

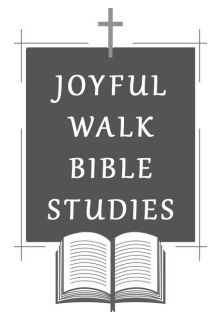
RADICAL ACTS

The Fire of the Spirit Erupting through Believers



An 11-Lesson Study of the Book of Acts

MELANIE NEWTON



We extend our heartfelt thanks to the many women who served as editors for the original study guide produced in 2008—Michelle Burns, Brenda Baker, Joye Messerli, Cheri Hudspith, Sara Price, Kathy Kelly, Liz Church and Diane Marbut. This second edition contains much of the original material but has been condensed from 14 lessons to 11 lessons with some alterations to most of the lessons.

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Melanie Newton is the author of “Graceful Beginnings” books for anyone new to the Bible and “Joyful Walk Bible Studies” for established Christians. Her mission is to help women learn to study the Bible for themselves and to grow their Bible-teaching skills to lead others. For questions about the use of this study guide, please visit melanienewton.com to contact us.

Joyful Walk Bible Studies are grace-based studies for women of all ages. Each study guide follows the inductive method of Bible study (observation, interpretation, application) in a warm and inviting format.

We pray that you will find *Radical Acts* a resource that God will use to strengthen you in your faith walk with Him.

Christ-focused • Bible-rich • Grace-based





MELANIE NEWTON

Melanie Newton is a Louisiana girl who made the choice to follow Jesus while attending LSU. She and her husband Ron married and moved to Texas for him to attend Dallas Theological Seminary. They stayed in Texas where Ron led a wilderness camping ministry for troubled youth for many years. Ron now helps corporations with their challenging employees and is the author of the top-rated business book, *No Jerks on the Job*.

Melanie jumped into raising three Texas-born children and serving in ministry to women at her church. Through the years, the Lord has given her opportunity to do Bible teaching and to write grace-based Bible studies for women that are now available from her website (melanienewton.com) and on Bible.org. *Graceful Beginnings* books are for anyone new to the Bible. *Joyful Walk Bible Studies* are for maturing Christians.

Melanie is a speaker, author, and trainer with Joyful Walk Ministries. Her mission is to help women learn to study the Bible for themselves and to grow their Bible-teaching skills to lead others. Her heart's desire is to encourage you to have a joyful relationship with Jesus Christ so you are willing to share that experience with others around you.

"Jesus took hold of me in 1972, and I've been on this great adventure ever since. My life is a gift of God, full of blessings in the midst of difficult challenges. The more I've learned and experienced God's absolutely amazing grace, the more I've discovered my faith walk to be a joyful one. I'm still seeking that joyful walk every day."

Melanie

OTHER BIBLE STUDIES BY MELANIE NEWTON

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Live Out His Love (New Testament women)
Heartbreak to Hope (the Gospel of Mark)
Radical Acts (Acts)
The God-Dependent Woman (2 Corinthians)
Knowing Jesus, Knowing Joy (Philippians, also in Spanish)
Healthy Living (Colossians and Philemon)
Adorn Yourself with Godliness (1 Timothy and Titus, also in Spanish)
Perspective (1 and 2 Thessalonians)
To Be Found Faithful (2 Timothy)
Connecting Faith to Life on Planet Earth (Genesis 1-11; Revelation)
Graceful Living Today (a devotional journal for a joyful life)

Resources for leading others

Be a Christ-Focused Small Group Leader
Leap into Lifestyle Disciplemaking
Bible Study Leadership Made Easy (online video course)

Download our catalogue and get resources for your spiritual growth at melanienewton.com.

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Using This Study Guide

This study guide consists of 11 lessons arranged chronologically according to the Book of Acts. Since Acts consists of 28 chapters, we will need to cover more than one chapter in most of the lessons. You will read through the complete book though not covering every detail.

The lessons are divided into 5 sections (about 25 minutes in length). The first 4 sections contain a detail study of the passages. The last section is a podcast that provides additional insight to the lesson.

If you cannot do the entire lesson one week, please read the Bible passage covered by the lesson and try to do the “Day One Study” of the lesson.

THE BASIC STUDY

Each lesson includes core questions covering the passage narrative. These core questions will take you through the process of inductive Bible study—observation, interpretation, and application. The process is more easily understood in the context of answering these questions:

- What does the passage say? (Observation: what’s actually there) **Discover the Facts** questions will help you to notice all the information that is given in the text.
- What does it mean? (Interpretation: the author’s intended meaning)
- How does this apply to me today? (*Application: making it personal*) **Your Life Adventure** questions lead you to introspection and application of a specific truth to your life.

STUDY ENHANCEMENTS

Deeper Discoveries (optional): Embedded within the sections are *optional* questions for research of subjects we don’t have time to cover adequately in the lessons or contain information that significantly enhance the basic study. If you are meeting with a small group, your leader may give you the opportunity to share your “discoveries.”

Study Aids: To aid in proper interpretation and application of the study, six additional study aids are located where appropriate in the lesson:

- Historical Insights
- Scriptural Insights
- From the Greek (definitions of Greek words)
- Focus on the Meaning
- Think About It (thoughtful reflection)

Hot Spots: Volcanoes form over “hot spots” in the earth’s crust where a crack allows molten lava to flow to the surface. The Holy Spirit’s work in your life becomes your own “**hot spot.**” These hot spots are anything you learned in the lesson or from reading the verses that sparked in you a longing and expectation for the Holy Spirit’s work in your life. Where did the Spirit grab your attention especially? What will you ask God to do in your life to get you fired up for adventure with Him?

Other useful study tools: Use online tools or apps (blueletterbible.org or “Blue Letter Bible app” is especially helpful) to find *cross references* (verses with similar content to what you are studying)

and meanings of the *original Greek words or phrases* used (usually called “interlinear”). You can also look at any verse in *various Bible translations* to help with understanding what it is saying. Feel free to add your own study at the end of each lesson.

PODCASTS

Find podcasts coordinating with these lessons at melanienewton.com/podcasts and most other podcast channels. Choose “7: Radical Acts (Acts).” Or, follow the links in pdf version of this book to access the podcast for each lesson. Listen to the first podcast as an introduction to the study.

“The times are urgent, God is on the move, now is the moment to ask God to ignite His fire in your soul!” (Jim Cymbala, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, front flap)

NEW TESTAMENT SUMMARY

The New Testament opens with the births of John (the Baptist) and Jesus. About 30 years later, John challenged the Jews to indicate their repentance (turning from sin and toward God) by submitting to water baptism—a familiar Old Testament practice used for repentance as well as when a Gentile (non-Jew) converted to Judaism (to be washed clean of idolatry).

Jesus, God's incarnate Son, publicly showed the world what God is like and taught His perfect ways for 3 – 3½ years. After preparing 12 disciples to continue Christ's earthly work, He died voluntarily on a cross for mankind's sin, rose from the dead, and returned to heaven. The account of His earthly life is recorded in 4 books known as the Gospels (the biblical books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John named after the compiler of each account).

After Jesus' return to heaven, the followers of Christ were then empowered by the Holy Spirit and spread God's salvation message among the Jews, a number of whom believed in Christ. The apostle Paul and others carried the good news to the Gentiles during 3 missionary journeys (much of this recorded in the book of Acts). Paul wrote 13 New Testament letters to churches & individuals (Romans through Philemon). The section in our Bible from Hebrews to Jude contains 8 additional letters penned by five men, including two apostles (Peter and John) and two of Jesus' half-brothers (James and Jude). The author of Hebrews is unknown. The apostle John also recorded Revelation, which summarizes God's final program for the world. The Bible ends as it began—with a new, sinless creation.

TIMELINE OF ACTS

The following are generally accepted dates although slight variations can be found in various commentaries and study Bibles. This timeline is based on Jesus' death and resurrection occurring in 30 AD. Most of the dates up to James being executed are best guesses.

Year AD	Events in Acts	Other Historical Events
30	Jesus' death and resurrection; Pentecost (Ch.1-2)	Tiberius is emperor of Rome
32-33	Stephen executed; Paul persecutes the church (Ch. 6-8)	
33	Paul meets Jesus on the Damascus Road (9:1-22)	
36	Paul goes up to Jerusalem (9:23-31) then Tarsus	Caligula becomes emperor of Rome (37 A.D.)
37	Gentiles added to the church (Ch. 10)	
40	Barnabas and Paul at the Antioch church (11:25-26)	

44	James (brother of John) executed; Herod Agrippa I dies (Ch. 12)	Claudius becomes emperor of Rome (41 A.D.)
47-48	Paul's First Missionary Journey (Ch. 13-14)	
49	Jerusalem council (Ch. 15)	Claudius expels Jews from Rome
49-52	Paul's Second Missionary Journey (Ch. 15:36-18:22)	
53-57	Paul's Third Missionary Journey (18:23-21:25)	Nero becomes emperor of Rome (54 A.D.)
57-59	Paul arrested & imprisoned in Caesarea (Ch. 21-24)	
59-60	Paul sent to Rome (Ch. 25-28)	
60-62	Paul under house arrest in Rome (Ch. 28)	
68	Paul executed in Rome	

DISCUSSION GROUP GUIDELINES

Anyone can do this study alone. If you are doing this as part of a group, we suggest you use the following guidelines to maintain a safe environment for your group members to learn together.

- **Attend consistently** whether your lesson is done or not. You'll learn from the other women, and they want to get to know you.
- **Set aside time** to work through the study questions. The goal of Bible study is to **get to know** Jesus. He will change your life.
- **Share your insights** from your personal study time. As you spend time in the Bible, Jesus will teach you truth through His Spirit inside you.
- **Respect each other's insights.** Listen thoughtfully. Encourage each other as you interact. Refrain from dominating the discussion if you have a tendency to be talkative. ☺
- **Celebrate our unity** in Christ. Avoid bringing up controversial subjects such as politics, divisive issues, and denominational differences.
- **Maintain confidentiality.** Remember that anything shared during the group time is not to leave the **group** (unless permission is granted by the one sharing).
- **Pray for one another** as sisters in Christ.
- **Get to know the women** in your group. Please do not use your small group members for solicitation purposes for home businesses, though.

There is a [Small Group Discussion Guide](#) located at the end of this book. Anyone can use the guide to lead a group through a discussion of the questions in this study. This is especially useful for groups that have less than two hours to meet together.

Enjoy your Joyful Walk Bible Study!

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Recommended: Listen to the podcast [“Get Fired Up and Ready for Adventure”](#) before doing the first lesson as an introduction to the whole study.

Get Fired Up and Ready for Adventure

THE RADICAL BLESSING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

- On the day of Pentecost around 30 AD, the power of God poured forth on the followers of Jesus gathered in Jerusalem. The church of Jesus Christ was born—a radically new creation on Earth that never existed before.
- The Holy Spirit is a radical blessing to us. The definition of radical is “having a profound or far-reaching effect.” Through the Spirit’s transforming power in our lives, He changes the world immeasurably and irreversibly.

3 REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD STUDY THE BOOK OF ACTS

Reason to study Acts #1. To understand how to live out your life in Christ.

- Acts is a book of history. The Spirit of God selected what He wanted us to know. The book of Acts is really the acts of Jesus Christ by His Spirit through His Church.
- Acts is a book of theology. You will see how theology is lived out, evidence for the inspiration of scripture, and proof that the gospel message has never changed.
- Acts is a book of biography and human relationships. You will see the fire of the Spirit erupting in the lives of people who are touched by the Spirit and changed forever.

Reason to study Acts #2. To connect with your spiritual heritage

- Gain a connection and appreciation for those who obeyed Jesus by spreading the gospel everywhere they went to reach people like you who never saw Jesus face-to-face but learned to believe in Him as Savior and Lord.

Reason to study Acts #3. Because you need spiritual adventure.

- Acts is a book of adventure. Within the history, theology, biography, and relationships, this marvelous book introduces us to adventure with Jesus Christ.

ADVENTURE WITH THE SPIRIT OF GOD

- According to the dictionary, adventure is “an unusual or exciting, typically hazardous, experience or activity.” Our English word *adventure* comes from the Latin for “about to happen.” What a way to look at life following Jesus—something’s about to happen!

- In Acts, the adventure definitely includes the unexpected. Adventure rarely means easy. But, it never means alone. The Holy Spirit is with you and me every day, forever.

WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

We can know these truths about the Holy Spirit.

- *The Holy Spirit is the breath of God.* We can't see Him. But, the Bible confirms that He lives inside every believer.
- *The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity.* Our God is one God but three persons. The Spirit is a personal being just as the Father and the Son are persons.
- *The Holy Spirit is central to salvation.* He convicts the unbeliever of sin and makes believers into new creations the moment we believe. He enters our spirits and seals us with Himself so our salvation is secure. He unites us with Christ and places us into the universal Body of Christ.
- *The Holy Spirit is the One who makes the Christian life possible.* He is the first gift we receive from God when we trust in Jesus for salvation. And, all those wonderful spiritual treasures Paul writes about in Ephesians and his other letters are wrapped up and delivered by the Holy Spirit to us in a package deal the moment we are saved.
- *The Holy Spirit is the power for spiritual growth.* He enables us to understand the Bible and takes our prayer needs to God the Father, even when we can't. He fills us with Himself and transforms us from the inside out so that our character looks more like Jesus and our lifestyle glorifies God more and more.
- This firepower is inside us. Yet, we must choose to cooperate, consciously depending on the Holy Spirit when making decisions, facing temptations, in our relationships, and in how we respond to the Spirit's leading us.

GETTING FIRED UP FOR ADVENTURE

- Volcanoes form over hot spots in the earth's crust where a crack allows molten lava to flow to the surface. The Holy Spirit's work in our lives becomes our own "hot spots."
- Open your eyes to the evidence around you of the firepower of the Holy Spirit—your own Holy Spirit hot spots. We hope that this study will also spark in you a longing and expectation for the Holy Spirit's transforming power in your life as you learn what it means to live in daily dependence upon Jesus Christ. God's Spirit will get you fired up and ready for adventure as you follow Jesus daily.

Let Jesus satisfy your heart with His Spirit's transforming power. And say yes to a life of adventure with Him!

Lesson 1: Getting Fired Up for Adventure

Acts 1:1-26

A.D. 30

Like the power of a volcano pouring forth fiery lava, the power of God poured forth on the followers of Jesus gathered in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost around 33 A.D. Born that day was a **radically** new creation on earth that never existed before—the Church—born not by natural power but by supernatural power. And, the power behind its existence is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a **radical** blessing to every believer and to the world.

Radical = “having a profound or far-reaching effect”

That word “radical” is an interesting word. It is often associated with something bad, such as free radicals, radical groups, but if radical is used to mean a profound and far-reaching effect, that certainly describes the Holy Spirit. And, that’s good! Through the Spirit’s transforming power in our lives, He changes the world immeasurably and irreversibly. We will see that *Radical Acts* is an appropriate name for our study of the book of Acts.

One of the biblical symbols for the Holy Spirit is “fire.” And, just as fiery lava and ash erupt from a volcano and flow out to build new land, the Holy Spirit’s fire erupts through the lives of believers to build Jesus’ Church. Within a few years, it was well established on planet Earth because men and women got fired up for adventure with the Spirit of God.

DAY ONE STUDY

Adventure with the Spirit

The book of Acts introduces us to adventure with the Spirit of God.

Adventure = “an unusual or exciting, typically hazardous, experience or activity”

What comes to mind when you think of adventure? How adventurous are you? You might not be naturally adventurous, especially the “typically hazardous” part.

Our English word “adventure” comes from the Latin for “about to happen.” Yep. What a way to look at life following Jesus—something’s about to happen! And, it’s usually not what you expect. I can verify that!

In Acts, the adventure definitely includes the unexpected. Miracles occur in strange places and strange ways. The Gentiles are included as equals to the Jews in the Church. An earthquake selectively releases prison chains. Unselfish behavior just springs forth in surprising ways. Add to that executions, beatings, riots, and a shipwreck—happening to the good guys! Adventure rarely means safe. But, it never means alone. The Holy Spirit is with you and me every day, forever.

Who is the Holy Spirit?

But, who is this Holy Spirit? Most Christians have only a vague idea about Him. The older translations called Him the Holy Ghost. The word “ghost” doesn’t inspire appreciation or curiosity in me! In Greek, He is called the *pneuma*, meaning “the breath” of God. He’s been called the transparent one because we can’t see Him. The Bible confirms that He lives inside every believer. By faith, I know He lives in me. Sometimes, I feel His presence. Maybe you do, too.

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. Our God is one God but three persons. The Spirit is not an impersonal “it” or simply an influence but a personal being just as the Father and the Son are persons.

The Holy Spirit is central to salvation. He convicts the unbeliever of sin and makes believers into new creations the moment we believe. He seals us with Himself so our salvation is secure, and He indwells us forever. He unites us with Christ, placing us into the universal Body of Christ. We are all part of the one Church since Pentecost. That includes those who are already in heaven as well as every Christian alive at this moment.

The Holy Spirit is the One who makes the Christian life possible. He is the first gift we receive from God when we trust in Jesus for salvation. And, all those wonderful treasures Paul writes about in Ephesians and his other letters are wrapped up and delivered by the Holy Spirit to us in a package deal the moment we are saved.

The Holy Spirit is the power for spiritual growth. He enables us to understand the Bible and prays for us, even when we can’t. He fills us with Himself and transforms us from the inside out so that our character looks more like Jesus and our lifestyle glorifies God more and more. This firepower is inside us. Yet, we must choose to cooperate. That means living our lives with a conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit—when facing temptations, making decisions, in our relationships, and in how we respond to the Spirit’s leading us. Trusting God in ways that you never did in the past, that’s the adventure. You’ll learn all about this in *Radical Acts*.

