Spirit is the Father's promise to us, an extravagant gift that was promised to the believers before Jesus's ascension (Acts 1:4-5; John 14:16-17). The disciples had to wait for the Holy Spirit to come, and it was not an easy wait. They were likely anxious, uncertain, and impatient. But when the Holy Spirit finally arrived, it was an extravagant gift that transformed their lives and empowered them for the work of spreading the gospel.

The Holy Spirit is still the Father's promise to us today, a wonderful gift He has provided to us. The Holy Spirit is not a force or a power, but the Third Person of the Trinity to live within us and guide us in our daily lives. He empowers us to live the Christian life, teaches us, comforts us, and unites us with other believers.

As Christians, we often can forget the significance of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We may take Him for granted or fail to acknowledge Him as the guide and comforter that He is. However, when we remember that the Holy Spirit is the Father's promise, we are reminded of God's faithfulness to us. Just as He promised to send the Holy Spirit to the believers, He promises to be with us always and to guide us through life.

How should the awareness of the Holy Spirit being in your life impact your daily life and relationship with God?

DAY 3

READ:

Matthew 28:16-20

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 28:19-20

NOTES



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.

The Great Commission to be Christ's witnesses throughout the world is often viewed as a burdensome task, something that we have to do as Christians. However, we should not view it this way. Instead, we should see the Great Commission as a high honor assigned to us by Jesus Christ Himself. We have been entrusted with the privilege and responsibility of reaching the world for Jesus. We have been chosen by God to be His ambassadors, to share the good news of salvation with others, and to make a difference in the world. We have a purpose and a mission, and our lives have meaning and significance. We have been given the honor of sharing the most important message in the world, the message of God's love and grace.

When we view the Great Commission as a high honor, it changes our perspective. We no longer see it as something we have to do, but something we get to do. We get to be part of God's work in the world, sharing the gospel with others and making disciples of all nations. We get to see lives transformed, relationships restored, and communities changed. What an incredible honor and privilege this is!

How can shifting our perspective of the Great Commission as a burdensome task to a high honor change the way we approach evangelism and discipleship?

DAY 4

READ:

Psalm 150; Acts 1:4-11

FOCAL PASSAGES:

Psalm 150:6; Acts 1:8

NOTES

Psalm 150 is a beautiful hymn of praise that encourages us to worship God with all of our being. The psalmist exhorts us to praise God with instruments, with our voices, and with our bodies. He tells us to praise God in His sanctuary, in His mighty heavens, and everywhere on earth.

God deserves our praise and there is joy when we praise the Lord. Because we experience joy in the worship and praise of the Lord, we should desire others to experience that same joy.

The Great Commission of Christ to His disciples in Acts 1:8 is an extension of this call to worship. As Jesus explained, we are to be witnesses of Jesus Christ to people everywhere, both near and far. In our act of worship and praise of God in every part of our being, others may see God and our joy in Him.

By fulfilling the Great Commission, we fulfill Psalm 150:6 in letting everything that has breath praise the Lord.

How can you praise God this week that others may see your joy in Him?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Join all ye living things in the eternal song. Be ye least or greatest, withhold not your praises. What a day will it be when all things in all places unite to glorify the one only living and true God! This will be the final triumph of the church of God."¹

—Charles H. Spurgeon
(1834–1892)

DAY 5

READ:

Matthew 25:14-30

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 25:19-23

NOTES

Acts 1:4-11 relayed the final instructions of Christ before He ascended to heaven. His disciples are commanded to focus on their mission to spread the gospel and make disciples of all nations, even as they wait for His return. This is similar to the parable of the talents Jesus told in Matthew 25:14-30. A master entrusted his servants with different amounts of money and expected them to use those resources wisely to produce a profit for him.

When we consider the two teachings together, we see how they complement one another. As we await the return of Christ, we are called to use the gifts and resources that God has given us to wisely serve Him and to further His kingdom.

We are not to be idle or to bury the resources God has given us, but to be diligent and faithful in all that we do for the sake of the gospel. Just as the disciples were instructed to be witnesses to the ends of the earth, we too are called to share the good news of Christ with all people.

We can do this through our words and actions, by getting involved in missions work, supporting missionaries, and praying for those who are sharing the gospel in difficult places. We can also share the gospel with our friends, neighbors, and coworkers. We can use the resources God's given us to share the gospel in creative ways, for example, through music, art, and storytelling as well.

What practical steps can you take to be a faithful and wise steward of what God has given you as you await Christ's return?

GROUP

NOTES

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.”²

—John Stott (1921–2011)

POINT 1: Jesus’s disciples rely on the power of the Spirit (Acts 1:4-5).

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

? How do you see the Holy Spirit as a promised blessing in the life of a believer?

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

? From Day 2: How should the awareness of the Holy Spirit being in your life impact your daily life and relationship with God?

POINT 2: Jesus’s disciples fulfill the mission of the Father (Acts 1:6-8).

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

? Why was it important for Christ to refocus the disciples’ attention from the restoration of Israel to the Father’s ultimate plan?

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.



Do you think the first disciples completed this commission and why?

POINT 3: Jesus's disciples anticipate the return of the Son (Acts 1:9-11).

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



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



How should our anticipation for Christ's return motivate our activity to be His witnesses?

MY RESPONSE

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:** How would taking on the responsibility to be a witness for Christ influence your daily decisions and actions?
- **HEART:** What are the distractions in your life that prevent you from prioritizing or obeying Christ's commission that you need to confess?
- **HANDS:** What are ways you can be involved personally and cooperatively with others to see the gospel go to all people everywhere?



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

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

THE WAITING COMMENCES

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

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

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Acts 1

+ **SETTING:**

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.

DAY 1

READ:

Acts 1:12-14

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 1:14

NOTES

In Acts 1:14, we see an example of the disciples praying together in unity. This was a time of great uncertainty and transition for the disciples, but they knew that the key to navigating this season was to seek God's guidance and wisdom through prayer.

As we read this passage, we are reminded of the power of praying with others. When we come together in prayer, we are united in purpose and in our commitment to seek God's will. We are reminded that we are not alone in our struggles, and that we have a community of believers who are supporting us in prayer.

Praying with others also brings a sense of accountability and encouragement. When we share our prayer requests with others, we invite them into our lives and allow them to see our vulnerabilities and struggles. This can be a humbling experience, but it also opens the door for others to offer their support and encouragement.

Praying with others helps us focus on what is truly important. In a world that is filled with distractions and competing priorities, prayer helps us to center our hearts and minds on God. When we come together in prayer, we are reminded of the things that truly matter—our relationship with God, our relationships with one another, and our commitment to living out God's will in our lives.

How has praying with others helped you to deepen your sense of connection with God and with your community of believers?

DAY 2

READ:

Mark 14:43-50

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Mark 14:50

NOTES



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 (Romans 5:1-5; Hebrews 4:14-16).

In Mark 14:43-50, we read a heartbreaking scene unfold as Jesus was arrested and His disciples fled in fear. These were the same disciples who had pledged their loyalty to Jesus, but in this moment of crisis, they abandoned Him. It must have been a painful and humbling experience for the disciples to come to terms with the fact that they had failed Jesus in His hour of need.

Yet, as we read on in Acts 1:12-14, we see that the disciples did not let their failure define them. Instead, they gathered together in prayer, seeking God's forgiveness and guidance as they moved forward. This is a powerful example of the restorative power of forgiveness, and of the importance of seeking restoration after we have failed.

When we experience a sense of guilt or shame over our past mistakes, it can be tempting to withdraw from God and from others. But as we see in the example of the disciples, this is not what God desires for us. He wants us to come to Him in humility and seek His forgiveness so that we can experience the freedom and joy of being restored.

The process of forgiveness and restoration begins with acknowledging our failures and seeking God's forgiveness. As we confess our sins and ask for God's forgiveness, we open ourselves up to the healing and transforming power of His love. We can trust that God is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

What steps can you take to come to God in humility and seek His guidance, even after you have failed?