For a more detailed discussion of the Holy Spirit, including verses that support the above statements, see “Who Is the Holy Spirit?” in the RESOURCES section at the back of the book.

1. What did you learn about the Holy Spirit that you did not already know or appreciate?

The ABCs of Acts—Author, Background, and Context

Like any book you read, it always helps to know a bit about the author, the background setting for the story (i.e., past, present, future), and where the book fits into a series (that’s the context). The same is true of Bible books.

AUTHOR

Although the author does not name himself, evidence from the text leads to the conclusion that the author was Luke, the physician and traveling companion of Paul (Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24). Certain passages using the pronoun “we” indicate the author includes himself as Paul’s companion on his journeys. Some word choices in both Luke and Acts suggest that a medical man was the author of these books (Acts 28:6). The abrupt close indicates that Acts must have been finished around A.D. 62.

BACKGROUND

The book of Acts is a fast-paced, action adventure book that chronicles the birth and growth of the early church from the Jewish center of Jerusalem to the Gentile nations surrounding her. It's a rich and fascinating book with something for everyone.

- Acts is a book of **history**. But, it's not a complete history of the early church or the apostles but a selective history of early Christianity from Jesus' ascension through two years of Paul's Roman imprisonment. Some call it the Acts of the Apostles. But, it's really the acts of Jesus Christ by His Spirit through His Church.
- Acts is a book of **theology**. Through His messengers, the Holy Spirit teaches people the truth about God and displays God's reality and power through miracles. You will see evidence for the inspiration of scripture and how the gospel message taught from the very beginning has never changed.
- Acts is a book of **biography**. It tells about the fire of the Spirit erupting in the lives of Peter, Paul, and their companions as well as many others whose lives were touched by the Spirit and changed forever.
- Acts is also a book about **human relationships** influenced by the transforming fire power of the Spirit. Conflicts occur and are resolved, friendships are made and tested, old prejudices surface and are removed, persecutions are shared, hospitality is extended, generosity is displayed, and opportunity taken to share the gospel with whomever would listen. Men and women got fired up and not only ready for adventure, but living the adventure with God.

CONTEXT

As a second volume to Luke's Gospel, the book of Acts provides a bridge for the writings of the New Testament, joining what Jesus "began to do and to teach" (Acts 1:1) as told in the Gospels with what he continued to do and teach through the apostles' preaching and the establishment of the church. It links the Gospel narratives with the apostolic letters that follow. It supplies an account of Paul's life from which we learn the settings for his letters. Geographically its story spans the lands between Jerusalem (where the church began) and Rome (the political center of the empire). Historically it recounts the first 30 years of the church. Within it are references to historical events occurring in the Roman Empire known from outside sources. It is also a bridge that ties the church in its beginning with each succeeding age.

2. What information did you learn from the ABC's of Acts that you did not already know?

Think About It: Acts is a tribute to the transforming power of God, as seen in the Apostles' lives. Observing the changes in their lives from fearful weaklings to irrepressible dynamos gives us hope and encouragement today." (Sue Edwards, *Acts of the Holy Spirit*, p. 2)

GET FIRED UP FOR ADVENTURE

Our hope is that this study will spark in you a longing and expectation for the Holy Spirit's work in your life. We call those "hot spots." Through these lessons, you will discover who the Holy Spirit is, His intended role in your life, and what it means to live in daily dependence upon Him. He is the one who will work through that "hot spot" in your life and get you fired up for adventure as you follow Jesus daily.

Think About It: "The work of God can only be carried on by the power of God. The church is a spiritual organism fighting spiritual battles. Only spiritual power can make it function as God ordained. The key is not money, organization, cleverness, or education. No matter the society or culture, the city or town, God has never lacked the power to work through available people to glorify His name ... The times are urgent, God is on the move, now is the moment to ask God to ignite His fire in your soul!" (Jim Cymbala, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*)

3. **Your Life Adventure:** Are you ready to get fired up for adventure with Jesus? What are you hoping to learn from this study?

DAY TWO STUDY

Recommended: Read Acts 1:1-26 to get the whole picture.

Read Luke 1:1-4.

4. **Discover the Facts:**

Who handed down the information (v. 2)?

What did Luke do (v. 3)?

For what purpose (v. 4)?

Focus on the Meaning: "Theophilus" means lover of God. Some interpreters have suggested that Theophilus was not an actual person and that Luke was writing to all lovers of God whom he personified by using this name (cf. Luke 1:3). All things considered, it seems more likely that Theophilus was a real person. There is no reason he could not have been. Such is the implication of the address, and Theophilus was a fairly common Greek proper name. (*Dr. Constable's Notes on Acts 2017 Edition*, p. 12)

5. Since Luke wrote the book of Acts, what confidence do you have that what you will be studying in Acts is trustworthy information?

Read Acts 1:1-3.

6. **Discover the Facts:**

What does the author say in vv. 1-2?

After His suffering, what did Jesus do (v. 3)?

From the Greek: The Greek word *tekmeriois*, translated "proofs," occurs only here in the New Testament. It refers to proof by incontrovertible evidence as contrasted with the proof claimed by a witness. Luke asserted that Jesus Christ's resurrection was beyond dispute. (*Dr. Constable's Notes on Acts 2017 Edition*, p. 13)

7. To what convincing proofs were the disciples a witness?

- See Matthew 28:8-10—
- Luke 24:36-42—
- 1 Corinthians 15:5-7—

8. **Your Life Adventure:** Read John 20:26-29. What did Jesus say about those who have not seen Him in bodily form and still believe? Why should you count yourself as one of those "blessed" ones?

DAY THREE STUDY

Read Acts 1:1-11.

9. **Discover the Facts:** Focus now on vv. 4-11.

What was Jesus doing with them (v. 4)?

Why were they to wait in Jerusalem (v. 4)?

What would happen in a few days (v. 5)?

What question did they ask Jesus (v. 6)?

What is Jesus' answer in v. 7?

What would they receive (v. 8 first part)?

What would they then become (v. 8 second part)?

What happened next (v. 9)?

Who suddenly stood beside them (v. 10)?

What did they promise (v. 11)?

Focus on the Meaning: The word translated “baptized” came from the process for “dyeing” cloth. It didn’t matter if the cloth was sprayed, dipped, or immersed. The significance was taking on the identity of the dye. For us, the Spirit does the dyeing—with Jesus. We are dyed with Christ. Water baptism is a picture of what the Spirit does to us. John baptized with water; Jesus baptizes with the Spirit—much more significant and with far greater effects. See Romans 6.

10. Read the following verses to see what Jesus had promised them about the Spirit.

- John 14:15-17—
- John 16:12-15—

11. **Your Life Adventure:** What grabbed your attention in this passage? Reflect and respond to what the Holy Spirit pointed out for you to notice.

DAY FOUR STUDY

Read Acts 1:12-26.

12. **Discover the Facts:**

Where did they go after Jesus left them?

Who was present there (vv. 13-14)?

What were they doing (v. 14)?

How many believers were there (v. 15)?

What were the qualifications for filling Judas's vacant place (vv. 21-22)?

Whom did they propose (v. 23)?

What did they pray (vv. 24-25)?

Who was added to the Eleven (v. 26)?

Historical Insight: The practice of “casting lots” was common in the Old Testament (Proverbs 16:33), but this is the only recorded time the Apostles did this in the New Testament. Each candidate’s name was written on a stone that was placed in a vessel and shaken. The first to fall out obtained the office. (Sue Edwards, *Acts of the Holy Spirit*, p. 6)

13. What did Peter already see as the set purpose for the apostles (v. 22)?

14. Whereas men and women were usually segregated in the synagogue, what were men and women doing together in this upper room (v. 14)?

Scriptural Insight: The women possibly included the wives of the apostles (1 Co 9:5) and those listed as ministering to Jesus (Mt 27:55; Lk 8:2-3; 24:22). (NIV Study Bible, p. 1644)

15. **Your Life Adventure:** The believers were joined together learning how to live dependently on Jesus for guidance. What did they do that you can also do?

Think About It: In this first chapter, three key elements of the book of Acts are introduced: 1) the emphasis on the many witnesses to Jesus’ life, death and resurrection; 2) the Holy Spirit’s guidance and empowering of believers, and 3) the dependent hearts of those same believers as they prayed. Keep these elements in mind as you work through the study.

GET FIRED UP FOR ADVENTURE:

16. **Hot Spot:** Where in this lesson did the Spirit grab your attention especially? What did you see Him do in your life this week?

Recommended: Listen to the podcast “[Trusting Jesus When Making Decisions](#)” after doing this lesson to reinforce what you have learned. Use the following listener guide.

Trusting Jesus When Making Decisions

MAKING DECISIONS IS PART OF LIFE.

- Making decisions is part of daily life. We can't get away from it.
- What we have to learn is how to make those decisions in a way that maintains our dependence on Jesus Christ in the process. Jesus' followers had to learn that as well.

CASTING LOTS WAS A CULTURAL TOOL NOT A FORMULA.

- The practice of "casting lots" was common in the Old Testament. And, God even used it to give direction to His people. This is the only record of its New Testament use.
- Casting lots as a cultural tool that God used with His people sometimes. He also used prophets and counsellors. *Proverbs 16:33*
- Casting lots was not a formula then nor is it a formula today. What we read in Acts is simply a description of what they did not a prescription for how to make decisions today.

DESCRIPTIVE VERSUS PRESCRIPTIVE

- Much of the Bible is written in narrative form. Narrative is usually descriptive not prescriptive.
- *Descriptive* means it is observation of what actually happened, how people lived and the choices they made about how to do life at the time.
- *Prescriptive* refers to commands from God about how to live or do something that applies to all believers, all people groups, and all time periods.
- We can't look at this passage in Acts chapter 1 about casting lots and create a formula for making decisions with God's blessing on the result.
- We also know that the Holy Spirit now lives inside every believer and can give us direction from the inside of our own hearts and minds for making decisions.
- From our study of Acts 1, we can look at the process the apostolic leaders used and see that the same process applies to us.

THE PROCESS FOR MAKING DECISIONS

Step 1. They aligned themselves with the purposes of God.

- Since Jesus had originally chosen 12 to represent the tribes of Israel, they would fill that 12th spot for the purpose that Jesus had set before them. It was a position of leadership to fill. They aligned themselves with the purposes of God.

Step 2. They considered options who were also aligned with the purposes of God.

- They used their own observations and mental acuity to evaluate the choices. Two men were equally good choices, and both were aligned with the purposes of God.

Step 3. They asked the Lord Jesus for His direction and for Him to show them the best choice.

- In the New Testament writings after the gospels, whenever you see “the Lord,” that refers to Jesus. God is God the Father, Lord is the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Spirit is the Holy Spirit.
- The disciples submitted their options to their Lord Jesus and asked for Him to show them which to choose. *“Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen (Acts 1:24)*
- This is living dependently on God. God the Father who is also your Creator has given you a brain to use. He wants you to use your mind and heart to evaluate the options and then remove the options that are not lined up with His way of doing life. Once you have done that, ask the Lord to show you which good option to choose. It is an act of faith.

Step 4. They submitted to Jesus’ direction for them.

- They asked for God to show them, and God did. Then, they submitted to that. Matthias became the 12th apostle and joined the leader team.

DECISION-MAKING AS PART OF DEPENDENT LIVING

- Decision-making is a huge part of dependent living. What decision do you need to make this week? Follow those guidelines I just gave you, trusting Jesus with your decision-making.

Let Jesus satisfy your heart with His Spirit’s transforming power. And say yes to a life of adventure with Him!

Lesson 2: A Fiery Beginning

(Acts 2:1-5:11)

A.D. 30-32

A beginning. Something that comes first. We value firsts—being first in line, having a first edition of a book, and going to see a movie on the first day of its release. Acts is also a book of firsts, most notably the birth of a new creation on earth, something that never existed before. No one before that day experienced a permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit uniting believers together across all geographic, social and time boundaries. This happened on the day we call Pentecost when the Church as the body of Christ was born.

The Holy Spirit is the main character dominating the entire book of Acts. He is actively involved in all the firsts. He authors the first gospel message given through Peter. He is the first gift we receive when we accept that gospel message and trust in Jesus Christ as the only way to have a relationship with God who made us. And, He initiates the first response to that gift—spontaneous praise of God erupting from the hearts of those who now have the Spirit inside. A fiery beginning, indeed! What a thrilling, unforgettable experience!

Recommended: Read Acts 2:1-5:11 to get the whole picture.

DAY ONE STUDY

Read Acts 2:1-13.

Scriptural Insight: The Annual Feasts—In addition to the Sabbath, God ordained annual feasts which all Jewish men were required to attend (Leviticus 23), grouped together so as to require only 3 pilgrimages: 1) Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits in early spring, 2) the Feast of Weeks in the summer, and 3) Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles in the fall.

At the Feast of Firstfruits, celebrated on the Sunday during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, families offered thanks for God's provision with the first of their barley harvest. Seven weeks later, at the end of the barley harvest and the beginning of the wheat harvest, another thanksgiving offering was given at the Feast of Weeks. By Jesus' day, this festival was known by its Greek name, Pentecost (*pent* means 50), since it occurred fifty days after Passover.

Since Jesus' resurrection occurred on Firstfruits, the resurrection event is considered to be God's "firstfruits" (1 Corinthians 15:20-23), and the giving of the Spirit to believers at Pentecost marked the beginning of the rest of the "harvest" which will continue until Christ returns (Joel 2:28, 32).

When the gift of the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples as promised in Acts 1, eyewitnesses could confirm three kinds of supernatural evidence (audible, visible, and experiential). Let's see what they heard, saw and experienced.

1. **Discover the Facts:**

Where were the believers (v. 1)?

What did they hear (v. 2)?

What did they see (v. 3)?

What did they experience (v. 4)?

Who else heard (vv. 5, 9-11)?

What did they hear (vv. 6 and 11, stick to the text here)?

How did they respond (vv. 12-13)?

Historical Insight: “God-fearing Jews” were devout Jews not native to Israel but from all over the Mediterranean world and the Middle East who were now in Jerusalem either as current residents or as visitors for Pentecost. This group included natural born Jews as well as Gentile converts to Judaism (v. 11).

2. Considering Jesus’ promise in Acts 1:8, what message was conveyed to the believers by the wind blowing from heaven?

From the Greek: The word for “spirit,” *pneuma*, is related to *pnoe*, the word translated “wind” in Acts 2:2. It also means “breath.” Breath or wind in the Bible is a symbol for the spirit of God as in Ezekiel 37:9, 14 and John 3:8. (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 357)

3. Read Exodus 13:21-22; 19:18; and Luke 3:16. What did the tongues of fire symbolize?

4. Read the following verses to see how God inaugurated a new “temple” dedicated to Him in the Old Testament.
 - Exodus 40:33-38—
 - 1 Kings 7:51; 8:10-11—
5. Now read 1 Corinthians 3:16 and 6:19. Relate this information to what is happening in Acts 2:1-4.

Think About It: Acts 2:6-7 indicates that the phrase “other languages” were languages understandable to the hearers, a diverse group from “every nation under heaven.” At Babel (Gen. 11:1-11), God separated the people by giving them different languages. At Pentecost, He gave them the Holy Spirit, using those languages to bring the scattered together to hear the gospel, uniting the believers all into God’s kingdom and then scattering them back out to their respective nations to spread the one gospel message in their different languages. Each one was a temple containing the presence of God.

6. **Your Life Adventure:** Upon receiving and being filled by the Holy Spirit, the new believers broke out in spontaneous praise of God. According to Ephesians 5:18-20, this is an evident work of the Spirit in someone’s life. When was the last time you broke out in spontaneous praise? Describe the occasion and how others (if present) responded around you.

Read Acts 2:14-41.

7. **Discover the Facts:** Peter declared to the crowd that his companions were not drunk but had received God’s promise. Then he preached the gospel to them. Peter’s sermon in Acts 2:22-32 included five main points that are repeated in sermons throughout Acts though not necessarily in the same order. This was the basic gospel message shared everywhere.
 - (1) Who Jesus was (v. 22)—
 - (2) What happened to Him (v. 23)—
 - (3) What God did (v. 24)—
 - (4) How this is confirmed (v. 32)—
 - (5) What one receives after believing (v. 38)—

Think About It: This same Peter was the one who denied Jesus three times the night before His crucifixion and hid behind locked doors afterwards. The indwelling Holy Spirit made a huge difference in his life, giving him courage and turning this uneducated fisherman into an effective preacher. That same Holy Spirit can make a difference in your life as you trust Him to work.

8. Peter weaves throughout his sermon that what they just observed was God fulfilling a prophetic promise.

- What was the promise (vv. 33, 38-39)?
- How does Peter relate Joel's prophecy (vv. 15-21) to what just happened?

Historical Insight: Based on the latest research into historical records, it is generally thought that Jesus' baptism took place in A.D. 29, with the Crucifixion on Friday, April 3, A.D. 33 and the resurrection on Sunday April 5. The Crucifixion had to occur in a year when Nisan 14 fell on a Friday. This happened in A.D. 33. Astronomy presents another insight related to the Crucifixion. Just as the sun was setting on April 3 of A.D. 33, there was an eclipse of the moon, giving the moon a dark red color. The apostle Peter took advantage of what the people had seen at the time of the Crucifixion when he said that the various phenomena, including the sun turning to darkness and the moon to blood, were signs of the ushering in of the great day of the Lord, in which anyone who calls on the name of the Lord would be saved. (Rodger C. Young, *Book review: From Abraham to Paul: A Biblical Chronology*, by Andrew E. Steinmann, accessed online)

9. In Acts 2:25-32, Peter quotes Psalm 16:8-11. What does David prophesy that was fulfilled in Jesus?

10. In Acts 2:33-36, Peter quotes Psalm 110:1 (the most quoted Old Testament verse in the New Testament), demonstrating how Jesus has fulfilled this prophecy as well.