DAY 3

READ:

2 Timothy 3:16-17

FOCAL PASSAGE:

2 Timothy 3:16-17

NOTES

In 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul wrote that all Scripture is inspired by, or breathed out by, God.

This is a powerful reminder of the importance of believing that the Scriptures are truly God's Word. The Bible is not just a collection of human writings or opinions—it is the very Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit and given to us as a guide for our lives.

When we read and study the Scriptures, we are not just learning about God, we are encountering God Himself. The Holy Spirit speaks to us through the words of Scripture, revealing God's character, His will for our lives, and His plan for redemption.

Believing that the Scriptures are God's Word is not just a matter of intellectual assent—it is a matter of faith. We must trust that God is speaking to us through His Word and be willing to submit ourselves to its authority.

When we embrace the truth that the Scriptures are God's Word, we are transformed by their power. The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, able to penetrate even to the dividing of soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (Hebrews 4:12).

How has your belief that the Scriptures are God's Word impacted your life and your relationship with God?

DAY 4

READ:

Acts 1:15-26

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 1:20-21

NOTES

In Acts 1:15-26, we see the apostles faced an important decision that led them to discern God's will. First, they turned to the Scriptures, citing two passages from the Psalms that directed them to act. Then they prayed for God's guidance, asking Him to show them which man He had chosen to take Judas's place.

The disciples did not rely on their own understanding or their own opinions—they turned to Scripture for guidance, trusting that God's Word would lead them in the right direction. By turning to the Scriptures in this way, the apostles were able to discern God's will and make an important decision that would shape the course of their ministry.

Similarly, we must be committed to turning to God's Word for guidance in our own lives. When faced with important decisions, we must pray for God's wisdom and guidance, and then turn to the Scriptures to seek His will.

God's Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalm 119:105), and it is able to guide us in every decision we make. As we commit ourselves to studying and meditating on the Scriptures, we can have confidence that God will guide us and direct our steps.

How are you at allowing God's Word to lead you in making important decisions in your life?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"If you are ignorant of God's Word, you will always be ignorant of God's will."¹

—Billy Graham (1918–2018)

DAY 5

READ:

Acts 1:15-26

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 1:23-26

NOTES

As Christians, we understand the importance of seeking God's will and following His commands. We spend time studying the Scriptures, seeking to understand what God wants us to do. But it's not enough to simply know God's will—we must also be committed to doing it.

In Acts 1:16-22, the disciples followed God's will by choosing a replacement for Judas. They were diligent in relying on Scripture to guide them in their decision. But they didn't stop there—they also took action, selecting Matthias as the twelfth apostle.

James 1:22-25 emphasizes the importance of not just hearing God's Word, but also doing what it says. We must be committed to putting God's Word into action, not just reading it and forgetting about it. We must be willing to take action and obey God's commands, even when it is difficult or goes against our own desires. May we be like the wise person in James 1:25, who not only hears God's Word but also puts it into practice. And may we always remember that true wisdom comes from doing God's will, not just knowing it.

In what areas of my life am I struggling to obey God's commands?

GROUP

NOTES

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."²

—R. A. Torrey (1856–1928)

POINT 1: Jesus's disciples unite in prayer (Acts 1:12-14).

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

? Why is it sometimes hard to be obedient to Jesus?

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 (Romans 5:1-5; Hebrews 4:14-16).

? From Day 1: **How has praying with others helped you to deepen your sense of connection with God and with your community of believers?**

POINT 2: Jesus's disciples follow the Scriptures (Acts 1:15-22).

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.

? How does believing the Word of God is true affect how we live?

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



What are ways we can learn to obey Scripture more on a daily basis?

POINT 3: Jesus's disciples trust in God (Acts 1:23-26).

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



When making a major decision, what are some helpful tips to help make the right decision?

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



When in your life have you asked for God's leading, He answered, but you didn't want to obey and follow?

MY RESPONSE

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:** How has God proven His Word is true as you have trusted in the Scriptures' promises?
- **HEART:** 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:** How are you prayerful and active in furthering the church and the kingdom of God?



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

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)

THE SPIRIT ENABLES

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

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

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Acts 2

+ **SETTING:**

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.

DAY 1

READ:

Acts 2:1-4

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 2:1

NOTES

As we go about our daily lives, it can be easy to become consumed by our own agendas and forget that God desires to use us for His purposes. However, like the disciples who obeyed Jesus by waiting together in Acts 2:1, we can position ourselves to be used by God by cultivating a lifestyle of obedience and availability.

One practical way to do this is to start each day with a devotional study that focuses on surrendering our plans and priorities to God. We can ask Him to show us where He wants to use us that day and to give us the strength and wisdom to carry out His will. This can help us stay attuned to the prompting of the Holy Spirit throughout the day and make ourselves available for whatever opportunities God may bring our way.

In addition to surrendering our plans, we can also prioritize spending time in God's presence through prayer and Bible study. This can help us stay grounded in His truth and draw strength from His Word as we go about our daily tasks.

As we make ourselves available to God in this way, we may be surprised at how He chooses to use us. Whether it's a word of encouragement to a coworker, a kind gesture to a stranger, or a bold proclamation of the gospel, we can trust that God will equip us for whatever task He has for us. And in doing so, we can experience the joy and fulfillment that comes from living a life fully surrendered to His purposes.

How will you develop a daily practice of being available to be used by God?

DAY 2

READ:

Ephesians 5:15-21

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Ephesians 5:18-21

NOTES

Ephesians 5:15-21 encourages us to be filled with the Spirit. We are called to be wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. We are to understand what the Lord's will is and not be foolish, but instead be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit.

Being filled with the Spirit means allowing Him to control our lives. It means surrendering our will to His and being open to His leading. When we are filled with the Spirit, we are empowered to live for Christ to be His witnesses and to do His work in the world.

So how can we be filled with the Spirit? First, we need to ask God to fill us. We need to pray and ask Him to fill us with His Spirit and to give us the strength and courage we need to do His will. Second, we need to spend time in God's Word, allowing His truth to permeate our hearts and minds. Third, we need to worship and praise God, lifting our voices in adoration and thanksgiving. Lastly, we need to walk according to the Spirit as we interact with others, showing and telling of God's love and grace.

As we do these things, we will be filled with the Spirit and empowered to live for Christ. We will be transformed by His power and ready to do His will in the world. May we each seek to be filled with the Spirit today and every day, so that we can be the people God has called us to be.

Based on the list in Ephesians 5, what changes could you make in your daily life to cultivate a greater sense of being filled with the Spirit?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"We have seen that the Bible reveals that the Holy Spirit is a person, not a thing. We call Him *He* rather than *It*. At the same time, the Bible reveals also that the Holy Spirit is a *divine* person. He is God."¹

—R. C. Sproul (1939–2017)

DAY 3

READ:

Acts 2:1-4

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 2:1-4

NOTES



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; Hebrews 10:29), acts like a person (John 14:26, 15:26; Romans 8:14), has attributes of a person (1 Corinthians 2:10-11; Ephesians 4:30), and acts in personal ways (Isaiah 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).

Acts 2:1-4 tells of an incredible day in the life of the church when the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost. There was a rushing wind, tongues of fire, and the disciples began to speak in other languages they had not previously known. It was a powerful moment that kick-started the early church's growth and spread the good news of Jesus Christ to people of all nations and languages.

But as we reflect on this passage, it is important to remember that while the day of Pentecost was a significant moment in history, this doesn't mean that every day since has been without the Holy Spirit's presence and power. In fact, as believers in Christ, we have the opportunity to be filled with the Spirit and used by God every day.

So how can we do this? Well, as Romans 8:5 tells us, we can live according to the Spirit by setting our minds on the things of the Spirit. This means making intentional choices to pursue a life that is aligned with God's will and staying connected to Him through prayer, reading His Word, and fellowship with other believers. It also means being open to the ways in which God may want to use us each day. We may not have tongues of fire resting on our heads, but we can be confident that the Holy Spirit is working in and through us as we love and serve others, share the good news of Jesus, and seek to live a life that honors God.

So let's remember that while not every day may be the day of Pentecost, every day is an opportunity to be filled with the Spirit and used by God. May we live each day with an open heart and a willingness to be led by the Holy Spirit, trusting that He will guide us and empower us to do His will.

What are some ways you have seen the Holy Spirit at work in your life this past week?

DAY 4

READ:

Acts 2:5-11

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 2:7-11

NOTES

Do you feel intimidated or nervous when speaking to new or different people? This is a common human response, especially when faced with unfamiliar social situations or when interacting with people who have different cultural backgrounds, beliefs, or values.

However, Christ has sent the Holy Spirit to empower His disciples to share the gospel with all people everywhere. In Acts 1:8, we read that the Spirit equips us to be effective witnesses of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth.

The Holy Spirit works in us to give us boldness, wisdom, and discernment to share the gospel with anyone, regardless of their background. We are called to be ambassadors of Christ, and the Holy Spirit equips us to fulfill that role.

Although sharing the gospel can be intimidating, especially when we encounter people who are hostile or indifferent to the message, we can take comfort in the fact that the Holy Spirit empowers us to overcome our fears and share the good news of Jesus Christ with confidence and conviction. We can trust in the power of the Holy Spirit to open hearts and minds to the truth of the gospel.

Therefore, don't let anxiety prevent you from being a witness for Christ. Be strong in faith and trust the Holy Spirit to empower you to share the gospel wherever and with whomever God leads you to. This is why Christ sent the Holy Spirit, and it is what He asks us to do as His disciples.

How can you trust in the Holy Spirit to overcome your fears and share the gospel with confidence, even in unfamiliar or diverse social situations?

DAY 5

READ:

Acts 2:5-13; 13:1-52

FOCAL PASSAGES:

Acts 2:13; 13:44-52

NOTES

Some things in life are within our responsibility, and some things are not. The same applies to sharing the gospel—certain aspects are within our control and others are not. As disciples of Christ who seek to grow in His Word and be led by the Holy Spirit, we are responsible for lovingly and clearly presenting the good news of Christ's salvation to others. However, their response to the message is not our responsibility.

In Acts 2, the disciples, filled with the Holy Spirit, faced individuals who denied the power of God and mocked them. Similarly, in Acts 13, as Paul and his companions shared the gospel, some people responded with saving faith while others became jealous and angry at the missionaries. Eventually, Paul had to leave town because of their hostility (Acts 13:44-52). However, he left with a clear conscience because he had effectively shared the gospel, even though not everyone responded positively.

We too should not be afraid to share the gospel with others, overcoming the fear of rejection or hostility. The Holy Spirit has been given to us that we may be Christ's witnesses, and we must seek to follow His leading and be willing to serve and share the gospel with others, knowing that their response is not our responsibility.

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?

GROUP

NOTES

POINT 1: Jesus's disciples obey Christ (Acts 2:1).

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

? How can knowing that God's timing is always perfect encourage us in our walk of faith?

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

? How does obedience to God's Word affect our lives?

POINT 2: Jesus's disciples are filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:2-5).

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

? Jesus told the disciples that they would experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit. How is the arrival of the Holy Spirit like baptism?

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; Hebrews 10:29), acts like a person (John 14:26, 15:26; Romans 8:14), has attributes of a person (1 Corinthians 2:10-11; Ephesians 4:30), and acts in personal ways (Isaiah 63:10; Acts 13:2). In addition to

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."²

—A. W. Tozer (1897–1963)

these, the Bible also affirms that Christians relate to Him personally (Acts 5:3-4; 7:51).

? Why is it important that Christ's disciples be filled with the Holy Spirit?

POINT 3: Jesus's disciples reveal God's works (Acts 2:6-13).

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

? How can you develop more relationships with those of various cultures to share the gospel?

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

? From Day 5: 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?

MY RESPONSE

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:** How does knowing God is trustworthy help you obey His commands for His glory?
- **HEART:** In what areas of your life can you confess your lack of obedience in carrying the gospel to the nations?
- **HANDS:** What opportunities has God given you to share the gospel this week?



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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?"³

—Lottie Moon (1840–1912)

THE SPIRIT EMPOWERS

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

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.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGES:**

John 16; Romans 8; 1 Corinthians 2

+ **SETTING:**

The Old Testament prophets promised a day when the Spirit of God would dwell in God's people (Isaiah 44:1-5; Ezekiel 36:22-32; Joel 2:28-32), and Jesus modeled a life with the Spirit's presence and power (Luke 4:1,18; Matthew 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.

DAY 1

READ:

John 16:7-11

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 16:8

NOTES

In John 16:7-11, Jesus explained that the Holy Spirit would convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. This means that the Spirit brings a sense of conviction to our hearts, helping us to understand the truth about our sinfulness and our need for Christ. However, this conviction is not just for those who have not repented, but the Holy Spirit also continues to convict believers of sin, that they may be pure and righteous before God.

As disciples of Christ, we must rely on the Holy Spirit to help us live for Him. It's easy to become complacent or to justify our actions, but the Holy Spirit convicts us of our wrongdoing and helps us to turn away from it. The Spirit leads us to confess our sins and to seek forgiveness, allowing us to walk in purity and righteousness before God.

It's essential to understand that this conviction is not meant to condemn us, but rather to lead us to repentance and forgiveness. When the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, it is an act of grace, reminding us of God's mercy and love. The Spirit helps us turn away from our sins, restoring our relationship with God and allowing us to live in fellowship with Him.

The Holy Spirit's conviction of believers is a continual process that helps us grow in our faith and become more like Christ. The Spirit leads us to pursue holiness and righteousness, reminding us of God's standards for our lives. Through the Holy Spirit's guidance, we can learn to live in a way that is pleasing to God and glorifies Him in all we do.

Let us open ourselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and allow Him to bring conviction to our hearts, that we may live for Christ and bring glory to God.

How has the Holy Spirit's conviction of your sin helped you to grow in your faith?

DAY 2

READ:

John 16:7-11

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 16:9-11

NOTES

Sharing the gospel with unbelievers is a crucial part of the Christian faith. We must also remember that our gospel proclamation has to have the Holy Spirit's power to bring about salvation to those who are listening. The role of the Holy Spirit's conviction cannot be overstated. In John 3:1-21, Jesus explained to Nicodemus that in order to see the kingdom of God, one must be born again. This spiritual rebirth can only happen through the power of the Holy Spirit, who gives us new life in Christ.

As we share the gospel with unbelievers, we must rely on the Holy Spirit to do His work of conviction in their hearts. Without the Spirit's guidance, our words will fall on deaf ears. The Spirit brings to light the truth about our sinfulness and our need for a Savior. He helps us to understand the reality of our separation from God and our need for forgiveness and redemption.

Furthermore, in John 16:7-11, Jesus explained that the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. This conviction is necessary for salvation because it helps us to see our need for Christ. It leads us to repentance and faith, drawing us into a deeper relationship with Him.

Therefore, as we share the gospel with unbelievers, we cannot convince them through our own strength or persuasion. Instead, we must trust in the power of the Holy Spirit to draw them to Himself.

In what ways have you seen the Holy Spirit drawing others to faith in Christ?

DAY 3

READ:

John 16:12-14

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 16:13-14

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The Spirit teaches the believer many things, but His supreme subject is Christ: to emphasize His claims, to exalt His Person, to reveal His perfections, to make Him superlatively attractive. Many things in Nature are very beautiful, but when the sun shines upon them, we appreciate their splendor all the more. Thus it is when we are enabled to view Christ in the light of the Spirit's teaching."¹

—A. W. Pink (1886–1952)

In John 16:12-14, Jesus spoke to His disciples about the role of the Holy Spirit in teaching and guiding them. He explained that the Spirit would reveal the truth to them and reminded them of everything He had taught them. This includes the words that Jesus spoke, which were recorded in the Bible for us to read and study today.