- Where is Jesus now? See also Acts 7:56.
- What has He received?
- What has He just done?
- Therefore, who is Jesus (v. 36)?

11. What did Peter challenge them to do and promise to them if they did that (vv. 38-40)?

12. At the end of his sermon, what was the audience's response (vv. 37, 41)?

Focus on the Meaning: To convict of sin is a work of the Holy Spirit. The term "repent" is from the Greek *metaknoia* referring to a change of mind, in this case, a radical change of mind about Jesus—from unbelief to faith. Forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit are two gifts given to those who repent and believe. Baptism, as had been taught by John, is an outward expression of inner repentance.

13. **Your Life Adventure:** What conclusion have you drawn about Jesus? Share how your heart responded when you really "heard" and took in this message.

DAY TWO STUDY

Spirit-Driven Unity

Caring for infants and small children can be demanding and exhausting. The same is true for "baby Christians." On the day of Pentecost, the Church as the body of Christ was born. Suddenly, the Twelve Apostles became spiritual parents to 3,000 needy infants, many of whom were not residents of Jerusalem and lacked means of long-term support. The apostles' dependence was now on the Holy Spirit to guide them daily.

Focus on the Meaning: Generally, when referring to the universal body of Christ, the word "Church" is capitalized. When referring to a local body (congregation), the word "church" is not capitalized unless used in a title, such as Grace Bible Church.

Read Acts 2:42-47.

14. **Discover the Facts:** Tell the story of the new church learning to function using these prompts.

They devoted themselves to . . .

Everyone was filled with awe at ...

All the believers were (vv. 44-45) ...

Every day they (v. 46) ...

They broke bread ...

And the Lord (v. 47) ...

15. How would you describe the heart attitude of these new believers as they lived out their new faith? See also Acts 4:32-35.

16. Relate what you see in this passage to Jesus' words in John 13:34-35 and John 17:11.

Historical Insight: This practice of caring for one another's needs wasn't confined to Jerusalem. Read "Care and Prayer" in **The Rest of the Story** information in the RESOURCES section.

17. **Deeper Discoveries (optional):** For a balanced view of the communal sharing described in Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-35, see also 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15. What do you see when you combine both passages together?

18. **Your Life Adventure:** Are you faithful to a church? If so, what is your heart attitude toward the other believers in your church? Are you spending time with them? Are you praying together with them? This week, ask Jesus to give you the same heart attitude toward them as He did the early Church believers.

Spirit-Driven Prayer

Think About It: “The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of prayer. Only when we are full of the Spirit do we feel the need for God everywhere we turn. We can be driving a car, and our spirit starts going up to God with needs and petitions and intercessions right there in the middle of traffic.” (Jim Cymbala, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, p. 58)

Through the filling of the Holy Spirit, Peter preached to curious crowds on the day of Pentecost and saw great results. The new community of believers was established with great joy and unity. Then came the tests—from the Jewish authorities and from within that same community of believers.

Do you enjoy being tested? Most of us do not. Testing is a significant part of the growth of a Christian to spiritual maturity. God’s method of teaching seems to be: 1) **prepare by instruction** (His Word) and 2) **learn by experience** (the test). In the case of the early church, the test was whether or not they would trust God in the midst of trial and humble themselves to live in dependence on Him through prayer. This is what the prophets, down through the centuries, had told them to do. When under attack, when facing a new challenge, in all seasons, in all times, call on the name of the Lord, and He will help you.

The writer of Hebrews nails down this most central activity for Christians, “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and grace to help us in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16).” For Christians in any troubled times, there is simply no other way.

Read Acts 3:1-10.

19. *Discover the Facts:*

Why were Peter and John going to the Temple?

Whom did they see?

What did the lame man do (vv. 3-5)?

What did Peter say (v. 6) and do (v. 7)?

What did the healed man do then (v. 8)?

How did the people in the Temple courts respond?

Scriptural Insight: The scriptures teach that God does miracles out of His kindness (Acts 4:9 and 14:3) and love. Miracles also have another specific purpose—to authenticate the message and thus the messenger (John 14:10-11; Hebrews 2:3-4).

20. What did the beggar think was his most pressing need (v. 3)?

21. What need did the apostles address? Why?

22. **Your Life Adventure:** Like the lame beggar that was healed, do your requests from God typically focus on His meeting your physical needs? Why? Read Ephesians 3:19-4:1. Our God desires to do infinitely more than you can think or imagine in transforming who you are. How could knowing that change how you pray? What are your real needs beyond money and health?

Think About It: There's so much to want—healed bodies, restored relationships, changed circumstances. But asking, seeking, and knocking aren't secret formulas for getting what we want from God; they're ways to get more of God. As I listen to God speak to me through his Word, he gives me more of himself in fuller, newer ways. Then, if healing doesn't come, if the relationship remains broken, or if the pressures increase, I have the opportunity to discover for myself he is enough. His presence is enough. His purpose is enough. If you truly want to move God's heart, put aside secret-formula prayer and instead begin to practice prayer that seeks the Giver more than the gifts. (Nancy Guthrie, "Prayers that Move the Heart of God")

Read Acts 3:11-26.

23. **Discover the Facts:**

To whom is Peter speaking this time (vv. 8-11)?

Where?

What similar message does Peter give in vv. 12-15 to what Peter preached at Pentecost?

What titles does Peter give to Jesus in vv. 13-15?

Why was the man healed (v. 16)?

What did Peter confirm in vv. 17-18?

If they repent (change their minds about Jesus), what does Peter promise (vv. 19-20)?

What is God's plan and timing (v. 21)?

What did God promise through the prophets (vv. 18, 22-24)?

What promise did God make to Abraham (v. 25)?

What did God do to fulfill (v. 18) His promises (v. 26)?

Scriptural Insight: There was no confusion in the minds of the first Christians about what to proclaim. There was no searching for new and novel messages. The plain gospel was considered entirely adequate. (Jim Cymbala, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, p. 105)

24. Refer back to Acts 1:6-7, 10-11. Read also Psalm 110:1. What is Peter's understanding (v. 21) about the timing of when Christ will return to set up His kingdom?

Scriptural Insight: Was Peter saying here that if Israel repented, God's kingdom would have come to earth? This must be answered in the affirmative for several reasons: (1) The word 'restore' in Acts 3:21 is related to the word 'restore' in Acts 1:6. Both occurrences anticipate the restoration of the kingdom to Israel (Mark 9:12). (2) The concept of restoration parallels regeneration when it is used of the kingdom (Rom. 8:20-22). (3) The purpose clauses are different in Acts 3:19 and 20. Repentance would result in forgiveness of sins, the near purpose (v. 19a). Then if Israel as a whole would repent, a second more remote goal, the coming of the kingdom (times of refreshing at the second coming of Christ) would be fulfilled. (4) The sending of the Christ, that is, Messiah (v. 20) meant the coming of the kingdom. (5) The Old Testament 'foretold these days' when they spoke of the messianic golden age, that is, the Millennium. (*Dr. Constable's Notes on Acts 2017 Edition*, pp. 77-78)

25. The time spanning the inauguration of the Church at Pentecost to the time when Jesus returns to set up His physical kingdom on planet Earth is often called the “Church Age” or the “until” time. We are living in this “until” time. God has promised times of refreshing (v. 19) and restoration (v. 21) in His Kingdom. Both have begun for believers in the Body of Christ.

- Define the word “refresh.”
- From Acts 2, in what ways has God already given the early Christians times of refreshing?

26. **Your Life Adventure:** As a believer in Jesus Christ, what has God refreshed in your life after you repented, turned to God and had your sins wiped out?

DAY THREE STUDY

Read Acts 4:1-22.

27. **Discover the Facts:** Peter and John are on trial before the same men that put Jesus to death.

Who was disturbed by Peter’s sermon (vv. 1-2)?

Why were they disturbed?

What did they do (v. 3)?

What did God do (v. 4)?

Who got together the next day?

What did they ask Peter and John (v. 7)?

Who prepared Peter to speak (v. 8)?

To answer their question, what did the Holy Spirit declare through Peter in v. 10?

Write out v. 12.

What did the leaders notice about Peter and John (v. 13)?

Since they could not deny that the man was healed, what did they do (vv. 15-17)?

When commanded not to speak, how did Peter and John reply (vv. 19-20)?

What were the results (vv. 21-22)?

Historical Insight: The Jewish authorities were members of the Sanhedrin, the high court of the Jews. In New Testament times, it was made up of three kinds of members: chief priests, elders, and teachers of the law. Its total membership numbered 71, including the high priest, who was presiding officer. Under Roman jurisdiction, the Sanhedrin was given a great deal of authority, but they could not impose capital punishment. (*NIV Study Bible*, p. 1526)

28. How did the leaders respond to the evidence before them and to the message given to them?

29. **Your Life Adventure:** In light of today's diversity of philosophies and religions, what does Acts 4:12 definitively declare? Is this what you believe? Why or why not?

Scriptural Insight: Through the angel Gabriel, God told both Mary and Joseph to name their son Jesus. The name Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua, which means "the LORD saves." Further support of Jesus being the only way to salvation is found in Acts 10:43, John 14:6, and 1 Timothy 2:5.

30. **Your Life Adventure:** No one can dispute genuine evidence of change in a person's life after being with Jesus. Can you recall a time when someone noticed that you have been with Jesus? What did you say or do that they noticed? How did they respond?

Read Acts 4:23-31.

31. **Discover the Facts:**

In response, what did Peter, John and the rest of the believers do (vv. 23-24)?

They prayed this prayer:

²⁴ "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. ²⁵ You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? ²⁶ The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one."

²⁷ Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. ²⁸ They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. ²⁹ Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. ³⁰ Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

Underline what God foretold through David. Circle the part of the prayer that states how this was fulfilled. Then, draw an arrow from the prophecy to the fulfillment.

What two specific things did they request of God in vv. 29-30?

How does God answer their prayer (v. 31)?

Focus on the Meaning: The baptism of the Holy Spirit occurs once, at salvation (Romans 6:3-4). The filling of the Spirit occurs repeatedly as needed and as we are yielded to Him (Acts 4:8, 31; 6:3-5; Ephesians 5:18). “Filling” is a metaphor (picture) of control. We can be filled/controlled by fleshly desires (like alcohol) or be filled/controlled by the Spirit. The Spirit’s presence is permanent (indwelling), but we must repeatedly choose to yield to God to experience the Spirit’s transforming power to change and grow us. In actual experience, “walking in the Spirit” or “being filled with the Spirit” means living the Christian life (facing temptations, making decisions, etc.) with a **conscious dependence** on the Holy Spirit. He is the one who enables us – producing Christ’s life in us. Here, their spirits were completely under the control of the Spirit; their words were His words.

32. **Your Life Adventure:** The early church prayed together consistently as though it were necessary and not optional. Is that how you view prayer? What drives you to pray? Are you willing to be driven to prayer by the Holy Spirit’s prompting in your life?

Think About it: Prayer cannot be taught by principles and seminars. It has to be born out of a whole environment of felt need. If I say, I *ought* to pray, “I will soon run out of motivation and quit; the flesh is too strong. I have to be *driven* to pray. The more we pray, the more we sense our need to pray. And, the more we sense a need to pray, the more we *want* to pray. When the apostles were unjustly arrested, they didn’t call for a protest or some political leverage. Instead, they headed to a prayer meeting. (Jim Cymbala, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, p. 49-50, 73)

DAY FOUR STUDY

Read Acts 4:32-37.

33. **Discover the Facts:** Describe the heart attitude of the believers in verses 32-35 using the information given.

34. Luke introduces us to Barnabas who will play a later role in the Book of Acts. What does he say about him?

35. **Your Life Adventure:** Have you given up anything voluntarily to benefit someone in the church? If so, how did you feel? Describe the experience.

Read Acts 5:1-11.

Focus on the Meaning: Here (v. 11) is the first use of the term “church” in the book of Acts, referring to a local congregation (also 8:1; 11:22; 13:1) or the universal church (20:28). The Greek word for “church” (*ekklesia*, “called out ones”) was already being used for political and other assemblies and for Israel when gathered in religious assembly. (*NIV Study Bible*, p. 1652)

As Barnabas demonstrated in the previous section, giving money to the work of the apostles was voluntary, not compulsory like paying taxes. This is important to remember as you work through this section.

36. **Discover the Facts:**

What did Ananias and Sapphira do with the proceeds from the sale of their property?

What deliberate sin did Peter point out in Ananias (vv. 3-4)?

What happened next (vv. 5-6)?

Three hours later, how did Peter likewise confront Sapphira (vv. 8-9)?

What happened to her?

How did this affect the church (v. 11)?

Scriptural Insight: “Satan filled your heart” (v. 3)—the verb translated “filled” contains the idea of control or influence. The same verb is used in the command, “Be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). Ananias was at that moment being influenced by Satan, not by the Spirit. (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 365)

37. Peter exposed the sin of Ananias and Sapphira as deceit (v. 3) and testing the Spirit of the Lord (v. 9). **God determined and enacted the discipline** needed at this time. Even in the giving of grace, God confronts sin. Why was it necessary for God to enact such a severe discipline at this time? To help, read 1 Corinthians 10:1-12 to see what God did when Israel was just being formed as a nation representing God.

Think About It: Ananias, in the effort to gain a reputation for greater generosity than he had actually earned, tried to deceive the believing community, but in trying to deceive the community he was really trying to deceive the Holy Spirit, whose life-giving power had created the community and maintained it in being. So real was the apostles' appreciation of the presence and authority of the Spirit in their midst. (F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, p. 105)

38. **Your Life Adventure:** Similar to Ananias and Sapphira, Jesus condemned the Pharisees for having an external appearance of spirituality while having hearts that were far from God. Are there areas of your life in which you are attempting to appear spiritual but have a heart that is far from God?

If so, agree with God that is sin. Repent of that sin by choosing to behave God's way in that area and depend on the Holy Spirit to help you do that. You can say, "*Lord, I know I can't do _____ on my own. I will trust you to do that in and through me.*"

GET FIRED UP FOR ADVENTURE:

39. **Hot Spot:** Where in this lesson did the Spirit grab your attention especially? What did you see Him do in your life this week?

Recommended: Listen to the podcast "[Spirit Baptism—God's Radical Work](#)" after doing this lesson to reinforce what you have learned. Use the following listener guide.

Spirit Baptism—God's Radical Work

SOMETHING'S ABOUT TO HAPPEN

- The confusion about Spirit Baptism comes from several sources: a lack of understanding of the Spirit's work in a Christian's life, the expectation of certain experiences to be associated with it, and even misinterpretation of our English translations. God's Word is clear about the truths He wants us to know so we can have confidence in what He gives to us.

WHAT WERE THEY EXPECTING?

- The Old Testament Jews used water rituals for cleansing and initiation into special groups, especially for Gentiles who converted to Judaism. We get our English word "baptize" from the Greek word *baptizo*, which came from the process for dyeing cloth. Whether the cloth was sprayed, dipped, or immersed, the significance was taking on the identity of the dye.
- When Jesus taught about Spirit Baptism, He chose the word *baptisma*, which means "immersion." In Spirit Baptism, we are dyed with Christ, immersed into Him never to come out again.

WHAT DID THEY RECEIVE?

Truth #1. Spirit Baptism is the Spirit's work of indwelling the believer.

- Every believer receives the complete Holy Spirit the moment they trust in Christ. *Romans 8:9*

Truth #2. Spirit Baptism is the Spirit's work of uniting us with Christ—identifying us with Christ's death, burial and resurrection.

- At Spirit Baptism, we are fused together with who Christ Jesus is and what He has done. His death provided us with forgiveness of sins and His resurrection gave us new life. That's the process of us being born again. Nowhere in the New Testament is any believer commanded or exhorted to be Spirit baptized. It's God's gift initiated by God to those who put their faith in Christ. *Romans 6:3,5*

Truth #3. Spirit Baptism is the Spirit's work of making all believers permanent members of the Body of Christ.

- The Bible teaches that all believers have been Spirit baptized and placed permanently into the Body of Christ. *1 Corinthians 12:13*

Truth #4. Spirit Baptism occurs once and for all at the salvation of each believer.

- In Acts, God was introducing something new, and He didn't follow a set pattern at first. So, it is not wise to selectively choose a passage from Acts and use it as a doctrinal statement on *how* to receive the Holy Spirit, especially up to the point when the

Gentiles as a group were added to the Church. But, absolutely positively, everyone who believed received Spirit Baptism. *Galatians 3:26-27; Ephesians 4:4-5*

- Spirit Baptism is a permanent condition and occurs once. Water baptism can be repeated at different times in your life. Spirit Baptism cannot be repeated because a person would have to be removed from the Body of Christ in order to be reinstated again by a second baptism. Scripture teaches that the Spirit will be with us forever. *John 14:16*

Truth #5. Spirit Baptism is a change of state and is not validated by any particular outward sign.

- By faith in Jesus Christ, a person goes from being without God to being with God forever; from being filthy with sin to being cleansed of all sin; and from being an enemy of God to becoming the Temple of God. God does this whether we feel it or not.