As believers, we can trust the Bible because the Holy Spirit revealed Christ's words to the authors of the Bible. The Spirit worked through the writers to ensure that the Bible is accurate and trustworthy. Second Timothy 3:16-17 tells us that all Scripture is inspired by God, useful for teaching, correction, and training in all righteousness.

The Holy Spirit's work in revealing the truth of Christ's words to us through the Bible is crucial for our faith. It ensures that we have a reliable source of guidance, teaching, and wisdom. It also helps us to understand the truth about God and His plan for our lives.

As we read and study the Bible, let us rely on the Holy Spirit to guide us and reveal the truth of Christ's words to us. May we trust in the accuracy and reliability of the Bible, knowing that it is God's inspired Word. And may we be transformed by its truth, growing in our faith and becoming more like Christ each day.

How has relying on the Holy Spirit's guidance in your study of the Bible impacted your understanding and application of God's Word in your life?

DAY 4

READ:

1 Corinthians 2:14

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Corinthians 2:14

NOTES



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 1 Corinthians 2:14, Paul wrote that the natural person—without the Holy Spirit—does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. This means that those who do not have the Holy Spirit cannot understand the truth of the gospel message.

As believers, it can be difficult and even hurtful when we share the gospel with someone and they reject it. We may take it personally, wondering what we did wrong or why they don't believe. However, we must remember that the Holy Spirit is the One who convicts and converts hearts, and we cannot force someone to believe.

We should not be personally offended when someone rejects our presentation of the gospel to them. Instead, we should pray for them and continue to share the truth of Christ with love and compassion. We should trust that the Holy Spirit is at work in their lives, even if we cannot see it.

Furthermore, we must remember that it is not our job to convince people to believe in Christ. Our job is to share the gospel message, leaving the rest up to God. We should do so with humility, recognizing that it is only through the Holy Spirit's work that anyone can come to faith.

How does this understanding of the Holy Spirit's role in conversion impact your approach and desire to share the gospel with others?

DAY 5

READ:

Romans 8:12-17

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Romans 8:15-17

NOTES

What an incredible privilege and joy we have in being a child of God. Through salvation, we are adopted into God's family and become heirs with Christ, sharing in all the blessings and promises that come with being part of His household.

As children of God, we have a new identity and a new purpose. We are no longer slaves to sin and death, but rather children of God who have been set free by the power of the Holy Spirit. We can now live according to the Spirit, walking in obedience and experiencing the fullness of life that God intends for us.

Furthermore, as children of God, we have the assurance that we will one day inherit eternal life in heaven. We are joint heirs with Christ, and all that He has received, we have as well. This means that we have the hope of eternal life, the promise of a new heaven and a new earth, and the joy of spending eternity with our heavenly Father.

It is truly amazing to think that we can become children of God through salvation. We who were once far from Him, separated by sin, are now brought near through the work of Christ on the cross. We are adopted into His family, given a new identity and purpose, and made heirs with Christ. This is a gift that we could never earn or deserve, but one that is freely given to us through the grace and love of our heavenly Father.

How has the realization of your identity as a child of God through salvation impacted your daily walk with Christ and your perspective on life?

GROUP

NOTES

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.'"²

—Don Fortner (1950–2020)

POINT 1: The Holy Spirit convicts the world (John 16:7-11).

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

? How is the Holy Spirit a counselor, helper, comforter, and advocate in our everyday life?

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.

? From Day 2: In what ways have you seen the Holy Spirit drawing others to faith in Christ?

POINT 2: The Holy Spirit guides toward truth (John 16:12-14; 1 Corinthians 2:14).

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

? How can we walk in step with the Spirit's guidance?

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

? What are you thankful for in regards to the Spirit?

POINT 3: The Holy Spirit leads God's people (Romans 8:12-17).

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.

? **How do we put sins to death?**

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

? **How does the knowledge that we are heirs with Christ through adoption by the Holy Spirit give us hope for the future?**

MY RESPONSE

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.

- **HEAD:** How can you cultivate a deeper reliance on the Holy Spirit in your life and grow in your relationship with Him?
- **HEART:** What can you confess that happened recently when you felt a prompting from the Spirit and chose to not act upon it?
- **HANDS:** In what ways can you use your spiritual gifts to serve others around you this week?



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

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 is the sling, we are the arrows, and he is the bow."³

—Charles H. Spurgeon
(1843–1892)

UNIT 30

+

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 began 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.

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.

Any time a miracle occurs, it is an opportunity for believers to say, "Look at what God did!"

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

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.

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.

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.



THE CHURCH GROWS



+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

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.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Acts 2

+ **SETTING:**

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.

DAY 1

READ:

Acts 2:22-33

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 2:25-26

NOTES

What makes your heart glad and your tongue rejoice? If we are honest, far too often we spend time thinking about things that make our hearts sad and our lips speak words of discouragement. There's no denying that this world is a difficult place—filled with sadness and despair. So if we are going to have hearts filled with gladness and tongues that rejoice, we need something beyond our circumstances to shape us.

At Pentecost, Peter speaks to the crowd, quoting Psalm 16:8-11 in Acts 2:26, where David saw the Lord sitting at the right hand of the Father, and this exalted picture of Christ brought him joy. David's life wasn't great at the moment when he wrote the psalm. There were perhaps many causes for fear and sadness for David, but he was able to look through his circumstances to see the risen Christ, ruling and reigning over all things, and this made him glad.

Peter wanted the crowds to know that Jesus was the same Lord of the Scriptures of their forefathers. He wanted them to know that the resurrected Christ is our all, our Lord and Savior, the only path to life. By training our hearts and minds to focus on Him, we can reorient our affections to hope, gladness, and joy even in difficult times.

Where do you look for gladness and joy?

DAY 2

READ:

Acts 2:22-36

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 2:28-36

NOTES

Imagine that you are lost in the woods, trying to make your way back to camp for the night. The evening sky is growing dark, and you've never been in this place before. You've lost your hiking partners, and you begin to feel looming desperation well up in your soul. How will you find your way out? Suddenly a random stranger stumbles into your path. It's obvious that she's a competent hiker who has traveled this route before. She stops, asks where you are going, and then invites you to follow her. She knows the path to life. All you have to do is follow in her steps.

The same pattern is true for us as well. God reveals the path of life to us. We often feel lost, trapped, isolated, in the dark—lost in the woods of our lives and seeing no clear way out. The Lord Jesus Christ invites us to follow Him on the path to life. He's given us His Word, which provides a map to safety. We are not alone in the darkness; rather, He is with us in His Word and His Spirit to guide us to safety. Sadly, too often we are tempted to try to find the path to life on our own. We may know the path He provides, but rather than depending on His wisdom, we trust in our own and get further lost in the darkness.

How do you need to follow God's path to life today?

DAY 3

READ:

Acts 2:36-41

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 2:38

NOTES

The Holy Spirit is a gift given to all Christians. God isn't like our great-aunt at Christmas, who simply wants to be kind but doesn't really know what we like. Instead, God is a perfect gift-giver. First, He has access to everything, so He can give any gift He wants. He's not limited by resources or access. He's also perfectly aware of our needs. He knows us even better than we know ourselves, so He's able to give the gift that He knows we need the most.

With all resources and perfect knowledge, God chooses to give Christians Himself. He knows that He is what we need the most. The Holy Spirit indwells believers. He is with us, our great Guide and Comforter in this life. He goes with us at all times and in all circumstances. While God continues to give spiritual gifts that empower us to serve the church and build up the body, the most important gift that God gives is Himself. Christians should treasure this gift. We should give thanks to God for the immeasurable kindness, not only of sending Jesus to pay the price for our sins, but also in sending the Holy Spirit to be with us for the rest of our lives.

How does the Holy Spirit shape your life?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"We don't have to wait for the Holy Spirit to come, for he did come on the Day of Pentecost, and he has never left the church."¹

—John Stott (1921–2011)

DAY 4

READ:

Acts 2:36-41

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 2:41

NOTES

Have you been baptized? If so, what do you remember about that day? Baptism is a celebration for the new Christian. It marks the time of the outward proclamation of a person's spiritual rebirth.