WHAT MIGHT TRIP YOU UP

- You may expect an experience similar to what they had at Pentecost or a few other places in Acts to validate that Spirit Baptism has happened to you. But, Spirit Baptism is not necessarily evidenced by that particular experience or any other. It is primarily a change of state from being separated from Christ to being united with Him receiving everything we need for life and godliness at that instant. *John 3:8*
- In Acts, not every new Christian is said to have had the experience of speaking in tongues. And, in less than 30 years, when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, only some are said to have the gift of speaking in tongues (1 Corinthians 12:10-11). The rest are given other gifts by the Holy Spirit. Nowhere does Paul exhort them to be Spirit Baptized to receive the tongues gift. And, in the masterful book of Romans, tongues are never mentioned.
- **The gift of the Spirit is separate from the gifts of the Spirit.** Whether or not you sensed anything, Spirit Baptism happened to you when you placed your trust in Jesus Christ.

EXPERIENCING SPIRIT POWER

- The whole New Testament confirms that the greatest evidence of the power of God in a person's life is not in the gifts given. It is in the miracle of a transformed life that comes to us through the Spirit living in us.
- You can see evidence that the Holy Spirit lives inside you, empowering you to live and serve Jesus. That's the kind of experience we can all embrace and enjoy. And, with that, you might get a sense that something's about to happen. And, life as you have known it will never be the same as you embark on the adventure God has for you.

Let Jesus satisfy your heart with His Spirit's transforming power. And say yes to a life of adventure with Him!

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Lesson 3: Pride and Prejudice

(Acts 5:12-7:60)

A.D. 32-33

The plot thickens like a novel filled with twists, turns and intrigue. The last section highlighted God answering the prayer of the believers (4:29-30) who prayed expectantly for boldness to preach and for signs and wonders to be done through them. That's exactly what the Holy Spirit gave them as they continued to teach daily that "Jesus is the Messiah" wherever people were gathered. The Spirit added new believers to this Jerusalem church daily. Can we too pray with a sense of boldness and expectancy? Yes, we can and should.

Nevertheless, familiar prejudices began to affect the church—from within and from outside. Prejudices, which flow out of the pride in human hearts, may be perceived or actual. Yet, allowing either to continue will tear through the bond of unity in a community of believers. Historical prejudices also block perspective and can stir up irrational emotions. Humility and justice are the opposites of pride and prejudice. We have a daily choice of feeding our pride and promoting our prejudices or walking humbly with the Lord and seeking His truth and justice. The Holy Spirit can guide any believer who humbly desires to recognize and remove prejudices from her own heart and behavior.

Recommended: Read Acts 5:12-7:60 to get the whole picture.

DAY ONE STUDY

Read Acts 5:12-16.

1. **Discover the Facts:** See all the things happening in this short passage. Be sure to give the verses where you found your answers.

What God did through the apostles	How the people responded

2. If you've read the gospels, what in this passage is similar to what Jesus experienced? See Mark 1:32-33 and 6:54-56.

Scriptural Insight: The reference to Peter's shadow (v. 15) parallels such items as Paul's handkerchiefs (19:12) and the edge of Jesus' cloak (Mt. 9:20)—not that any of these material objects had magical qualities, but the least article or shadow represented a direct means of contact with Jesus or His apostles. (*NIV Study Bible*, p. 165)

Read Acts 5:17-42.

Filled with pride (their jealousy over the attention given to the apostles) and fear over losing their political status and social position, the High Priest and his Sadducee associates act.

3. Discover the Facts:

Who is arrested this time (v. 18)?

How does God respond to their arrest (vv. 19-20)?

How did the apostles obey (v. 21)?

What surprise did God give to the high priest and his associates (vv. 21-23)?

What happened next (vv. 25-26)?

What did the high priest say to the apostles when brought before him (vv. 27-28)?

What is the first thing that Peter and the other apostles said in response (v. 29)?

How did the leaders respond to the apostles' words about Jesus' death & resurrection (v. 33)?

Who spoke up to caution the leaders (v. 34)?

What was his main point in v. 39?

How did the Sanhedrin respond to his speech (v. 40)?

How did the apostles respond after their release (vv. 41-42)?

Historical Insight: The Sadducees (v. 17), though small in number, were an aristocratic, politically minded Jewish group willing to compromise with secular and pagan leaders, including the Romans. They held the majority of the seats in the Sanhedrin, including the High Priesthood, yet they denied the resurrection, angels and spirits. Feeling their status with the Roman government was threatened, they opposed Jesus (John 11:47-50). (*NIV Study Bible*, p. 1579)

4. Recall the believers' prayer in Acts 4:24-30. How is God answering their prayer?

Focus on the Meaning: What weighed most of all with the apostles was their personal commitment to the risen Lord to be His witnesses, "We cannot stop telling what we have seen and heard (4:20)." (F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, pp. 96-97)

5. Compare Peter's message here to the ones he's given before (2:22-39; 3:12-26; 4:8-12). Were the council members given the complete gospel message and an opportunity to respond to it?
6. Seeing how Gamaliel was honored by all the people, compare his wisdom and motives with the rest of the Sanhedrin. What insight did Gamaliel have about the purposes of God?

7. **Your Life Adventure:**

- God answered the believers' prayer for boldness. Share a time when you prayed for courage and/or the right words to say, and God answered.
- Gamaliel reminded his associates about the purposes of God. Have you found yourself in a situation where you were fighting against God? What happened?

8. **Deeper Discoveries (optional):** Peter's statement, "We must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29)," was directed towards religious authorities not governmental authorities. See instruction regarding governmental authorities in Romans 13:1-5, 1 Peter 2:13-17, and Acts 4:19-20 and 5:20. How should we respond to the government when we have opposing views?

DAY TWO STUDY

Historical Insight: The early Church was composed of three groups:

- (1) Hebraic Jews—usually natives of Judea (Israel); spoke primarily Hebrew and Aramaic.
- (2) Hellenistic (Grecian) Jews—Greek speaking and influenced by Greek culture, mostly living among the Gentile nations.
- (3) “God-fearing” Gentiles—Gentile converts to Judaism, observers of most rabbinical law but not yet circumcised.

Prejudice existed between each of these groups, especially between the Hebrew “home boys” and the Grecian outsiders, who differed not only in language and culture, but also in regard for the Temple as their center of worship. Keep these differences between the three groups in mind as you study the rest of Acts.

Read Acts 6:1-7.

As with all groups, good things can be happening alongside some not-so-good things. But, misunderstandings that create friction can become catalysts for change.

9. **Discover the Facts:**

What is good (v. 1)?

What is not-so-good (v. 1)?

What did the Twelve recognize (v. 2)?

What is their decision (v. 3)?

How was this proposal received?

Who were chosen by the whole group?

What was the result (v. 7)?

10. The Hellenistic (Grecian) Jews perceived some “prejudice” existed. In what ways did the apostles rightly respond to this?

11. **Your Life Adventure:** Perceived and actual prejudices are barriers to true fellowship. Are you sensitive to any prejudices that might exist in your local church community? Are your leaders aware of them? Ask Jesus to help you recognize any prejudices existing in your heart and behavior. Trust the Holy Spirit to guide you to know when and how to speak to leadership about these.

12. How would the work of the chosen seven differ from that of the Apostles?

Scriptural Insight: Read Exodus 16-17:7 and 18:13-26 for an Old Testament example of God's appointed leaders dealing with a similar situation. The Greek word used to describe the responsibility of these 7 men ("wait on") is the verb *diakoneo* ("to be a servant, to wait upon") from which the English noun "deacon" comes. Later Paul communicated more qualifications for deacons to the church at Ephesus (1 Timothy 3:8-13).

13. What did the Twelve do to officially designate the new group of servants?

Scriptural Insight: In previous times, the laying on of hands was used in many ways, including commissioning a person for a new responsibility. In New Testament times, laying on of hands was observed in healing (Acts 28:8), blessing (Mk 10:16), ordaining or commissioning (Acts 6:6; 13:3; 1 Timothy 5:22), and imparting of spiritual gifts (Acts 8:17; 19:6; 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6). (*NIV Study Bible*, p. 1654)

14. Why might so many priests have responded (v. 7)?

Historical Insight: One writer estimated that about 2,000 priests lived in Jerusalem at this time. Many of the ordinary priests were men holy and humble of heart who would be readily convinced of the truth of the gospel. (*Dr. Constable's Notes on Acts 2017 Edition*, p. 111)

15. **Your Life Adventure:** Maintaining focus on what is important to do and learning to delegate responsibility are not easy. If you serve in a leadership capacity (home, church, work, community), how are you at maintaining focus on doing what's the important thing to do each day? How well do you delegate responsibility to others that is not necessary for you to do personally?

Focus on the Meaning: We can see several priorities of the early church. First would be the concern for both spiritual and physical needs. Its leaders gave priority to spiritual needs (prayer and the ministry of the Word), but they also gave attention to correcting injustice and helping the poor. Second, they were willing to adapt its organizational structure and administrative procedures: to minister effectively and to meet needs. Third ... rather than feeling that they had to maintain control over every aspect of church life, the apostles delegated authority to a group within the church (that had the greatest vested interest) and let them solve the distribution problem. (*Dr. Constable's Notes on Acts 2017 Edition*, p. 112)

DAY THREE STUDY

Read Acts 6:8-15.

16. **Discover the Facts:** Both pride and prejudice are at play in what happens to Stephen ... Stephen was whom (v. 8)?

Opposition arose from where (v.9)?

Those arguing could not stand up against what?

The opposition secretly persuaded men to say what (v. 11)?

This stirred up the elders and lawyers who did what?

They produced false witnesses who said what (vv. 13-14)?

When the Sanhedrin looked at Stephen, what did they see?

Historical Insight: The Jews living outside of Israel turned their religious focus from the Temple, having learned to live in their home countries without the Temple's presence and relying on the synagogue meetings and the three annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem to fulfill their religious needs. They concentrated on the law rather than nationhood, on personal piety rather than sacramental rectitude, and on prayer as an acceptable replacement for the sacrifices denied to them. (*NIV Study Bible*, p. 1433)

17. Notice the controversy Stephen faced in vv. 12-14. How is this similar to what Jesus experienced in His trial? See Mark 14:57-58.
18. During the accusations, the members of the Sanhedrin fixed their eyes upon Stephen (v. 15) and saw that his face like the face of an angel. Read Exodus 34:29-35. What message was God delivering to the Sanhedrin through this visible sign?

Scriptural Insight: Moses' face similarly *shone* when he descended from Mt. Sinai after seeing God (cf. 7:55-56; Exod. 34:29, 35). Perhaps Stephen's hearers recalled Moses' shining face. If so, they should have concluded that Stephen was not *against* Moses, but was *like* Moses. Stephen proceeded to function as "an angel" (a messenger from God), as well as looking like one, by bringing new revelation to his hearers, as Moses had. As on the day of Pentecost, God was giving both audio and visual evidence that what the speaker was saying came from Him. (*Dr. Constable's Notes on Acts 2017 Edition*, p. 115)

19. Stephen is described as a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, full of God's grace and power, doing great wonders that would be definitely drawing people to God. He was completely in God's will, doing what God chose him to do. How does it make you feel that he was targeted like this (and eventually killed) as such a dedicated servant of Jesus?
20. **Your Life Adventure:** What grabbed your attention in this passage? Reflect and respond to what the Holy Spirit pointed out for you to notice.

DAY FOUR STUDY

Read Acts 7:1-53.

If you are unfamiliar with Old Testament history, Stephen reviewed the history of Israel in his defense giving us a bird's eye view of the Old Testament that contains God's progressive revelation and dealings with the Jewish people. This is the third time that God delivers His message of truth to those who killed His Son.

21. What do you learn from vv. 2-47 about Israel's history that you had not previously known?

22. In the last part of his appeal, Stephen addresses the accusation made against him by discussing the place of the Temple in God's plans. The Jews idolized the Temple as the very means of God's saving presence among His people. What does Stephen say in 7:48-50 that explodes their view about where God lives?

Think About It: If God changed so many things in Israel's history, who is to say that the Law and the Temple were permanent? The Jewish leaders missed Jesus because they were unable to see God working. See 1 Corinthians 2:6-10.

23. In verse 51, Stephen switches from "our fathers" (identifying with them as Jews) to "your fathers" (separating himself from those who had not accepted Jesus as Messiah). Now, what is Stephen's charge against his accusers? To understand what this means, see also Romans 2:28-29.

Scriptural Insight: What does "uncircumcised heart & ears" mean? Though physically circumcised, they were acting like the uncircumcised pagan nations around them in rejecting the very God who offers them life. Their hearts were not truly consecrated to the Lord. (*NIV Study Bible*, p. 1657)

24. What does he declare in vv. 52-53 to those who are supposed to be on God's side?

Read Acts 7:54-8:1.

25. **Discover the Facts:** Finish out these statements as though you are telling the story.

When they heard this accusation, the Jewish leaders ...

Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit ...

He says that he sees ...

At this, the crowd ...

The witnesses laid their clothes ...

While being stoned, Stephen ...

Then, he fell on his knees and cried out ...

Saul ...

From the Greek: "Witness" translates the Greek word *marturia* ("bearing witness or testimony") from which comes our English word "martyr"—one who bears "witness" by his death. A witness is also a martyr in the sense that she swears to tell the truth regardless of the consequences. In that sense, Stephen was the true witness as well as the first Christian martyr.

26. What special gift did the Holy Spirit give Stephen at the moment he needed it?

27. What clue is given in 7:60 about a believer's death? See also 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14.

Think About It: At the beginning of this lesson, God miraculously delivered all of the Apostles from this same Sanhedrin that executed Stephen. Yet, He chose not to deliver Stephen. God is sovereign. We don't need to understand it to trust His goodness to Stephen.

28. What message is Luke communicating to us about Saul in 7:58?

29. Throughout this passage, we see Stephen possessing a supernatural calmness even in this life-threatening situation, all the while modeling spiritual maturity and wisdom. Who enables him to do this? See v. 55 and Hebrews 12:1-2.

Think About It: Stephen was stoned because he wouldn't stop preaching the truth of Jesus. In his life as well as in his death, Stephen displayed qualities that should characterize every believer now and did characterize other witnesses through the years. Stephen: (1) Was faithful in the ordinary tasks of life, (2) Spoke up for God, (3) Knew the certainty of persecution, (4) Faced the reality of the world to come, (5) Knew the presence of the living Lord, and (6) Knew the sufficiency of God's grace. God gave Stephen power to live and witness for Him. He also gave Stephen grace to suffer and die for Him.

30. **Your Life Adventure:** Adventure usually involves stressful situations. The Holy Spirit who upheld Stephen is the same source of power available to you in such difficult circumstances. In what one aspect of your life do you desire to calmly reflect more maturity and wisdom? Spend some time this week asking God specifically to work on this in you, finding scriptural promises that you can claim. Trust Him to do what He has promised. Ask someone else to join you in prayer about this.

31. **Deeper Discoveries (optional):** Crown is derived from the name Stephen (Greek, *Stephanos*). Research the background of the word "crown." How is the word "crown" used in the New Testament? Make some conclusions about its meaning to Christians.

GET FIRED UP FOR ADVENTURE:

32. **Hot Spot:** Where in this lesson did the Spirit grab your attention especially? What did you see Him do in your life this week?

Recommended: Listen to the podcast "[Spirit Filling—The Fruit of Living Dependently on the Lord](#)" to reinforce what you have learned. Use the following listener guide.

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Spirit Filling—The Fruit of Living Dependently on the Lord

THE FILLING OF THE SPIRIT

- Spirit Baptism occurs once, at salvation, as the Holy Spirit connects us with Christ so that He is **with us** and **in us** forever. Every Christian is permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit and added to the Body of Christ. You have all of Him, not part of Him.
- After we are saved, the Holy Spirit living within us empowers us to live the kind of life our God desires for us to live. When we walk in submission to and dependence on the Spirit by faith daily, that leads to the filling of the Spirit.

The filling of the Spirit is **not** getting more of the Spirit inside of us. We have all of Him with His indwelling. It is also not something magical or mystical.

The filling of the Spirit **is** you choosing to be more influenced by God than by yourself or anything else.

- Paul's comparison of being filled with the Spirit to drunkenness is a metaphor (picture) of control. Both forces of these influencers are internal. What things take control of you from the inside? *Ephesians 5:18*

Being filled with wine refers to excessive intake of alcohol which fills your bloodstream and influences every area of your life as long as you consume it. Drunkenness results in ungodly behavior. That's the fruit.

In the same way, when you trust and obey Jesus as His Word directs for you to do, the Holy Spirit will have more influence over every area of your life. Any Christian who allows the Spirit to influence and direct her thinking and behavior will experience His control as long as she yields her will to the Spirit. The results will be godly behavior. That's the fruit.

- Being filled with the Spirit is an ongoing choice and responsibility. We are to continually desire more of the Spirit's control in our lives and choose to give Him more control in our lives. He responds by doing it!
- Being filled with the Spirit is a privilege for every child of God. We don't earn it. God still chooses to do this to us based upon our responses to Him. It is a fruit of our dependence upon Him and yielding to His control in our lives.

THE DAILY CHOICE OF YIELDING

- Just like choosing to trust in Christ in the first place is a choice, staying dependent on Him after salvation is also a daily choice. *Romans 12:1-2*
- To yield to God means to give Him the right-of-way in your life. You yield to God at salvation, then continually yield to His Spirit's influence over your thoughts, attitudes, words, and deeds. Coming from your heart, you present your body as an act of worship. That's **yielding your body to God** for His control and purpose.

- **Yield your mind to God** by yielding to the Word of God. You yield your mind to God as you desire to know His truth through Bible reading and study of its teachings and truths.
- **Yield your will to the sovereignty of God and His will.** This may include submitting to one particular truth or command in the Word that you don't like. It may also include God bringing into your life situations or experiences that are not pleasant or desirable.
- Your body, your mind, your emotions, and your will belong to Christ. Yielding those to God is living dependently on Him. The fruit of living dependently is Spirit filling and all the Christ-like behavior the Holy Spirit will produce in your life.

THE FRUIT OF YIELDING

- The Christian life is to be a life of dependence on the living Christ. Human parents raise their children to be less dependent on them and more independent. But, God raises His children to be *less independent* and **more dependent on Him**. That is called **dependent living**.
- When you choose daily to yield to the Spirit's influence over your own self-dependence, the Holy Spirit fills you with Himself. "Walking by the Spirit" or "being filled with the Spirit" means having a **conscious dependence** on the Holy Spirit.
- But, our willingness to let the Spirit control and transform us requires us to recognize that we are weak to do anything of spiritual significance on our own. Your weakness makes room for His power. There will be fruit.

DEVELOPING A SENSITIVITY TO THE SPIRIT AT WORK

- Some examples of the Spirit's work in you that you might not have recognized:
 - ✓ Has someone explained something to you about the Bible, and you understood what he or she was saying? That's the Spirit enabling you to understand.
 - ✓ Have you ever felt really loved by God? That's the Spirit inside of you. It doesn't come naturally.
 - ✓ Do you have a desire to please God with your life? That's the Spirit inside of you. That doesn't come naturally.
 - ✓ Have you ever started loving someone even more after you started praying for him or her? That's definitely the Spirit.
 - ✓ Do you like to sing praises to God? Do you feel thankful to God for His goodness to you? That's the Spirit filling your heart with praise and thanksgiving.
 - ✓ Have you not known what to ask God to do about a problem, but God took care of it anyway? That's the Spirit working to take care of your need before you even ask.

Let Jesus satisfy your heart with His Spirit's transforming power. And say yes to a life of adventure with Him!

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Lesson 4: Radical Transforming Power

(Acts 8:1-9:43)

A.D. 33-36

Stephen's execution created an even more hostile environment in Jerusalem for the church. Nurtured in the protection of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem for a time, the church has now matured enough to burst forth to other lands, still in the protection and guidance of the Spirit. Believers are scattered. Rather than being intimidated and hushed up, they share the gospel message wherever they go—back to familiar homelands or to places unknown—faithful believers responding to the Holy Spirit's guiding. When the Holy Spirit says, "Time to go!" we should respond by being both available and flexible.

You may have heard the phrase, "Bloom where you are planted." For a believer, a more appropriate version would be, "Bloom where you are transplanted." Women like to put down roots wherever they are and prefer not to move if given a choice. And, God may choose to leave you there. Or, He may choose to "transplant" you, possibly more than once. Faithful believers should consider themselves available to the Holy Spirit's leading in their lives to go wherever, whenever, and be flexible enough to wait on His leading once there. When the Holy Spirit says, "Time to go!" the response should be a willingness to go on the adventure with Him, having no idea where you are heading and who will be there. Scary? You bet. But, we can trust our God to strengthen us for the journey.

Recommended: Read Acts 8:1-9:43 to get the whole picture.

DAY ONE STUDY

Read Acts 7:58-8:3.

These verses have the first mention of Saul. You probably know him better by his Roman name, Paul.

1. **Discover the Facts:**

What broke out against the church?

Who stayed in Jerusalem?

Where did the other disciples go?

How did Saul attempt to destroy the church?

Scriptural Insight: Stephen's execution ignited the first popular ("great") persecution of Christian Jews. Luke showed that the early Jerusalem Christians first received a warning (4:21), then flogging (5:40), then martyrdom (7:58-60), then widespread persecution (8:1). (*Dr. Constable's Notes on Acts 2017 Edition*, p. 136)

You may wonder why the Apostles stayed in Jerusalem in spite of the danger (Acts 8:1). Historians speculate the reason might be to maintain a central home for the fledgling church and to support Jerusalem Christians. Another reason could be that the Apostles were all Hebraic Jews and not the disdained Grecian Jews who devalued the emphasis on the Temple as the center of Jewish worship and sacrifices. (Review the "Historical Insight" in Lesson 3, Day Two for the discussion of the prejudices there. Stephen was a Grecian Jew.) Historian F. F. Bruce thought the apostles felt their duty remained in Jerusalem in spite of persecution. There is no indication that Saul was hunting down people like Peter and John, but rather those who were associated with Stephen—Philip, for example.

Now Luke records the way God used another deacon, Philip, as an example of what He was doing all over Judea and Samaria through His "scattered" servants. The word "scattered" (Acts 8:1, 4) in Greek is used to refer to sowing seeds.

Think About It: Someone once said this section describes the "Christian's Second Law of Thermodynamics"—the greater the heat, the greater the expansion. How does that phrase fit what is happening?

Read Acts 8:4-8.

2. Discover the Facts:

Who was Philip (see Acts 6:5)?

Where did he go?

What was his message?

How did God authenticate it?

What was the result?

3. How does this fit with Jesus' instructions in Acts 1:8?

Historical Insight: The Samaritans were considered to be half-breeds, the product of mixed marriages between Jews and the foreign people imported by Assyria (a country that spanned modern-day Syria and northern Iraq) when it conquered the northern Kingdom in 722 BC. The Samaritans had a polluted worship of God, insisting God should be worshiped on their Mount Gerizim. The Samaritan Bible contained only the books of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy) so they knew very little of God apart from that. The Hebraic Jews typically despised the Samaritans. Jesus spent time with the Samaritans in his early ministry (John 4:39-42), particularly in the area of Sychar, where many Samaritans believed in Jesus. Since Philip was a Grecian Jew, he was likely more broadminded than the Hebrew-speaking Jews in Israel. The Samaritans also had more of a Hellenistic (Grecian) mindset.

Read Acts 8:9-25.

4. ***Discover the Facts:***

Who was Simon?

What did he think of himself?

What did the people think of him?

How did the people respond to the gospel (v. 12)?

What was Simon's response to the gospel (v. 13)?

When news of the faith of the Samaritans reached Jerusalem (v. 14), what happened?

5. What had God waited to do until His designated leaders, the Apostles, came to be witnesses (vv. 15-17)?

6. Why was it important for the Apostles to officially recognize these once-despised "half-breed" Samaritans as equal participants in the gospel of Christ?

7. What was Simon's response to the giving of the Holy Spirit?

8. How did Peter confront him?

Scriptural Insight: Scholars differ as to whether Simon was actually a believer. Although he professed faith, it may have only been head knowledge much like the profession of the demons in Luke 4:34. This view is substantiated by Romans 10:9 which requires that a Christian "believe in your heart" and Acts 8:21 which reveals that Simon's heart was not right before God. (Sue Edwards, *Acts of the Holy Spirit*, p. 21)

The adverb "perhaps" does not mean that God is reluctant to forgive sin. The question was whether Simon would repent of his heart's intention. (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 374)

9. Since the "door" to the gospel was now open to the Samaritans,

- What else did Peter and John do while in Samaria (v. 25)?
- Considering their historical prejudices against them, why the change?

Focus on the Meaning: The Samaritans responded to the gospel with joy (v. 8). Joy is evident throughout Acts, seen in 13 places (2:46-47; 5:41; 8:8, 39; 11:23; 12:14; 13:48, 52; 14:17; 15:3, 31; 16:34; 21:17). Joy is a deep, inner gladness—an attribute of God given to us by the Holy Spirit (John 15:11; Galatians 5:22).

10. **Your Life Adventure:** Consider someone you know whose life is characterized by the joy of the Lord. What evidence leads you to recognize joy in her/his life? Is the joy of the Lord evident in your life? It can be. Ask Jesus today to give you His joy. Pray for those close to you to experience His joy as well.

DAY TWO STUDY**Read Acts 8:26-40.**

11. **Discover the Facts:** In the midst of a very successful ministry, God moved Philip elsewhere. You might say that Philip had a divine appointment with a particular person. Finish the following sentences from vv. 27-38 as though you were retelling the story. [Note: A eunuch is a man who has been castrated, especially one employed to guard the female living quarters in a royal court.]

An angel of the Lord ...

Philip responded by ...

On his way, Philip met ...

The Ethiopian was in Israel because ...

The Spirit told Philip to ...

Philip heard the man reading Isaiah and asked him ...

The man responded ...

After reading the verses in Isaiah, the man then asked Philip ...

Philip began with ...

When they came to some water ...

Then Philip ...

Think About It: Philip was both available and flexible. Philip used what the Ethiopian already knew (Isaiah 53) and expanded on that. He knew his message well enough to be able to start anywhere and lead to Jesus. You can also do that through the power of the Holy Spirit and His illumination of the scriptures in your mind as you study. You don't need to be a Bible Scholar. Ask questions about what they want to learn, then share what you know.

12. Once again, the Spirit directed Philip to a new place (vv.39-40). What did he do there that shows consistency in his life?

Historical Insight: Philip reached Caesarea. There he seems to have settled down—at least, it is there that we find him when he makes his next appearance in the narrative, twenty years later (21:8). By that time, he had become a family man, with four daughters, each one a prophetess [speaking God's Word to others]—worthy children of such a father. (F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, p. 179)

13. In Acts 1:8, what does Jesus tell the Apostles they will do when they receive the Holy Spirit? Did the persecution mentioned in chapter 8 hinder God's plan? List at least three observations in this chapter to support your answer.

14. **Your Life Adventure:** Faithful believers are available to the Holy Spirit's leading in their lives. Philip had no idea where he was heading and who would be there. But, he followed the guidance given to him.

- Has the Lord moved you to a new place (or places)? How did you respond to the move(s)? What lesson can you learn from Philip's availability to be moved?
- When was the last time you responded to the Holy Spirit prompting you to be in a relationship with someone so you could share the gospel when opportunity arose? Was it hard to wait? Describe the experience.

15. **Your Life Adventure:** God used persecution in the first church to fulfill His plan. Where in modern history has the gospel spread in spite of resistance by human authorities? How does this affect your view of persecution and resistance? Are you currently praying for someone facing persecution in specific areas of the world to be empowered by the Spirit to boldly share the gospel and live for Christ? Visit www.persecutedchurch.org for specific prayer needs and consider making this a regular part of your prayer life.

DAY THREE STUDY

Martin Luther, the renowned leader of the Protestant Reformation, struggled for years under the guilt of his sin, desperately wanting a relationship with God but never finding it through empty religion. Then ... one night, alone at his bedside, he read from the book of Romans these penetrating words from the pen of Paul: 'the just shall live by faith ...' (Rom. 1:17). And in that moment, a light suddenly shone brightly in the darkness of his heart. The living Savior broke into the chamber of despair and turned on the shining light of His grace. (Chuck Swindoll, *Paul: A Man of Grace and Grit Study Guide*, p. 16)

Saul or Paul? It was common for Roman citizens to have three-part names. "Saul" was his Hebrew name, given at birth; "Paul" was his Roman name. We don't know the third name. Saul continued to use his Hebrew name for many years after his salvation. He began to use his Roman name Paul more extensively in his travels and ministry to Gentiles throughout the Roman Empire. Contrary to popular teaching, there is no biblical evidence that Jesus changed Saul's name to Paul after he got saved. From this point onward, we are going to refer to Saul by his more familiar name, Paul. So, whenever you read the name Saul in your Bible, think "Paul."

16. Read the following verses to understand Paul's background and his activities to stop the spread of Christianity. Put what you learn in the chart below.

	Paul's background	What he did to stop Christianity
<i>Acts 22:3-5</i>		
<i>Acts 26:4-5, 9-11</i>		
<i>Philippians 3:4-6</i>		

Historical Insight: The Pharisees were a religious society of ~6,000 men who strictly obeyed the Jewish laws as interpreted by the teachers of the law (also called scribes). This law consisted of the written Mosaic Law (found in the first five books of the Old Testament) plus the tradition of the elders, containing hundreds of rules and prohibitions that were equally important to God's Law. They considered themselves to be Israel's spiritual leaders. Though originally standing against evil in Jewish society, and any form of idolatry especially, by Jesus' day many Pharisees had become narrow-minded and petty, more concerned with rules than with relationships, even with God.

17. Based on the above information and anything else you've learned about Pharisees, give reasons why you think the Pharisee Paul hated the Christians so much.

Read Acts 9:1-9.

Some think this incident occurred 2-3 years after Jesus' resurrection and ascension. Paul was around 30 since he is called a "young man" in 7:58.

Historical Insight: Paul's targeting of Damascus (~150 miles from Jerusalem) shows Christianity had spread rapidly. At that time, Damascus may have been under the Nabatean king, Aretas IV. In order to gain favor with the anti-Roman Jews, Aretas, who hated the Romans, would have conceded this favor to the high priest. This same king tries to capture the transformed Paul just a short time later (Acts 9:23-25; 2 Corinthians 11:32-33). (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 375)

18. **Discover the Facts:**

Why was Paul going to Damascus?

What did he see on the way?

Paul heard whose voice (v. 5)?

What did Jesus say to Paul (vv. 4-5)?

What instructions were given to Paul (v. 6)?

What did his companions witness?

What happened next (vv. 8-9)?

19. What did Jesus mean when He said to Paul, "Why do you persecute me?" instead of "Why do you persecute the believers?" See also Matthew 25:34-40.

20. Now, read these other accounts of Paul telling his own story. What additional facts do you glean from these verses?

- Acts 22:6-11—

- Acts 26:12-16—

Focus on the Meaning: In Acts 26:14, Jesus used a Greek proverbial phrase “kick against the goads” that referred to the goads used to prod oxen or other beasts of burden. To encourage his oxen to pull harder, a farmer would use a pointed rod to prod the hind parts of the beasts. In protest, the animals would often kick against that action. The result would be a painful reminder of who was in charge. John 6:44 and 12:32 remind us that God draws people to Himself in various ways.

21. Looking back over chapters 6-8, in what ways was Jesus drawing Paul to Himself (prodding him) before this day? How did Paul “kick against these goads?”

Think About It: Saul could not escape God’s gracious pursuit. Ultimately, on a dusty thoroughfare north of Jerusalem, the Lord caught him, blinded him, and conquered his heart ... The once self-avowed avenger of Judaism changed his course and humbly submitted to the Captain of his soul. (Chuck Swindoll, *Paul, a Man of Grace and Grit Study Guide*, pp. 15-16)

Read Acts 9:10-19.

22. **Discover the Facts:**

Who is Ananias? See also Acts 22:12.

What instruction does Jesus give to him in v. 11?

What is Paul doing while waiting (v. 11)?

What does Paul see in a vision?

What is Ananias' initial response (vv. 13-14)?

What did Jesus say to reassure him (vv. 15-16)?

Where did Ananias go?

What did he say to Paul?

What resulted?

23. What may have been God's purpose for Paul's blindness for three days?

24. What benefit was gained by Ananias' presence to restore Paul's sight?

25. ***Your Life Adventure:***

- The Lord allowed Paul to wait for three days before giving him any further information. Sometimes the Lord interrupts our lives to force us to wait. Are you waiting on the Lord for something now? How are you submitting your heart to Jesus in prayer concerning that issue?
- Consider how Ananias might have felt on his way to Judas's house. Has Jesus ever asked you to do something really hard or scary that just didn't fit with the plans you had for your life? How did He reassure you that it would be okay to follow Him?

26. Read the following verses about Paul's mission and glean information given in each.

- Acts 9:15-16—
- Acts 22:14-15—
- Acts 26:16-18—

Historical Insight: How did Paul's life in Tarsus prepare him for the task to which Jesus called him? Paul was born in Tarsus, a large commercial center and university town. Located on major highways, it was both prosperous and prestigious. Tarsus was known for its production of goat hair fabric that had terrific water repellent properties perfect for making tents. Tarsus was very Greek in culture and steeped in idolatry. Paul was also born a Roman citizen (Acts 22:28), which gave him privileges as he traveled throughout the Empire. Paul would have been expected to learn his father's trade and behave as a responsible citizen of Rome.

In Philippians 3:5, Paul calls himself a "Hebrew of Hebrews," meaning that although living in a Greek culture, he was raised as a Hebraic Jew—attending Hebrew school at the Hebrew synagogue. What irony! The Hebrew of Hebrews would spend the rest of his life living among Gentiles and loving them. Acts 23:16 reveals that Paul had at least one sister—a definite advantage!

After reading the "Historical Insight" above, you can see that Paul received many advantages that prepared him for the task to which Jesus called Him. His understanding of the Greek culture, being a Hebrew scholar, and his Roman citizenship being some of the most obvious. Nothing in Paul's life would be wasted unless he refused to let God use it.

27. **Your Life Adventure:** What advantages have you received from God by your birth, rearing, education, and life experiences? Nothing in your life will be wasted unless you refuse to let God use it. Thank Him for what you received from Him that sets you apart and offer that to Him for His service.

28. In a letter to Timothy, Paul gives his perspective on his life before knowing Jesus. Read 1 Timothy 1:12-16. What did Paul consider himself and why?

Think About It: Charles Wesley captured this in his hymn *And Can It Be*: “Long my imprisoned spirit lay fast bound in sin and nature’s night ... I woke—the dungeon flamed with light! My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.” Paul was set free from his ignorance and his sinful, murderous ways. His life is new, never to be the same! Scholar and historian F. F. Bruce calls Paul “the apostle of the heart set free.” What an appropriate description!

29. **Your Life Adventure:** Paul considered himself a trophy of God’s absolutely amazing grace to an undeserving sinner. Do you consider yourself a display of Jesus’ unlimited patience and abundantly poured out grace? Do you recognize the transformation in your life and in other believers around you? Write 1 Timothy 1:13, personalizing it with your name and background.

Even though I _____ (your name) was a ...

Now, read 1 Timothy 1:17 and repeat those words back to Jesus in praise.