Here in Acts 2, those who repented of their sin and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ were baptized, and this pattern continued throughout the New Testament. All those who place their faith in Jesus, and only those who have faith in Jesus, are baptized.

In many ways, the act of baptism is the starting point for Christian obedience. It's the first command after the call to repent and believe. Baptism is also an act that Jesus Himself submitted to. While He did not have sin to repent of, He modeled the life of righteousness that would be expected of His people. Those who are baptized are united in this glorious picture of His death, burial, and resurrection, and we follow His model for Christian obedience.

If you haven't been baptized, why not? And if you have, how does your baptism continue to encourage you?

DAY 5

READ:

Acts 2:42-47

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 2:42

NOTES



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 (Colossians 1:18). This means that the church is an extension of Christ's ministry, carrying out His work by fulfilling the Great Commission (Matthew 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 Corinthians 12).

The first Christians did not merely engage in the various practices we see mentioned in verse 42; rather, they were devoted to them. The word “devoted” communicates steadfastness, commitment, and perseverance. Those who are learning to play a sport or an instrument model this virtue. You can't learn a skill or difficult sport if you merely do it from time to time. You have to be devoted to learning the scales in order to master an instrument. Hours spent throwing, catching, and batting are required fundamentals when it comes to becoming a skilled baseball player.

In the same way, devotion is required for Christian community. While we might have casual friends who are Christians, we need devotion to actually invest in these relationships in a self-giving, sacrificial way. We need devotion to submit to the Word of God as it is taught and to talk to God in prayer. We devote ourselves to the work when we commit to these practices day in and day out, even when we don't feel like it. God pledges to bless our faithful devotion as we give ourselves to Jesus Christ and His church.

What things in your life are you devoted to that would be pleasing to God and that wouldn't be pleasing to Him?

GROUP

NOTES

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."²

—Ajith Fernando

POINT 1: God's people are empowered to proclaim Jesus boldly (Acts 2:22-31).

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.

? **What do we learn about what is needed to share the good news of Jesus through Peter's sermon?**

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

? **Why is it important to know our audience to better spread the message of the gospel?**

POINT 2: God's people are empowered to call others to repentance (Acts 2:37-41).

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

? **Why do you think Peter combines repentance and baptism as a response to the gospel?**

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.

? **From Day 3: How does the Holy Spirit shape your life?**

POINT 3: God's people are empowered to live together as one (Acts 2:42-47).

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 (Colossians 1:18). This means that the church is an extension of Christ’s ministry, carrying out His work by fulfilling the Great Commission (Matthew 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 Corinthians 12).

? How can you be a part of building up the body in your church?

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

? With what attitudes do you perform Christian activity or service?

MY RESPONSE

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:** Where are you being asked to repent and believe today?
- **HEART:** How is your heart pierced as you think about what Jesus has done for you?
- **HANDS:** How can your engagement with the local church lead to kingdom growth?



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

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.”³

—Michael Green (1930–2019)

THE CHURCH MEETS NEEDS



+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

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.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Acts 3

+ **SETTING:**

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.

DAY 1

READ:

Acts 3:1-10

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 3:1-10

NOTES

This is a miracle of miracles. A man who was unable to walk from birth was healed by faith in Jesus's name. The man went from being unable to walk to walking, leaping, and praising God. It's no wonder that those who saw this man marveled at what God had done in his life.

Have you ever seen God transform a person? Maybe you've seen God break the power of sin, put a marriage back together again, or grant new life after the destruction of terrible decisions. The person was broken by sin, but they were made whole in the name of Jesus. In fact, the apostle Paul described becoming a Christian as dying to our trespasses and walking in a new way of life (Romans 6:3-4).

Like the healed man, Christians walk as new people because of the miraculous power of God. This is enough to prompt us to worship because of the transformation we've experienced and to long for God to transform the lives of others in our midst.

How can you praise God for His work in your life and in the world?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"We take what we think are the tools of spiritual transformation into our own hands and try to sculpt ourselves into robust Christlike specimens. But spiritual transformation is primarily the work of the Holy Spirit. He is the Master Sculptor."¹

—Jerry Bridges (1929–2016)

DAY 2

READ:

Acts 3:1-10

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 3:4-10

NOTES



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. (continued)

The first thing Peter and John did when the man asked them for alms was to look straight at him. This point may be easy to overlook, but it's important nonetheless. Imagine how many people over the years had walked past the man who was lame and had not stopped to notice him. How many people had looked the other way or pretended not to hear his petition? The man had likely grown accustomed to looking up at people's distant stare in the opposite direction. The apostles, in contrast to so many who had gone before, looked straight at the man, surely communicating their intention to help.

Do we notice those who are hurting in the world? Many times Christians are likely as guilty at overlooking those in need as those who passed by the lame man each day on their way to the temple. Christians today may be busy with their own lives and unwilling to acknowledge the plight of another human who is made in the image of God. Today, try to not look past others but look straight at them and ask the Lord to give you wisdom for how to love them well.

Who do you need to really see today?

DAY 3

READ:

Acts 3:11-16

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 3:12

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #94: SOCIAL CONCERN

(continued)

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 (Micah 6:8; Ephesians 6:5-9; 1 Thessalonians 3:12).

Acts 3:12 seems like an odd question for Peter to ask the crowd in the temple that day. After all, the people had often seen this man who could not walk, and now he was leaping and praising God. Why wouldn't anyone be amazed at this? Granted, many of the people in Jerusalem had witnessed Jesus's miracles. The apostles had also witnessed God do many amazing things—He'd sent His Spirit, accomplished the miracle of Pentecost, empowered Peter's sermon, brought thousands of people to faith, and birthed His church. Anything was possible with God.

The onlookers, on the other hand, were amazed because they thought the apostles themselves had produced this miracle. It would have been amazing to see mere humans cause a man who had never walked to stand and leap. But it was God's power and not the apostles' power at work. No one should have been amazed because God can do anything He wants.

The same is true today. God can do whatever He wants, which should give us great confidence to trust Him, to pray to Him, and to expect Him to act. Amazement is a proper response, not because people are surprised at what God can do, but because every time He acts, His might is on display.

How does God amaze you?

DAY 4

READ:

Acts 3:11-16

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 3:14

NOTES

Peter condemned his hearers for making a bad exchange. He reminded them that God had glorified Jesus as evidenced by His miracles, and yet they chose to release a murderer—Barabbas—instead of the Son of God.

Before modern readers are too quick to condemn this exchange, consider Paul's words in Romans 1:22, which speak of an equally bad move on the part of all humanity: Thinking we're wise, we choose to worship created things instead of the Creator. All people have denied the Holy and Righteous One and chosen instead to worship and serve far lesser things. The result of this exchange is the sinful chaos reigning in this world. Every day, every hour, people are confronted with a choice: Will I worship the Holy and Righteous One or will I choose something else in His place?

Since Jesus is holy and righteous, the implication is that nothing else compares to Him. Nothing else in all of creation can take His place. As a result, it's wise to consider whether your life is worshiping Him as He deserves or whether you are following the pattern of Romans 1 and worshiping a sad substitute.

What does your life say you worship?

DAY 5

READ:

Acts 3:17-23

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 3:19

NOTES

Consider the implication that sin can be wiped or blotted out (v. 19). Peter was not suggesting that sin can be overlooked, or that God minimizes the implications of sin. Peter didn't even say that sin isn't really that bad or that people need not worry about it. Rather, he was clear that sin is disastrous and costly, but because of Jesus's work, sin can be wiped out.

Now surely he wasn't saying here that the sinful actions people performed will all go away. What he was saying was that the consequences of sin before God—death and wrath—can be wiped out for us because Christ took them upon Himself. Therefore, God can look at sin for what it is, deal with it justly in Christ, and yet wipe it away from us.