30. **Deeper Discoveries (optional):** Read the following scriptures and summarize what happens when a person believes Jesus Christ is who He claimed to be. Romans 5:1, 10; 6:18; 8:1, 17; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:11; 12:13; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 1:5, 13; and Colossians 1:13, 22; 2:13.

DAY FOUR STUDY

At the beginning of this study, we defined *radical* as “having a profound or far-reaching effect.” What God did to Paul when He shined His light of grace on him was certainly radical. Not only was Paul’s life changed but also that of the entire world. To many former skeptics, the radical transformation of the murderous, anti-Christian Paul of Tarsus to Jesus’ joyful bondservant is one of the most concrete evidences of the reality of Jesus Christ and His gospel of grace.

The moment Paul accepted that Jesus was who He said He was, placing his faith in Him, a new Paul was born. The Holy Spirit transformed Paul, the enemy of God, to Paul, the forgiven child of God, one of God’s saints, totally loved and accepted by Him. That was Paul’s new identity. That is also the new identity each of us receives the moment we put our faith in Jesus Christ. Off we go on our new adventure with Christ. But, the transformation doesn’t stop there. The Holy Spirit takes all of those character traits and advantages God has already given us and changes them or redirects them to serve a new purpose—becoming more like Jesus Christ as we follow Him. No miracle is greater than a life radically transformed through Jesus Christ! The Holy Spirit is certainly a radical blessing.

Read Acts 9:20-31.

31. What has immediately changed in Paul (vv. 20-22), demonstrating the radical transforming power of the Holy Spirit?

32. Many scholars believe there is a three-year gap between Acts 9:22 and 9:23. Read Galatians 1:11-18. What did Paul do during those three years?

33. Read Acts 9:23-25 and 2 Corinthians 11:32-33. What happened at the end of that time?

Think About It: A *radical* faith is choosing to step out to fulfill God's clearly defined will at great personal risk and sacrifice. If there is not risk, there is no living by faith. (Chip Ingram)

34. **Discover the Facts:** Paul's reception in Jerusalem differs markedly from his previous experiences there.

He tried to join the disciples, but what happened?

How did Barnabas help?

Paul stayed and did what?

How did the Grecian Jews respond to Paul's teaching?

When the disciples heard this, what did they do?

What is said about the church in Israel?

What did the Holy Spirit do?

35. Read Acts 22:17-21. Besides Barnabas, who else encouraged Paul during this time? What instructions did He give to Paul?

Scriptural Insight: There are other recorded New Testament instances of the resurrected Jesus appearing to Paul (Acts 9:5; 18:9-10; 22:17-18; 23:11, and possibly 2 Corinthians 12:1-10).

36. **Your Life Adventure:** The Holy Spirit uses God's Word and God's people to encourage believers. Whom has God used to defend or encourage you? What difference has that gift made? Have you thanked him/her?

Scriptural Insight: Jesus chose Paul to be an apostle for Him. The word "Apostle" means someone sent as an authoritative delegate. Twelve men plus Paul were official apostles who had seen the risen Christ and received personal appointment from Him (Acts 1:21-22; 1 Cor. 15:8-9; Gal. 1:1; 2:6-9). (*Dr. Constable's Notes on Ephesians*, p. 49)

Read Acts 9:32-43.

Peter is continuing his tour of Samaritan and Judean towns (Acts 8:25 and 9:32). Lydda is a small town twelve miles from Joppa, a seaport on the Mediterranean.

37. **Discover the Facts:**

Who is Aeneas?

What did Peter say to him?

What were the results?

Who is Tabitha?

What happened to her?

How did Peter respond to her friends' summons (v. 39)?

What did the widows do when Peter came?

What did Peter do and say (v. 40)?

How did Tabitha respond?

Then, what did Peter do?

What were the results?

38. Peter stayed with a tanner (v. 43) whose profession involved treating the skins of dead animals, something unclean according to Jewish law (Leviticus 11:24). What does Peter's staying with Simon demonstrate about the Holy Spirit's radical transformation of Peter? How might this prepare him for accepting fellowship with Gentile Christians in the future?

39. **Your Life Adventure:** We are told in 2 Corinthians 5:17 that the moment we trust in Jesus Christ as who He claimed to be, Jesus begins a *radical* transformation in us. The Holy Spirit comes to live in us permanently to enable that transformation. What radical changes has the Holy Spirit made in your life? Write a prayer of thanksgiving to Jesus for the work He has done in your life.

GET FIRED UP FOR ADVENTURE:

40. **Hot Spot:** Where in this lesson did the Spirit grab your attention especially? What did you see Him do in your life this week?

Recommended: Listen to the podcast "[The Adventure of a Life Transformed, Part 1](#)" after doing this lesson to reinforce what you have learned. Use the following listener guide.

The Adventure of a Life Transformed, Part 1

You and I are not transformers. We are ones who are transformable in the hands of the living Christ and His transforming power. And, while the toy won't consciously resist the human working its parts because it has no will of its own, we can resist our transformer. But, we can cooperate with our transformer by faith, like everything else in our Christian life. Yielding to the God who loves us dearly, knowing it's for our own good. When we do that, our lives declare and demonstrate the undeniable reality of the living Christ and His transforming power.

PAUL'S EARLY CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

- Paul was born in Tarsus, a big city on major highways and a university town. He learned tent-making to support himself. His Jewish birth name was Saul; his Roman citizenship birth name was Paul. He also had at least one sister.
- Paul was raised as a Pharisee meaning he had a Pharisee father who raised him to be a Pharisee also. Paul learned to be a disciplined rule follower—a good trait.
- Paul was raised as a Hebraic Jew. Even though living outside Israel, he went to Hebrew schools at Hebrew synagogues. Paul lived a segregated life. He knew of the Greek ways but did not participate in them. He developed **pride** and prejudice against the Grecian Jews and all Gentiles, being taught to think lowly of them. Not good traits.
- Paul was zealous for God, a diligent student, and thoroughly trained to teach as a rabbi or perhaps law professor. Good traits.
- As a young adult, Paul followed the Law faultlessly, advancing in Judaism beyond his peers. So, he was ambitious, had confidence in the flesh, and was self-seeking.

PAUL TOOK CHARGE OF DESTROYING THE CHURCH.

- Paul was deliberate; destructive; and bold as he tried to destroy the church. He disrespected families, lacked compassion, and promoted murder. He was an independent thinker, not easily persuaded, and manipulative. He was proactive, respected authority, and a courageous traveler. Paul was also sold out to his cause, determined to stamp out “wrong,” and obsessed to get them all.
- Paul's good traits were corrupted by his association with misguided religious leaders who formed his world. All of his good character traits became useful to his life of serving God, including the misdirected ones. All of his bad traits needed to be changed by God.

YIELD TO BE TRANSFORMED

- God's plan is to transform us to become like Jesus in our character. And, He uses what He's already put in us to complete that transformation.

- Immediately after salvation, he taught the gospel message with boldness. He got away from the old influences and spent time with Jesus.
- After 3 years, Paul spent 2 weeks in Jerusalem getting to know the Christian leaders there because he respected authority. Paul was in tune with God's will for him, not knowing how God would carry it out.
- Jesus' transforming power enhances the positive traits and replaces the negative ones with His own character.
 - ✓ God showed Paul the value of weakness. Confidence in the flesh transformed.
 - ✓ He learned humility in light of Jesus' strength in him. That's pride transformed.
 - ✓ As Jesus' disciple, his self-promoting energy was transformed toward promoting Jesus Christ and His agenda. A good trait redirected.
 - ✓ As Jesus' disciple, he labored as an encourager to help Christians mature in their faith and stand firm against persecution. From being destructive of the church, he became constructive, founding many churches. Transformed.
 - ✓ Over the years, God replaced Paul's heart that lacked compassion with one that loved people deeply including Gentiles whom he accepted as family. His former prejudice totally transformed!
 - ✓ No longer was Paul disrespectful of women, but he penned the beautiful words in Ephesians 5, Colossians 3 and Romans 16 that have built up respect for women wherever the gospel has gone.
 - ✓ God took Paul's obsession to destroy all the Christians, and redirected it to a restlessness to win as many as possible to Christ. He remained sold out to his cause and a very courageous traveler.
 - ✓ Instead of being a willing participant in murder, at least twice Paul saved the lives of prisoners. His life was being transformed. It was for his own good, and it definitely pleased God. He was becoming like Christ.

YOUR TRANSFORMED LIFE

- What kind of good and not-so-good traits were developed in you by the time you reached your 20s? Now, consider what God has done in your life since you trusted in Christ. Which ones of those traits have been used by God as you serve Him? Which ones have been redirected or needed to be changed by God?
- What do you need to give to the living Christ **today** to be transformed? Submit to the Spirit's work in that area of your life and trust Him to do that. It's okay to say, "Lord Jesus, I can't change myself. I know that. But, I desire to be changed by you. I will trust you to do that in my life. Show me how to yield to you." Then, watch what He does!

Let Jesus satisfy your heart with His Spirit's transforming power. And say yes to a life of adventure with Him!

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Lesson 5: The God of the Unexpected

(Acts 10:1-12:25)

A.D. 37-44

Do you like surprises? Especially those good ones that are totally unexpected? Obsessed with his anti-Christian crusade, Saul never expected Jesus' appearance to him on the Damascus road. Ananias was surprised by the commission to lay hands on a sightless Saul, welcoming him into the community of believers. The radical change in Saul of Tarsus was certainly unexpected by those who had heard of him or had experienced his tirade against Christians. Our God likes surprises. And, He does the unexpected as well as the expected in our lives.

The range of the gospel message has been steadily broadened. Already it crossed the barrier that separated Jews from Samaritans, surprising the Jerusalem church. Now, it crosses a much greater chasm between Jews and Gentiles. God Himself initiates the event as He surprises Peter and Cornelius with visions leading the way to an even bigger surprise—the complete inclusion of Gentile believers into the church by faith alone. As Peter declared to the incredulous apostles, “Who was I to think that I could oppose God (11:17)?” The God of the unexpected works through our weaknesses, leads us to appreciate someone or something we previously disliked or distrusted, and surprises us with gifts from unexpected sources. What a joy it is to serve Him!

Recommended: Read Acts 10:1-12:25 to get the whole picture.

DAY ONE STUDY

Read Acts 9:42-10: 8.

1. **Discover the Facts:** Let's see how the God of the unexpected began His surprise.

Who is Cornelius (vv. 1-2)?

What was Cornelius doing when the angel appeared to him (v. 3)?

What was his response (v. 4)?

What had God noticed about Cornelius (v. 4)?

What were God's instructions (vv. 5-6)?

How did Cornelius respond (see also vv. 30-33)?

Historical Insight: Caesarea, located 30 miles north of Joppa, was the provincial headquarters for the Roman forces of occupation. A centurion commanded a military unit that normally numbered at least 100 men. Centurions were carefully selected; all of them mentioned in the New Testament appear to have had noble qualities and provided necessary stability to the entire Roman system. (*NIV Study Bible*, p. 1662)

Read Acts 10:9-23.

2. **Discover the Facts:** Retell the story using these prompts.

About noon the following day ...

Peter fell into a trance and saw ...

Then a voice said ...

Peter replied ...

The voice spoke again and said ...

While Peter was wondering about the vision that happened three times (vv. 17-18) ...

The Spirit said to Peter (v. 19) ...

Peter went down and said ...

The men replied ...

Then Peter ...

Scriptural Insight: Fell into a trance. A state of mind God produced and used to communicate with Peter. It was not merely imagination or a dream. Peter's consciousness was heightened to receive the vision from God. (*NIV Study Bible*, p. 1663)

3. In Leviticus 11, you can read the list of clean and unclean animals that determined a Jewish diet. Considering Peter's refusal to eat them, the sheet probably included unclean animals such as a rat, lizard, insect, rabbit, owl or pig. What new thing was God doing (vv. 12-15)?

4. **Your Life Adventure:** Twice before, Jesus used "3 times" to teach or exhort Peter (John 13:38; John 21:15-17). Knowing He understood Peter's weaknesses and learning style, relate this to the fact that Jesus can use for His service those who are slow learners, impulsive doers, experiential learners as well as the ones who obey easily and without hesitation whatever they read or are told. What does this mean to you?

DAY TWO STUDY

Read Acts 10:23-48.

5. **Discover the Facts:** Let's continue sharing in God's surprise for Peter and Cornelius. The next day what happened?

When they arrived in Caesarea, Cornelius had done what?

Cornelius met Peter and did what (v. 25)?

But Peter responded how (v. 26)?

Once inside, what did Peter say to the large gathering (vv. 27-29)?

Cornelius told his story then said what (v. 33)?

6. What do vv. 28-29, 34-35 reveal about Peter's understanding of the message of the vision?

7. Peter's message to the Gentiles (vv. 36-43) is very consistent with what he delivered to the Jewish audience in Acts 2:22-39. But, what did he not include in his invitation to the Gentiles (compare 2:38 with 10:43)?

Think About It: Why were the Jews astonished that God gave His Spirit to the believing Gentiles? Joel 2:28-29 says that God would pour out His Spirit on all people. But, all other promises of the Spirit refer to the house of Israel and inhabitants of Jerusalem.

8. The God of the unexpected does something to show the Jews that He not only accepts the Gentiles by faith in Christ but also includes them in His Church.

What does He do in v. 44?

What was the evidence (v. 46)?

Based upon the astonishment of the Jewish believers, what were they not expecting (v. 45)?

What does Peter declare (vv. 47-48)?

9. Why was it necessary to have Jewish witnesses of this (Peter and 6 others, Acts 11:12)?

Scriptural Insight: God gave His Spirit to individuals from both groups, Jews and Gentiles, solely because of their faith in Jesus Christ (11:17). The Gentiles did not have to do anything but believe on Jesus. They did not need to become Jewish proselytes, experience water baptism, undergo circumcision, turn from their sins, or even say they were willing to turn from them ... Spirit baptism took place here without the laying on of an apostle's hands. The identification of Spirit baptism with the apostles was not necessary here, as it had been with the Samaritans (8:17-19) ... the important point was the connection between *faith in Jesus Christ alone*, apart from any external Jewish rite, and *Spirit baptism*. (Dr. Constable's Notes on Acts 2017 Edition, pp. 177-178)

In Matthew 16:18-19, Jesus declared that Peter would be given significant authority (“keys”) to build Christ’s Church. Three times he was present as the Holy Spirit was given to the three possible groups of people who could be accepted into Christ’s Church (Jews in 2:1-41, Samaritans in 8:14-17, and the Gentiles in 10:44-46). In a sense, the “keys” opened three doors.

10. **Your Life Adventure:** What has God done that has been unexpected in your life?

Read Acts 11:1-18.

11. **Discover the Facts:** Let’s see how other Jews responded to God’s “unexpected” gift.

What happened when Peter got back to Jerusalem (vv. 1-3)?

What did Peter state in v. 9 that answered their objection?

What new information is given in v. 14?

What did Peter remember when he saw the Spirit given to the Gentiles (v. 16)?

What was Peter’s conclusion (v. 17)?

How did the other apostles and leaders respond (v. 18)?

Think About It: The news of Peter’s revolutionary behavior, in entering a Gentile house at Caesarea, reached Jerusalem before he himself did. (F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, p. 219)

12. Read 11:17 again.

- Who initiated and directed the contact between Peter and the Gentiles?
- Who demonstrated His complete acceptance of the Gentiles in front of Jewish witnesses?

Scriptural Insight: The Jewish believers were compelled to recognize that God was going to save Gentiles on equal terms with Jews. By *divine action* rather than by human choice, the door was being opened to Gentiles. (*NIV Study Bible*, p. 1666)

13. **Your Life Adventure:** Have you felt distrust or prejudice against someone you only knew from a distance but then got to know personally? Perhaps you expected to dislike them but unexpectedly learned to not only like them but also to appreciate them and rejoice over knowing them? What changed your mind?

DAY THREE STUDY

Read Acts 11:19-30.

Remember Paul? Let's see how God works His plan.

14. **Discover the Facts:**

Those scattered traveled where (v. 19)?

Some went to Antioch and did what (v. 20)?

What did the Lord do?

When news reached Jerusalem, what happened?

When Barnabas arrived in Antioch, what did he do?

Barnabas went to Tarsus to do what?

What happened for a whole year after that?

The disciples were called what?

What message did Agabus give?

What did the disciples decide to do?

With whom did they send their gift?

From the Greek: The title “Christian” literally means those “belonging to the party of Christ” and is used only three times in Scripture (Acts 11:26; 26:28 and 1 Peter 4:16). They were now recognized as a distinct group.

15. Recall what you learned about Barnabas (Acts 4:36-37; 9:27). Considering his ethnic background, character and spiritual gifts, why would he be a good choice for the Jerusalem church leaders to send to pastor these new believers in the first mainly Gentile church?
16. **Your Life Adventure:** Relate any experiences you have had with helping new Christians grow in their relationship with Jesus. What qualities are needed to help someone along in her new faith? Did someone disciple you as a new believer? If you can, share a “Barnabas” experience.
17. Review Acts 9:19-22, 28-29. Barnabas sought out Paul to help him with this ministry. What qualities did Paul bring to the ministry that made him a good match for the mission?

Scriptural Insight: Possibly while Paul was in Tarsus, some of the sufferings described in 2 Corinthians 11:23-27 and the mysterious experience described in 2 Corinthians 12:2-9 occurred. Based on Acts 15:41 and 22:17-21, some think Paul was already ministering to Gentiles when Barnabas brought him to Antioch. (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 383)

18. How do Barnabas and Paul complement each other?

19. Notice how the Christians at Antioch responded when they heard the prophecy of the famine. What did their actions demonstrate about the work of the Spirit in their hearts? See also Romans 15:27.