There's a joyous freedom found in knowing that sin is wiped out. It's not uncommon to see people still living under the weight of sin and guilt, even though that very sin has been forgiven by Christ. It's imperative that all Christians live in light of the reality that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). Since sin is truly wiped out, then Christians should live free and forgiven.

If Christians have been forgiven, why do some often feel weighed down instead of refreshed?

GROUP

NOTES

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."²

—Chrysostom (c. 347–407)

POINT 1: God's people serve others to display God's works (Acts 3:1-7).

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 (Micah 6:8; Ephesians 6:5-9; 1 Thessalonians 3:12).



How is our social concern a testimony of our love for Christ?

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

POINT 2: God's people challenge others to recognize God's Son (Acts 3:11-16).

We humbly serve others to testify about Jesus.



How can we remain humble in ministry successes?

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



How can our service point more directly to Jesus?

POINT 3: God's people invite others to experience God's presence (Acts 3:17-20).

Jesus's forgiveness extends to all when they repent.



How can we help lead others to repentance?

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



From Day 5: **If Christians have been forgiven, why do some often feel weighed down instead of refreshed?**

MY RESPONSE

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:** What are your thoughts about those who are broken and need Jesus?
- **HEART:** What pride issues reside in you today?
- **HANDS:** Who can you serve this week who are considered marginalized?



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

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."³

—Daniel L. Guder

THE CHURCH STANDS FIRM



+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

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

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Acts 4

+ **SETTING:**

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.

DAY 1

READ:

Acts 4:5-12

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 4:10

NOTES



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 (Ephesians 2:1-3) to being welcomed into God's family as a beloved child (Ephesians 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 (Colossians 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 Corinthians 5:17).

The testimony of a transformed life is a powerful force. Imagine how you might have responded should you have known or seen the man who was lame begging at the Beautiful Gate each day, only to suddenly find him healed—leaping for joy and praising God. You would have likely been overwhelmed at the power and salvation God offered.

Peter said the same kind of transformation that healed the man has come to all Christians. Those saved by Jesus have been healed of a far deeper malady than lameness. Their sins have been forgiven and their dead heart made alive.

In one of his letters, Peter described all Christians as a royal priesthood, a nation of holy people who proclaim the glory and praise of the One who drew us out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9). Once dead in sin and separated from God, now Christians give praise to God for the salvation Jesus accomplished on the cross. Those who know someone whose life has been radically changed by Christ are compelled by the power of God. In this way, those far from God see the gospel lived out in the transformed life of a follower of Jesus.

What do those who see your life learn about Jesus?

DAY 2

READ:

Acts 4:5-12

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 4:12

NOTES

Evangelism and missions hinge on the claim that salvation is only found in Jesus Christ. If salvation and forgiveness of sins could be found in another way, then why would Christians need to point people to Jesus? If Jesus were merely one among many ways that people could find hope and purpose, then evangelism would be a waste of time. We might talk to people about why we love and follow Jesus, but we wouldn't need to call them to faith and repentance if they could find salvation in another way.

But the apostles were clear: Salvation only comes through faith in Jesus because He is the only One who has been appointed by God as the cornerstone for salvation. God did not devise multiple cornerstones for salvation, but only one. Since this is true, Christians have a mission to make sure that all people everywhere have a chance to hear the gospel of Jesus. We live at a time when national and international missions have never been easier; we have access to modern transportation and translation options that would have been unimaginable decades ago. These resources, backed by the power of the Holy Spirit, empower God's people to proclaim the singular name by which all people must be saved—Jesus.

How are you involved in getting the gospel to those who have never heard it?

DAY 3

READ:

Acts 4:13-22

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 4:18-20

NOTES

What would you do if someone told you that you could not talk about Jesus? Most have not faced such a reality, but many Christians around the world have. Martyrdom is common. Oppression has been normative. In many parts of the world, even today, the testimony that Jesus is King brings with it a death sentence, or at least the death of relationships with family and friends. Both the government and individuals are apt to tell Christians to stop speaking about the name of Jesus or else they will suffer. What are Christians to do in such a place? They follow the model of the apostles here and entrust themselves to God and continue to speak.

The fact that many of us don't live in such an environment brings challenges as well. If we are not being forced to remain silent about Jesus, then why is it so easy for many of us to fail to speak about Him? In places where persecution isn't the norm and Christians do not suffer harm for talking about Jesus, we should use that freedom to openly and compellingly share the good news.

What are some ways people face persecution today for telling the good news of Jesus?

DAY 4

READ:

Acts 4:23-31

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 4:23-24

NOTES

When Peter and John were released, they immediately went back and reported to the other brothers and sisters in the church about what had gone on. The persecution they endured would have certainly alarmed these early Christians, since the expectation would be that the threats and opposition would soon threaten the entire church. But the apostles understood that the weight they were carrying wasn't theirs alone. They modeled what Paul would later write, carrying one another's burdens to "fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

Burden-bearing was a hallmark of the New Testament church. Whether it was suffering, pain, complexity, persecution, or sin, the people of God confessed their need for God's help and the support of others. The church rallied around those who were burdened to lend them strength in their hour of need. Often in modern times, we are too private about the pain we are carrying and assume that others either don't want to know or are too burdened themselves to help. We then keep things locked in private, when the community of the church is the best means of help and prayer. As God's people, we should seek out ways to allow others to bear our burdens and actively find ways to support those around us who are burdened.

What burdens could you be sharing with other believers for mutual encouragement?

DAY 5

READ:

Acts 4:23-31

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 4:29-30

NOTES

People often find themselves rattled by the complexity of life in this world. The pervasive, twenty-four-hour news cycle brings to the forefront story after story of chaos and pain. It's not just that bad things happen, but it seems that the world is often hostile to Jesus, the church, and the moral principles that guide a Christian's life.

The apostles faced the same reality. In spite of all that God was doing in their day, they still faced opposition. God could have stopped such oppression in light of the spread of His church, but that was not the case. The Christians did not ask God to give them protection against persecution, but that God would give them strength to continue preaching with boldness and that the Holy Spirit would continue to help them heal the sick and perform miracles.

The ongoing threats should remind Christians today that persecution is to be expected for the people of God. The apostles set a good model here—they pointed back to King David, who recognized that the nations would always rage against God's people. Until we reach heaven or Christ returns, Christians should expect opposition. We must trust God to give us boldness in the face of evil.

How is God calling you to trust Him in the middle of opposition or evil?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small: Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."¹

—Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

GROUP

NOTES

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."²

—Michael W. Goheen
and Timothy Sheridan

POINT 1: God's people testify about the risen Savior (Acts 4:8-12).

Those who experience Jesus's love, through the Holy Spirit, testify about Jesus's death and resurrection.



How can you more boldly proclaim Christ with the Spirit's power?

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 (Ephesians 2:1-3) to being welcomed into God's family as a beloved child (Ephesians 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 (Colossians 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 Corinthians 5:17).

Believers proclaim Jesus as the cornerstone—salvation is found only through Him.

POINT 2: God's people refuse to be silenced about the risen Savior (Acts 4:18-22).

In spite of the world's threats, believers continue to testify to Christ in obedience to God.



What happens when we fear people rather than God?

Despite threats, those who witness the Messiah's work can't stop talking about Him.

? From Day 3: **What are some ways people face persecution today for telling the good news of Jesus?**

POINT 3: God's people pray for boldness to proclaim the risen Savior (Acts 4:23-31).

The body of Christ prays for each other to receive God's power to pursue kingdom objectives.

? **How do we cultivate more corporate prayer for the work of God's mission in our lives?**

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.

? **What are ways we can respond in obedience to God's plan to bring salvation to others who don't yet know Him?**

MY RESPONSE

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:** Why does the truth of the resurrection compel Christians to speak about Jesus?
- **HEART:** In what ways can you confess that you haven't been bold for Jesus?
- **HANDS:** To whom in your life can you boldly share the good news of Jesus?



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

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."³

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer
(1906–1945)

THE CHURCH WORKS TOGETHER



+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

God judged Ananias and Sapphira for lying about the gift they gave, protecting the purity of the early church.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Acts 4–5

+ **SETTING:**

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.

DAY 1

READ:

Acts 4:32-35

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 4:32

NOTES

It's worth considering what it means to have all things in common with others. Particularly for those who live in individualistic societies like the United States, it can be hard for us to admit how much we prize and prioritize our own stuff. We tend to live for ourselves and use our resources in a way that advances our good or the good of our immediate family. In many cultures around the world, however, decisions are made on the basis of the collective good of the community as a whole. The resources of the community are given in such a way that everyone in the community is blessed.

Sometimes this communal posture is due to government policies, but many times it develops out of necessity. In some societies, survival depends on the fact that people work together. It seems that the early church functioned in this communal spirit. They were not forced to do so, but compelled to live as a collective whole by virtue of their submission to Jesus and their understanding of the gospel. They lived to make one another better. They lived in unity as one body. Today's church could stand to learn from this example.

How can we, as a body of believers, feel and act more unified?

DAY 2

READ:

Acts 4:32-35

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 4:33

NOTES

Wouldn't it be nice to live with great grace upon your life? Grace can be defined as unmerited favor. Whereas mercy is not getting the treatment that you deserve, grace is getting better than you deserve. It is unusual, unexpected kindness.

The early church experienced great grace as the Holy Spirit worked to perform miracles and bring people to saving faith in Jesus Christ. They felt great grace from the hand of God, even in the midst of challenge and persecution.

Christians today, especially many in the United States, have unusual grace from the Lord as well. We've been saved by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and made one with the people of God. We have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. We have the Word of God in our language and the ability to gather with healthy churches where we can grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord. For these things, we should give thanks.

Additionally, we should ask God for the unique manifestations of His grace in the transformed lives of people in our church community. As witnesses of God's power, we should live with thankfulness for the Lord's great grace in our lives.

Where do you see the great grace of God in your life and the life of the church?

DAY 3

READ:

Acts 4:32-35

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 4:34

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #88: **STEWARDSHIP**

God's intention for mankind is that we serve Him as faithful stewards of His creation (Genesis 1:28; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2). We are to invest the time, talents, and material possessions God has given us for His kingdom work (Matthew 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 (Matthew 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 (Proverbs 3:9), regularly (1 Corinthians 16:2), sacrificially (Matthew 12:41-44), humbly (Matthew 6:1-4), and cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:6-7), praying that God may be glorified in our stewardship of His provisions.

The early followers of Jesus seemed to do more than merely take the leftovers of what they had and give it to those in need. Instead, they intentionally sold their possessions in order to bless others. In other words, they were proactive in finding ways to be generous, even when that level of generosity was costly to their own pursuits and pleasures. In that day, selling land and houses was a huge sacrifice—more so than might be common today.

Christians today should consider how they are called to actively pursue generosity. It's common to think about caring for the poor out of the leftovers of whatever resources might be available. But what might change if Christians were proactive to see how they might leverage what they have to create means of blessing others? Such generosity would require that Christians learn to live simply and consider how to be content without many of the pleasures that are expected in today's world. But the fruit of such generosity could be such that all those in the church are cared for and burdens are lifted.

Where are you called to display sacrificial generosity?

DAY 4

READ:

Acts 4:36-37

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 4:36-37

NOTES

A man named Joseph—whom we know as Barnabas—sold his field and gave the proceeds to the apostles to bless those within the church. This generosity calls to mind the words of Paul in Galatians 6:10. Christians have a general call to model the love of Christ to all people, but they have a more specific responsibility to care well for those who are members of the church body. Certainly, “doing good” means more than simply giving financial blessing, but it doesn’t mean less than that. This level of care requires that Christians actually live in close community with members of their church. It’s through community that they can be aware of needs and know how to best give care to those who are hurting.

Church members caring for one another is far more than a social program to address poverty or need. It is believers seeking out the welfare of one another by modeling the love of Jesus with generous giving.

Who is someone in your church community whom you could help this week?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Any temporal possession can be turned into everlasting wealth. Whatever is given to Christ is immediately touched with immortality.”¹

—A. W. Tozer (1897–1963)

DAY 5

READ:

Acts 5:1-11

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 5:3

NOTES

The role of Satan is explicitly linked to the sin of Ananias and Sapphira. While some may overemphasize the role of Satan, others likely underestimate his role in sin. Peter stated that Satan filled Ananias and Sapphira's hearts and prompted them to lie and retain some of the money from their sale for themselves.

In his later letter, Peter described Satan as a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour (1 Peter 5:8-9). Satan is like a wild animal seeking to do harm, and his primary aim is to lead people away from God and toward sin. Christians are called first to recognize that Satan is at work in this world. Christians are then called to resist Satan's attacks. The idea of resisting means to fight against or to press back. Christians press back against the enemy by fleeing from and fighting sin. As they do, they remain firm in the faith. Christians renounce following after Satan and his work in the world and instead commit to faithfulness to the Lord.

How do you need to resist Satan today?

GROUP

NOTES

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."²

—Augustine (354–430)

POINT 1: God's people practice generosity (Acts 4:32-37).

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.



From Day 1: **How can we, as a body of believers, feel and act more unified?**

KEY DOCTRINE #88: STEWARDSHIP

God's intention for mankind is that we serve Him as faithful stewards of His creation (Genesis 1:28; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2). We are to invest the time, talents, and material possessions God has given us for His kingdom work (Matthew 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 (Matthew 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 (Proverbs 3:9), regularly (1 Corinthians 16:2), sacrificially (Matthew 12:41-44), humbly (Matthew 6:1-4), and cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:6-7), praying that God may be glorified in our stewardship of His provisions.



What does it take to sacrifice worldly goods for the sake of needs in the church body?

POINT 2: God's people confront sin (Acts 5:1-9).

Part of the role of the church is to combat and confront sin in the church and in the life of individual believers.



How easy or difficult is it to confront sin in others and why?

God gives us opportunities to repent, but confronted unrepentant sin will lead to dire consequences.



When confronted with sin, why do we sometimes fall into more sin when we are unrepentant?

POINT 3: God's people display reverence (Acts 5:10-11).

God made it clear that He is almighty and all-holy, and He will continue to take sin seriously.



How do we balance a seriousness for staying away from sin and grace to forgive when sin happens?

Christians should live in awe of God's grace among them while maintaining a reverent fear for His holiness and hatred of sin.



How can the church instill more understanding of reverent fear of the Lord to its people?

MY RESPONSE

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:** How was Jesus generous, and how can we imitate Him?
- **HEART:** How have you experienced the generosity of the church body that you can thank God for?
- **HANDS:** Where do you need to demonstrate increased generosity?



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

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."³

—C. S. Lewis (1898–1963)

THE CHURCH PREACHES THE GOSPEL



+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

God has sent His people into the world to tell others about Christ.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGES:**

Matthew 9–10; Romans 10

+ **SETTING:**

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.

DAY 1

READ:

Matthew 9:35-38

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 9:37

NOTES

The picture of a plentiful harvest is compelling. Imagine the farmer walking out into the fields and seeing the results of months of labor to plant and tend to the crop. The time from planting to harvest is filled with uncertainty, but then the morning comes and the harvest springs to life. What you can't likely imagine is the farmer walking out into the fields that are ready to harvest and just leaving the produce sitting in the field to rot. No one in their right mind would do all of the work to plant and tend to a crop and not harvest it.

Jesus used this image to represent humanity. The lost around us are ripe for harvest. God, through the work of His Spirit, brought the gift of salvation, and even among those we see every day are folks who could be ready to respond to the offer. The problem is the farmers are not picking the crop. There aren't enough laborers to get out in the field and pick the fruit of God's labor. What a tragedy and what a motive to pray that God would raise up more workers.

Where are you called to harvest?