Think About It: As the Jerusalem church had ministered to the church in Antioch by providing leadership and teaching, the Antioch church now was able to minister to the Jerusalem church with financial aid (cf. Gal. 6:6). (*Dr. Constable's Notes on Acts 2017 Edition*, p. 188)

20. **Your Life Adventure:** The Jews received an unexpected gift of love (money) from an unexpected source (the Gentiles). Have you ever received an unexpected gift from an unexpected source?

DAY FOUR STUDY

Read Acts 12:1-19 (first part).

Now we are back to Peter in Jerusalem.

21. **Discover the Facts:** Tell the story about Peter's arrest and deliverance.

King Herod ...

To please the Jews, he (v. 3) ...

After arresting him, Peter was (v. 4) ...

While Peter was in prison, the church was ...

The night before trial, suddenly (vv. 6-7) ...

Then the angel told him (vv. 7-8) ...

Peter followed him out of the prison, but ...

The iron gate leading to the city (v. 10) ...

After the angel left him, Peter (v. 11) ...

He went to ...

The servant girl Rhoda ...

She told those praying about Peter but ...

After Peter kept knocking, they opened the door and ...

Peter said (v. 17) ...

In the morning ...

Historical Insight: Herod Agrippa I, nephew of the king who tried Jesus, was partly Jewish and known for doing everything possible to curry the favor of the Jews, so he found it politically expedient to arrest Christians, including Peter, and to execute James. (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 384) James's death happened about 10 years after Jesus' death and resurrection.

22. Since the church was praying while Peter was in prison, why do you think they were astonished in vv. 15-16?

23. In light of what happened to James, what was unexpected?

Scriptural Insight: Mary might have been Barnabas's aunt (Colossians 4:10) since her son Mark was his cousin. Her home was likely the location for the Last Supper (Mark 14:13-15).

24. **Your Life Adventure:** As you pray, do you prepare your heart for the unexpected as well as what you expect? What steps can you take to do this?

Read Acts 12:19-25.

25. What was Herod not expecting on that day when he appeared to the people of Tyre and Sidon (vv. 21-23)?

Historical Insight: This occurred in A.D. 44. This account parallels that given by Josephus in his *Antiquities of the Jews* saying Herod wore a robe woven of silver thread. Though this Herod is dead, three of his children figure prominently later in Acts. (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 385)

26. Read Romans 12:19. In the midst of persecution and mistreatment, what should be left to God alone?

27. **Deeper Discoveries (optional):** Read Psalm 73. This psalm describes the emotions of a godly man looking at wicked men who seem to get away with their wickedness. Of what do we need to remind ourselves?

28. How did God's work continue (vv. 24-25)?

GET FIRED UP FOR ADVENTURE:

29. **Hot Spot:** Where in this lesson did the Spirit grab your attention especially? What did you see Him do in your life this week?

Recommended: Listen to the podcast [“The Adventure of a Life Transformed, Part 2”](#) after doing this lesson to reinforce what you have learned. Use the following listener guide.

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The Adventure of a Life Transformed, Part 2

What a difference Christ made in the lives of the Apostles! In the gospels, they bickered over who was going to be the greatest in the kingdom. In Acts, they were one in heart, mind, and soul. Jesus had chided them for wanting to send people away to find food. In Acts, they willingly shared everything they had. At Jesus' arrest and crucifixion, they deserted Him and fled. In Acts, they are bold and confrontational to those who killed Jesus. Knowing Jesus and experiencing the Holy Spirit's transforming power made the difference.

PETER "BEFORE" PENTECOST

- Unlike Paul, where you have to piece together his "before Christ" life, we get glimpses of Peter's character from the gospels. He was not a highly trained academic but was just an ordinary guy, a blue-collar worker and business owner.
- In John chapter 1, when Andrew first brought his brother Simon to Jesus, he seemed anything but a promising spiritual leader. But, Jesus immediately gave him a new name—Peter, meaning rock or rock-man. Jesus named him not for what he **was** but by God's grace what he would **become**.

Good traits

You see that Peter was open-hearted, loyal, and verbally gifted.

- When asked by Jesus, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter's testimony to Jesus' identity was the clearest given to that point in the Lord's life. Verbally gifted.
- When Jesus emphasized the trouble His followers would encounter, many fell away. Peter responded, "Lord, to whom shall we go. You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that You are the Holy One of God." Loyal. Open-hearted.
- In the Upper Room, after Jesus warned of his upcoming trouble and that they would desert him, Peter bragged, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will." Loyal.

Not-so-good traits

Peter was impulsive, weak-willed, and fearful.

- When Peter saw Jesus walking on water, he asked if he could do the same. Jesus said yes so Peter leapt out of the boat then became fearful and began to sink.
- After witnessing Jesus' glory on the mountain, Peter's impulsive response was to build three tabernacles right there. God's response was for him to listen to Jesus.
- After his great confession of Jesus as the Christ, Peter proceeds to tell Jesus what to do to avoid His death. Jesus gave him the most severe rebuke that He gave anyone except Judas and the Pharisees.
- At Jesus' arrest, Peter impulsively cuts off the servant's ear.
- After Jesus' arrest, Peter folded when the pressure was on and denied the Lord whom he loved. Weak-willed and fearful.

PETER “AFTER” PENTECOST

- The change that came into Peter's life did not eliminate his temperament, but modified it. After the filling of the Holy Spirit, the dynamic, lovable, magnetic characteristics of Peter are still evident. But, the weaknesses are transformed.
- At Pentecost, verbally-gifted Peter preached a masterpiece of a sermon. It was the message of God through the instrument of Peter, a classic example of the way God wants to use men and women today.
- Peter was flexible and available to do whatever the Holy Spirit would have him do.
- Peter boldly answered the charges of the respected religious authorities by acknowledging Jesus and giving all glory to Him. *Acts 4:1; Acts 5:29*
- Peter's rejoiced at being severely beaten by the Sanhedrin officials because he *"had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name."*

PREPARE BY INSTRUCTION, LEARN BY EXPERIENCE

- God's method of teaching seems to be this: 1) prepare by instruction and 2) learn by experience. Prepare by instruction is what we learn from His Word. Learn by experience is the test to see if you understood what you learned.
- God taught Peter something new in a vision. Nothing was unclean any longer. And, by the way, that includes people, especially the Gentiles who trust in Christ. Peter got the test by way of an invitation from a Gentile who wanted to hear the gospel message in his own house. Peter obediently shared the gospel with the group who all believed.
- Peter passed the test. Peter learned the lesson. The Holy Spirit had transformed Peter's life. And, God's plan moved forward in more amazing ways and more rapidly than anyone could have ever imagined. It was an ordinary life transformed by God.

AN ORDINARY LIFE TRANSFORMED

- Peter's seemingly ordinary life and see that it was very valuable to God. He was an ordinary man who knew his weaknesses and yielded to the Spirit's transforming power to do whatever Jesus wanted him to do and be.
- It's okay to be an ordinary woman who lets the Spirit transform us into someone who accomplishes the purposes of God for us.

Let Jesus satisfy your heart with His Spirit's transforming power. And say yes to a life of adventure with Him!

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Lesson 6: Appointed to His Service

(Acts 13:1-14:28)

First Missionary Journey A.D. 46-48

The God of the unexpected not only surprised the mostly-Jewish church with His addition of Gentiles to it, but He also caused an explosive spread of His gospel message among those same Gentiles. His Spirit poured forth in Antioch, growing that church to be a strong and solid landmark in the Gentile world. Then, out of that effective ministry, the Spirit appointed some to go and some to stay. And, that brought change.

Change can be a gift and an opportunity for us to walk into those good works God has appointed for us to do. We may have opportunity to serve the Lord in ways previously unknown to us. Such is the experience of Paul and Barnabas as they head out on their first mission trip, appointed by the Holy Spirit to do the work of God along the way.

Recommended: Read Acts 13:1-14:28 to get the whole picture.

DAY ONE STUDY

Read Acts 13:1-12.

Historical Insight: Cyprus was an island of great importance from very early times, being situated on the shipping lanes between Syria, Asia Minor, and Greece. It became a Roman province during the time of the emperor Augustus. Salamis was the largest town in eastern Cyprus, about 60 miles from Seleucia [Antioch's seaport]. Its population was mainly Greek, but many Jews lived there as well. Paphos, the provincial capital of the island, was 90 miles west of Salamis, on the western coast of Cyprus. This was not the first time the Christian gospel had come to Cyprus, but the Christians had only evangelized Jews earlier (Acts 11:19). (*Dr. Constable's Notes on Acts 2017 Edition*, pp. 200-201)

Barnabas and Paul had been a part of the congregation in Antioch for several years. They were enjoying success there and may have been expecting to remain for some time.

1. **Discover the Facts:**

Who interrupted their ministry in Antioch and appointed them to a new assignment?

What did He say to the worshipers?

How did the church leaders respond?

Where did Paul and Barnabas go first?

Who also went along (v. 5)?

Who was already familiar with that place (Acts 4:36)?

What two specific people did they meet on Cypress (vv. 6-7)?

How did Sergius Paulus respond to Paul and Barnabas (v. 7, 12)?

Who opposed this (v. 8)?

Filled with the Holy Spirit, what did Paul say and do to Elymas?

From the Greek: The Spirit “set apart” Barnabas and Saul and appointed them to specific work. The Greek word for “appointed” (*tithemi*, “to put”) is used of “appointment” to any form of service. Jesus appoints His disciples to do His work. See John 15:16 and 1 Timothy 1:12; 2:7.

2. Paul and Barnabas would go first to the synagogue in every town to proclaim Christ (Acts 13:5, 14; 14:1). What would have been some advantages of starting there? See also Acts 13:16.

Historical Insight: Dispersed Israel, along with Gentiles who worshipped God, met in their communities on the Sabbath for worship, reading of the Scriptures, and prayer. Established custom allowed visiting teachers to participate in the worship service by invitation of the synagogue leaders. (*NIV Study Bible*, p. 1494)

3. Why did the Spirit lead Paul to confront Elymas so harshly?

Focus on the Meaning: Blasphemy against the Spirit is the malicious resistance of the Holy Spirit’s converting power after one has been shown that Jesus is the Christ.

4. Luke now introduced Saul's Roman name "Paul," by which he referred to him hereafter in Acts, and by which Paul always identified himself in his epistles. Considering his mission from Jesus, why would using "Paul" rather than "Saul" be beneficial for his ministry?

5. **Your Life Adventure:** Change can be a gift and an opportunity to walk into those good works God has appointed for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). Consider the changes the Lord has brought into your life. Has God transplanted you from a place of comfort to a new place where you were appointed to serve Him? How did you respond? In what ways have those changes provided opportunities for you to serve the Lord in ways that you previously had not seen?

DAY TWO STUDY

Read Acts 13:13-52.

Historical Insight: Perga (modern Perge) stood 12 miles inland, in the Roman province of Pamphylia on the southern coast of Asia Minor (modern Turkey). The travelers then had to cross the Taurus Mountains to get to Pisidian Antioch, about 100 miles north. The road took them from sea level to 3,600 feet elevation through bandit-infested country. They arrived on a lake-filled plateau. Pisidian Antioch was a Roman colony, one of several strategically located places in the empire along frequently traveled roads. It was the most important city of southern Galatia, populated by a rich amalgam of Greek, Roman, Asian, and Phrygian traditions with a sizeable Jewish population. It was the communication nerve center of Asia Minor. (*Dr. Constable's Notes on Acts 2017 Edition*, pp. 205-206)

6. **Discover the Facts:** This is a long passage. We'll first look at the action then we'll look more closely at Paul's first recorded sermon in Acts.

What happened at Perga (v. 13)?

What did they experience in Pisidian Antioch on the Sabbath (vv. 14-15)?

After Paul preached, how did the people respond (vv. 42-43)?

On the next Sabbath, who came to hear them (v. 44)?

What happened then (v. 45, another instance of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit)?

What was Paul's response to the jealous Jews (vv. 46-47)?

How did the Gentiles respond to this (vv. 48-49)?

But then what happened (v. 50)?

What did Paul and Barnabas do (v. 51)?

What did the Holy Spirit do (v. 52)?

In Paul's first recorded sermon in Acts, he preaches to an audience grounded in the Old Testament and presents Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament expectations of the Messiah. Let's look at it more closely.

7. Whom does Paul address (v. 16)?
8. Verses 17-22 are a recap of Israel's history. How does Paul introduce Jesus to the audience (vv. 23-24)?
9. What does he tell them in vv. 26-27 to draw their interest?
10. After telling of Jesus' death, what good news does he give in vv. 30-31?

11. What expectations has God fulfilled in Jesus (vv. 32-33)?

12. What two scriptures does Paul use to prove the resurrection was God's plan (vv. 34-35)?

13. Now, what does Paul offer them that they could not get from the Law of Moses (vv. 38-39)?

Scriptural Insight: Notice that the gospel message preached by Paul was the same as that preached by Peter. This sermon is very similar to Peter's sermon in Acts 2. Acts 13:39 gives the thesis of Paul's letter to the Galatians, written shortly after this journey ended.

14. What is his warning to scoffers (vv. 40-41)?

15. Read and ponder Paul's statement in v. 46. Have you ever considered someone's rejection of the gospel to be that they did not consider themselves worthy of eternal life?

Focus on the Meaning: The results of the preaching of the gospel were due to God's work. The Christian evangelists were harvesting the "wheat" that God had prepared. (*Dr. Constable's Notes on Acts 2017 Edition*, p. 213)

16. Look at whom the "jealous" Jews used to prevent the Holy Spirit's work in their region (v. 50). Why do you think "God-fearing" women could be influenced to join their cause?

Historical Insight: Well-to-do women in many cities of the Roman world were attracted to the Jewish religion and thus found among the God-fearing Gentiles who frequented the synagogue (Acts 17:4, 12). (F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, p. 268)

17. **Your Life Adventure:** How do you determine the worthiness of the causes that engage your mind, energy, and finances? What steps do you take to protect yourself from being influenced in a manner that does not strengthen the cause of Christ? See also Galatians 4:18 and 6:10.

18. Paul and Barnabas get “kicked out” of the region. What is so radical about v. 52? Explain.

Scriptural Insight: Paul and Barnabas paid a return visit to this body of believers a few months later (14:21).

19. **Your Life Adventure:** Have you ever had an experience that would be similar to being “kicked out?” How did you feel? What did you do in response? How did those around you take it?

20. **Deeper Discoveries (optional):** “All who were appointed for eternal life believed” (v. 48, NIV). The words “were appointed” come from the verb *tasso*, a military word meaning “to place in order, arrange.” Research other uses of this term in Acts 15:2; 22:10; 28:23, Romans 13:1, and 1 Corinthians 16:15. Discuss what you learn.

DAY THREE STUDY

Read 14:1-7.

Historical Insight: Iconium was a Greek city-state in the Roman province of Galatia, southeast of Pisidian Antioch. It remained largely Greek in temper and somewhat resistant to Roman influence. A garden spot, situated in the midst of orchards and farms, but surrounded by deserts, Iconium owed its bustling business activity to its location on the main trade route connecting Ephesus with Syria and the Mesopotamian world, as well as its orchard industries and farm produce. (*Dr. Constable's Notes on Acts 2017 Edition*, p. 214)

21. **Discover the Facts:** Fill out the chart below using all the information given in this passage. Give verses.

What Paul & Barnabas did	What the unbelieving Jews did	What the Lord did

22. Why were Paul and Barnabas able to speak so boldly in the face of persecution in light of what had just happened 90 miles away in Pisidian Antioch?

Focus on the Meaning: The word “apostle” means “those sent with authority as representatives of another.” Barnabas and Paul are both called apostles since they had been sent as authoritative representatives of the Antioch church. The office of Apostle (the Twelve) is different from the work of an “apostle.” (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 391)

Read Acts 14:8-20.

Historical Insight: Like Pisidian Antioch, Lystra (modern Zoldera) was a Roman colony. It was the most eastern of the fortified cities of Galatia, about 20 miles south of Iconium. Twenty miles was a normal day's travel in the Roman Empire at this time. Luke did not mention synagogue evangelism here. Evidently there were so few Jews that there was no synagogue in Lystra (as in Philippi). Lystra was the home of Timothy (Acts 16:1). Derbe was 60 miles southeast of Lystra. The text says that Paul and Barnabas preached in these two cities and the surrounding countryside (Acts 14:7) (*Dr. Constable's Notes on Acts 2017 Edition*, p. 216 and *NIV Study Bible*, p. 1672)

23. **Discover the Facts:** Retell the story using the prompts below.

In Lystra sat a man who was ...

Paul looked at him and saw ...

The healed man ...

When the crowd saw the healed man, they shouted ...

They called Barnabas and Paul (v. 12) ...

The priest of Zeus brought ...

When Paul and Barnabas heard this, they ...

Paul and Barnabas shouted (v. 15) ...

They said that they were bringing them good news, telling them ...

They said that in the past, God let (v. 16) ...

Yet God has shown (v. 17) ...

Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and ...

But after the disciples gathered around Paul (v. 20) ...

Historical Insight: Tearing of clothes was a Jewish way of expressing great anguish. Usually rips were made four or five inches into the neckline of the garment.

24. When the people thought they were Greek gods and brought sacrifices to offer, how did Paul and Barnabas deal with this surprising situation compared to King Herod's response in chapter 12?

25. Paul and Barnabas are not preaching to a synagogue audience here but to a crowd of superstitious people. What do they emphasize in their message (vv. 15-17)? See also Romans 1:19-20.

26. How does God show kindness to unbelievers? What kind of response from them does He desire?

27. Paul is stoned and left for dead (see 2 Corinthians 11:25; Galatians 6:17; 2 Timothy 3:11-12). Then, he gets up and goes back into the city!