DAY 2

READ:

Matthew 9:35-38

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 9:38

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Personal working for souls is good. Giving money is good. But praying is best of all. By prayer we reach Him without whom work and money are alike in vain. We obtain the aid of the Holy Ghost. . . . The Holy Ghost alone can make ministers of the Gospel, and raise up lay workmen in the spiritual harvest, who need not be ashamed. Never, never, may we forget that if we would do good to the world, our first duty is to pray.”¹

—J. C. Ryle (1816–1900)

Jesus commanded His disciples to pray, but not simply to pray—they were to pray earnestly. Earnest prayer is both sincere and consistent. We think about what we are praying and ask the Lord to do what is best in the situation. In Matthew 9:38, Jesus told us what we should pray for. In the face of a world with overwhelming need, the best thing to pray for is for more workers to go into the field, share the gospel, and trust God to save.

Earnest prayer is also consistent. We do not merely call to mind the need for gospel workers from time to time, but it’s a consistent pattern of our life to implore God to raise up more who will go. Every time you see a crowd or witness the distressed and dejected state of others, you have an opportunity to pray. Consistency requires intentionality like making this type of prayer a steady part of your daily prayer.

Consider posting a card on the bathroom mirror or even setting an alarm each day that prompts you to pray for the harvest. Earnest prayer is the God-ordained means of raising up workers for the mission.

How can you be diligent in praying for God to send more workers into the harvest?

DAY 3

READ:

Matthew 10:1-15

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 10:1-4

NOTES

Isn't it amazing that Judas showed up on a list of men whom Jesus gave authority to cast out demons and heal every sickness (v. 4)? Matthew didn't want us to miss the fact that this is the same Judas who went on to betray Jesus. Jesus knew all things, so He surely knew who Judas would become. Judas's actions in the end were not a surprise to Jesus. Yet, Jesus included him among the disciples, gave him responsibility over the money, sent him out to preach about the kingdom of God, and even washed his feet. Had Jesus acted like us, most of us would have avoided Judas, kept him at a distance, and tried to make it as hard as possible for him to do us harm. But not Jesus. He brought Judas close. Though Judas would prove to be an enemy, Jesus offered him unusual kindness.

Praise God that Jesus is still doing this today. He isn't writing people off but giving them ample opportunity to come to Him in faith and repentance. Jesus's grace is also a challenge to Christians who may be tempted to write off people in the modern cancel culture. Let's be reminded to extend this same unusual kindness to all whom we encounter.

How has God shown you unusual kindness?

DAY 4

READ:

Romans 10:11-15

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Romans 10:14

NOTES



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.

Even with technology and proactive churches, there are still many people who have never heard the good news of Jesus. The ultimate fate of those who have never heard of Jesus should trouble us. Some of us may struggle with God's righteousness in judging those sinners who have never heard of the salvation Jesus offers. We must know that God is holy, good, and just, and His heart is for all to come to repentance. So perhaps the more important consideration is what are we doing about it? It's easier on many accounts to question God without taking a hard look at what we are doing to get the gospel to those who need it, fulfilling God's call upon our lives.

Our modern technology allows for several avenues of access to the gospel. This type of access would have made missionaries of previous generations envious. Many of them left their homes and families forever or faced an early death simply to establish a foothold for the gospel in one place. Today Christians can fly around the world with a few clicks. This isn't to minimize the cost of pioneering missions today, but it is to highlight the opportunity we have. Lord willing, many who have never heard of Jesus will soon hear, and by God's grace, we get to be a part of that great work.

How are you investing in getting the gospel to those who have never heard it?

DAY 5

READ:

Romans 10:11-15

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Romans 10:15

NOTES

All those who have trusted in Jesus are sent out as His representatives (2 Corinthians 5:17-21). There is no such thing as an unsent Christian. We are either faithful to the mission we've been entrusted or we are not. Of course, some of us are sent in unique ways to cross cultures in order to share the gospel. These missionaries are doing on a macro level what all Christians are called to do in the normal rhythms of their lives.

Paul established what those who are sent should be doing—they should preach. This doesn't mean that they need to prepare a sermon, stand behind a pulpit, and deliver it to a group. It means that all those who are sent declare a message about Jesus. This is what preaching is at its core. It's simply testifying to the truth about Jesus. We do this in formal ways like on Sundays when the church gathers and a pastor preaches, but we all can do this when we walk to our mailbox and talk to a neighbor. We can preach when we are at the gym and have a chance to share the hope we have in Jesus. We can preach when we walk around the neighborhood at night and someone asks us how we are doing. The opportunities to preach are endless for those looking to share good news.

How can you preach the good news of Jesus more?

GROUP

NOTES

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."²

—Rebecca Manley Pippert

POINT 1: God's people are to pray for the world with compassion (Matthew 9:35-38).

Knowing Jesus had compassion on people should compel believers to have compassion and share the good news of Jesus.

? From Day 2: **How can you be diligent in praying for God to send more workers into the harvest?**

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.

? **How can we see evangelism as a privilege?**

POINT 2: God's people are to go into the world with assurance (Matthew 10:1-14).

Jesus entrusted to His disciples the responsibility to carry on His mission and empowered them to do the work.

? **As disciples, what are examples of things we can do to carry out the mission and work of God?**

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.

? How can we take steps toward trusting God in equipping us for evangelism?

POINT 3: God's people are to preach to the world with urgency (Matthew 10:15; Romans 10:14-15).

God rightly judges those who reject Him and the good news of Jesus.

? Why is it right for God to judge those who reject Him?

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.

? How can we stress the importance of evangelism to ourselves and others in the church?

MY RESPONSE

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:** How does your salvation change the way you think about the work of evangelism?
- **HEART:** How do you need to grow in genuine compassion for the lost?
- **HANDS:** How can you grow in the work of evangelism?



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

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?"³

—David Platt

THE MOST CRITICAL PART OF YOUR BIBLE STUDY. PERIOD.

by Lynn H. Pryor

This last summer was the 54th anniversary of the first moon landing. I still remember two things about that night all those years ago:

1. Stretched out on the floor watching our 19-inch black-and-white TV from Sears, I watched Neil Armstrong step onto the moon, and I thought: “Dang. This is a big deal.”
2. We skipped Sunday night church to watch the moon landing. (Yeah, I grew up in one of those houses. I don’t regret it, although I never saw *Bonanza* or Walt Disney’s *Wonderful World of Color*.)

The moon landing really was a big deal, and as I look back, it is even more remarkable that all the years of preparation and the journey itself were done using computers with less combined processing ability than what currently resides in my smartphone.

DISCIPLESHIP IN THE PRE-DIGITAL AGE

We look back today and wonder: “How could they do so much with so little?” Yet . . .

- Moses led an entire nation out of Egypt with a stick (Exodus 14:16).
- Samson busted a few hundred Philistine heads with a donkey’s jawbone (Judges 15:14-16).
- David defeated a giant with a rock (1 Samuel 17:48-50).
- The early disciples had nothing but their feet and their verbal witness, and they changed the world (Matthew 10:5-13).

We have so much more than they had. We’ve got all this amazing technology and resources—social media, television, cars, planes—but are we really making a difference in people’s lives?

What would happen if we did what the early disciples did? What if we relied on the Holy Spirit?

POWER BEYOND TECHNOLOGY

More than relying on all these things, maybe we should rely on the same thing the early disciples did: the presence and power of God's Holy Spirit.

Paul wrote:

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, announcing the mystery of God to you, I did not come with brilliance of speech or wisdom. I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. My speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of wisdom but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not be based on human wisdom but on God's power. (1 Corinthians 2:1-5, CSB)

In the end, it's not my clever remarks or my well-crafted presentations (and they are really good, thank you very much) that make a difference. What makes a difference is when I let the Holy Spirit work through me and when people see Jesus in me.

I wonder what would happen if, instead of relying on our clever gadgets and Bible study tools, we did what the early disciples did. What if we relied on the Holy Spirit?

We don't need an app for that. Not even a 1969 NASA computer.

Lynn H. Pryor is the publishing team leader for Bible Studies for Life. A resident of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, Lynn serves as the discipleship director in his church. He offers a weekly blog at lynnhpryor.com.