- What did you think when you read that?
- Why and how do you think he could do that and even return to this city a few months later (vv. 21-22)?

Think About It: The Lystrans were probably offended by the missionaries' refusal to accept divine honors from them: they had been made to look foolish, and felt resentful. Paul, acclaimed as the messenger of the immortals, was the chief target for the violent assault that followed. (F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, p. 279)

28. **Your Life Adventure:** The crowd was easily swayed from one viewpoint to another, both equally wrong.

- What kind of influence do crowds have over you?
- What kind of influence do you have in a crowd?
- Which scriptures help to keep you from being wrongly influenced?

DAY FOUR STUDY

Read Acts 14:20-28.

29. **Discover the Facts:** Use the following questions to see what happened.

Where did they go next (v. 20)?

What happened there (v. 21)?

How did Barnabas and Paul encourage the churches they had previously planted (v. 22)?

Who was appointed and how (v. 23)?

Scriptural Insight: These elders were not novices in the faith (1 Timothy 3:6); they were probably Jews who came out of the synagogues where they had been steeped in the Scriptures. Thus, elders from the synagogues became elders in the churches. (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 392)

30. Organization is important to the function of a healthy church. What are the benefits of having mature leadership as new believers are added to a church?

31. Their journey ends in Antioch about 18 months after it began.

- What took place there (vv. 27-28)?
- Despite all the opposition and hardships, what was the heart of the mission report?

32. **Deeper Discoveries (optional):** It is thought that Paul wrote the Book of Galatians shortly after this first missionary journey and before the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). Read the letter to see what these Galatian believers experienced shortly after Paul left.

GET FIRED UP FOR ADVENTURE:

33. **Hot Spot:** Where in this lesson did the Spirit grab your attention especially? What did you see Him do in your life this week?

Recommended: Listen to the podcast "[Supporting Causes that Align with the Purposes of God](#)" after doing this lesson to reinforce what you have learned. Use the following listener guide.

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Supporting Causes that Align with the Purposes of God

BARNABAS AND PAUL—FOLLOWING THE PURPOSE OF GOD

- In the midst of an effective ministry, the Holy Spirit chose to set apart Barnabas and Paul from the other church leaders and send them on mission to faraway places.
- Paul and Barnabas always started their ministry in the synagogues where not only Jews but also God-fearing Gentiles were in attendance.
- God-fearing Gentiles worshiped the God of Israel in the Synagogue and practiced some but not all of the Jewish laws. Their hearts were hungry to know the true God and were glad to be included in the plan of God.
- But, many of the Jews, especially the synagogue leaders, rejected the message about Jesus as their Messiah. So, instead of joining the work of God, they fought it.
- Sadly, God-fearing women of high standing rejected the purposes of God and chose to work against God. *Acts 13:50*

GOD-FEARING WOMEN CHOSE TO WORK AGAINST GOD

- Jesus experienced the same thing among His own people. *Luke 7:29-30*
- Both history and archeology tell us that married women in Asia Minor exercised much more influence than was the case in most other parts of the Empire. They had a platform. Yet, they chose to support a cause that worked against the purposes of God.

EXAMINE THE CAUSES YOU SUPPORT

- We are the visible representatives of the living Christ. Jesus Christ gave His life for us so He could give His life to us so He could live His life through us. Any cause you support should represent Jesus Christ living His life through you more than your own will or emotions taking the lead. Beware of others who are influencing you. *Galatians 4:17-18*
- For the believer in Jesus Christ, God determines what purpose is good for you. Zealous people will try to win you over to their cause by appealing to your good motives.

COMPROMISE IS DANGEROUS.

- *Compromise with the world is usually subtle, tricky.* You get fooled with what look to be good causes that serve to lure you into the den of God's enemies. *Isaiah 32:7*

- *Compromise with the world sucks you in through wrong relationships.* We get lured by the subtlety of the world and then we get locked into wrong social, political, or spiritual relationships that get us entangled even deeper.
- *Compromise with the world closes you off to hearing ideas that you don't like.* Listening to other ideas and running them through the sieve of what God's Word says strengthens our discernment of what is God's way of approaching life compared to the world's way.
- *Compromise with the world sucks you in through emotions and can bring disastrous results.* Our culture treats feelings as if they were an inerrant internal compass that always points to truth and reality. But, emotions are faulty guides. We can get emotionally sucked into supporting a cause that produces ungodly fruit.

ALIGNING YOURSELF WITH THE PURPOSES OF GOD

- **Step #1: Align yourself with the purposes of God as described in His Word.** What will glorify Him more than yourself or someone else? Look at the fruit that this cause produces. Does it tend to draw people closer to God or make them more arrogant and self-sufficient because of their cause? Is a relationship with Jesus Christ the ultimate goal? A godly cause will encourage obedience to God and His Word rather than twisting Scripture to make it fit the cause.
- **Step #2: Consider options that also align with the purposes of God.** Seek wise counsel. Look into the financial integrity of the organization. Look at the character of the leaders. Are they living dependently on the living Christ or more on themselves? Avoid personality-driven causes. That which is decidedly backed by Christians who are unashamedly following Christ in dependence and obedience should take priority in the causes you support. *Galatians 6:10*
- **Step #3: Ask God for direction and for Him to show you the best choice.** This is living dependently on God. God the Father who is also your Creator has given you a brain to use. He wants you to use your mind and heart to evaluate the options and then remove the options that are not lined up with His way of doing life. Give yourself time to think and pray about it. Ask Him to show you which good option to choose.
- **Step #4: Submit to God's direction and look for the fruit of what you support.** This is obedience. God's work will produce godly fruit that glorifies the name of Jesus Christ and draws many people to Him as a result.

"Few things are more demoralizing than realizing you've been helping the wrong side. And that demoralization is intensified when you didn't know it." (Chuck Swindoll, "The Cross We Proclaim, Part 1")

Let Jesus satisfy your heart with His Spirit's transforming power. And say yes to a life of adventure with Him!

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Lesson 7: Spirit-Led by Conflict & Discernment

(Acts 15:1-16:40)

A.D. 49-52

Change is hard. Traditions bring security, comfort, and resistance to anything that might threaten “the way things have always been.” And so it was for some Jewish believers who became followers of Christ. They were struggling. What constitutes salvation and, therefore, righteousness before God? Is it faith in Jesus Christ alone, or faith in Jesus Christ plus submission to Jewish laws and traditions? This raging debate threatened to tear the fledgling Christian church apart as Jewish believers sharply disagreed with each other about the Gentiles. And so the church in Antioch acted, sending Paul and Barnabas to testify to the elders in Jerusalem and asking them to settle this foundational issue.

The modern-day church still struggles with doctrinal differences and disagreements. Are there additions to the gospel that a new believer might encounter in your church? Consider the simple, wonderful, declaration of Scripture—that salvation is by faith alone in Jesus Christ, a free gift of His marvelous grace. What can you do to spread the message?

Recommended: Read Acts 15:1-16:40 to get the whole picture.

DAY ONE STUDY

Read Acts 15:1-5.

1. **Discover the Facts:**

What was the problem (v. 1)?

How did Paul and Barnabas respond (v. 2)?

What did the Antioch church decide to do (v. 2)?

What did Paul and Barnabas do as they traveled to Jerusalem (v. 3)?

What happened when they arrived in Jerusalem (v. 4)?

Who were the apparent instigators of the problem (v. 5)?

Scriptural Insight: For many of the Jerusalem believers, the church was the righteous remnant of Judaism, embodying the ancestral hope which all Israel ought to have welcomed, preparing itself for the impending day of the Lord. To countenance any relaxation in the terms of the covenant with Abraham, sealed in the flesh by circumcision, would be to forfeit all claim to remnant righteousness, all title to salvation on the last day. (F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, p. 287)

Read Acts 15:6-11.

2. Discover the Facts:

What did the apostles and elders do?

Who spoke up on the Gentiles' behalf?

How did God show His acceptance of the Gentiles apart from the Mosaic Law (vv. 7-9)?

What question did Peter ask them to consider (v. 10)?

What is his conclusion (v. 11)?

Focus on the Meaning: Peter looked back ~10 years to God's choice of Cornelius. The issue of whether to accept Gentiles was settled then **before** Paul and Barnabas went on their first journey. Requiring that Gentiles become Jews before God would save them would "test" God, in that it would question the rightness of His action in giving the Spirit to Cornelius. When a Gentile became a Jewish proselyte, the Jew in charge of the ceremony said the Gentile now "took up the yoke of the kingdom of heaven" (cf. Matt. 23:4; Gal. 5:1). Peter said this "yoke," the Mosaic Covenant, was an obligation that was both unbearable and unnecessary (cf. Matt. 11:29-30). (*Dr. Constable's Notes on Acts 2017 Edition*, page 227)

3. Read Ephesians 2:8-9.

- How were the Jews saved?
- How were the Gentiles saved?
- How are you saved?

Scriptural Insight: Peter's statement, "we are saved, just as they are" is amazing. A Jew under the Law would say the opposite and in reverse order, but one who knew God's grace, as Peter did, would not say that. (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 394)

4. **Your Life Adventure:** What is so hard about accepting by faith God's absolutely amazing grace with "no strings attached?" Why do we tend towards adding conditions to salvation and complete acceptance before God? Do you? Why or why not? Write a prayer of thanksgiving in the space below for His amazing gift of grace in Christ and His complete acceptance of you by faith in Him—no strings attached.

Read Acts 15:12-21.

Since the apostle James (John's brother) was executed several years earlier (12:2), this James (15:13) is Jesus' half-brother. He is head of the church in Jerusalem.

5. Who spoke next and what did they tell (v. 12)?
6. Summarize James's message to the assembly in vv. 13-18.
7. What is James' judgment (v. 19)?
8. "Should not make it difficult" (v. 19) is from the Greek for "to annoy" (to irritate). What would be annoying about having to follow the Mosaic Law as a Gentile Christian?

9. What four guidelines did James recommend to the Gentiles?
- 1)
 - 2)
 - 3)
 - 4)
10. What reason does he give for these guidelines (v. 21)?
11. How would these guidelines help to foster church unity in cities where Jewish and Gentile Christians were trying to fellowship together?
12. **Deeper Discoveries (optional):** To find out more information about James and his place of authority in the Jerusalem church, read 1 Corinthians 15:7, Acts 1:14, Galatians 1:19, and Acts 12:17; 21:18. If you have a study Bible or commentary, read the introduction to the book of James.

DAY TWO STUDY

Read Acts 15:22-35.

13. **Discover the Facts:**

What was the decision of the Jerusalem church along with the apostles and elders (vv. 22-23)?

Who led them to their decision (v. 28)?

What did they send to the Gentiles (v. 23)?

Why were they sending Judas and Silas with Paul and Barnabas (vv. 22, 27)?

When they arrived at Antioch, what happened (vv. 30-31)?

What work continued in Antioch (v. 35)?

Historical Insight: Judas was a Hebrew name; Silas was Greek and a Roman citizen.

14. What information is given in the letter that would ease the minds of the Antioch church and would also reveal the Jerusalem elders' regard for the missionary work sponsored by them?

Focus on the Meaning: On what should a church focus when addressing issues that threaten unity? That depends upon whether the issue is a tenet, a teaching, or a taste. **Tenets** are the fundamental, non-negotiable beliefs essential to the Christian faith. Examples of tenets are: the deity of Christ, the Bible is the inspired Word of God, God exists as three persons in one, Jesus died and rose from the grave for the sins of the world, the Holy Spirit is God and not just a force or an energy, salvation is by grace alone through faith, and the security of believers in Christ. **Teachings** generally include things like method of baptism, spiritual gifts, and the end times. We can disagree on those but agree to the tenets and stay unified. **Tastes** are preferences such as worship styles, attire, and location. These are personal and not essential to the corporate Body of Christ remaining unified.

15. Unity of the church (locally and corporately) is an important theme throughout Acts. How is unity of the universal Church preserved and strengthened in this entire passage (15:1-35)?

Think About It: Jim Cymbala, in his book *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire* (p. 92), declares the following: "There were no labels (Baptist, Catholic, Pentecostal) at that time—and in God's view, there still aren't. He ignores our categories. All He sees when He looks down is the body of Christ, made up of all born-again, blood-washed believers. The only subdivisions He sees are geographical—local churches. Other distinctions are immaterial." What do you think about that?

16. **Your Life Adventure:** Unity in the body of Christ is just as important today. What decisions have you made that help to promote unity in your church rather than foster divisions? If you haven't made any specific decisions, consider asking the Holy Spirit for guidance about that as well as strength to carry out your decisions as needed.

Read Acts 15:36-41.

17. **Discover the Facts:**

What did Paul want to do?

What did Barnabas want to do?

What was Paul's objection (v. 38)?

What happened next (vv. 39-41)?

Where did Barnabas and Mark go?

Where did Paul and Silas go?

From the Greek: "A sharp contention." The Greek word here *paroxysmos* (provoking, stirring up, arousing) is used only here and in Hebrews 10:24 where it's translated "spur" or "stimulate." (*Robertson's Word Pictures*, note on Acts 15:39)

18. Based on what we've seen so far in their lives, we can assume both were praying about this upcoming journey, seeking the Holy Spirit's direction. Is it possible the Holy Spirit was giving each a different answer about Mark? If so, how could they have handled this more agreeably?

19. How was “the split” used ultimately to further the spread of the gospel and glorify God?

Scriptural Insight: Though neither Barnabas nor Mark is mentioned in the remainder of Acts, Paul refers to both in his letters (Galatians 2:11-13; 1 Corinthians 9:6; Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24; and 2 Timothy 4:11). Mark evidently returned from his work with Barnabas and became associated with Peter (see 1 Peter 5:13), leading to his greatest work—shaping Peter’s sermons into the gospel of Mark. After Mark’s time helping Barnabas and Peter for 10 years, Paul rejoiced and commended him to the Colossians. In the end, Paul asks Timothy to pick up Mark and bring him to Rome, for he has found him useful for ministry—forgiven and now respected. God was patient with Mark and was able to use Mark in a ministry totally different from Paul’s but equally as important. Sometimes maturity takes longer. Never give up on someone who belongs to the Lord.

20. **Your Life Adventure:** When we get comfortable doing things the usual way, we often don’t imagine life or ministry any differently. How do we handle the Holy Spirit giving different direction to individuals of a ministry team? Does someone always have to be right and another wrong? What can we learn from this lesson? See also Philippians 4:2-3.

DAY THREE STUDY

Second Missionary Journey A.D. 49-51

“Discernment is a discipline, and like other disciplines such as prayer and reading the Bible, it is one that all Christians should seek to practice and should seek to practice deliberately.” (Tim Challies, *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment*, p. 15)

Read Acts 15:41-16:5.

21. **Discover the Facts:**

Where do Paul and Silas go first?

What information is given about Timothy?

What message did they proclaim as they traveled?

Think About It: Two to three years earlier, Paul had been badly mistreated in this area, even stoned in Lystra. Yet, he returns. What gave him the courage to return? Would you have had the courage to return?

22. Look at the reasoning behind Timothy's circumcision. Why does this not contradict the message in Acts 15? See also 1 Corinthians 9:19-22 for Paul's mission focus.

Scriptural Insight: Both Mark and Timothy were teens when they trusted in Jesus. Both were trained in the scriptures since childhood, were discipled by apostles and other godly men, and were in active ministry. One with recognized potential found his ministry niche right away. He jumps in with both feet and never turns back. The other had great potential that was slow to be realized. He tastes ministry then backs off for a while but comes back strong. One became a missionary and pastor; the other became a writer and interpreter. Two books of the Bible bear Timothy's name as the recipient; one bears Mark's name as the author and is the first one translated by Wycliffe missionaries as they go into a new language group.

23. **Your Life Adventure:** Besides Mark and Timothy, teens in the Old Testament such as David, Daniel, and Joseph also served the Lord mightily. What qualities of teens make them useful to God's work? How can this knowledge help you in ministry to the Christian youth of today?

Think About It: Teens have special characteristics that are particularly useful to God. These characteristics are: 1) available, 2) risk takers, 3) desire to make a difference, and 4) abundant energy. All that activity needs to be funneled somewhere. Why not in the direction of ministry? (Chuck Swindoll)

Read Acts 16:6-10.

24. **Discover the Facts:** The Holy Spirit determines the direction for ministry.

To what two areas would the Holy Spirit not let them go to minister?

To which place did the Spirit let them go?

What did the Spirit show Paul during the night?

What was Paul's response?

Scriptural insight: These hindrances may have been circumstances, a word of prophecy, a vision, or some other phenomenon. God planned for people in both Ephesus and Bithynia to hear the gospel later (Acts 18:19-19:41; 1 Peter 1:1). (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 398)

Paul was a man with a plan. After revisiting the churches established in his first missionary journey, he would head into the province of Asia (Asia Minor), then into Bithynia. But Paul discerned that the Holy Spirit had clearly closed those two doors and was, instead, sending him westward across the Aegean to Greece. Paul was willing to lay aside his will, as Jesus had done for the Father (Luke 22:42), and be guided by the Spirit.

Read Acts 16:11-15.

Historical Insight: Philippi was a city in eastern Macedonia, or modern northern Greece, 10 miles inland from the Aegean Sea. It was surrounded by mountains, close to the sea, and also on the *Via Ignatia*, a Roman “interstate highway” connecting the eastern provinces to Rome. As a Roman colony, the citizens in the city were given the same rights and privileges as those who lived in Italy. They were able to maintain their own senate and magistrates and were not subject to regional government. Most importantly, this excluded them from taxation. Many retired army veterans lived there, but few Jews. Luke refers to Philippi as a “leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony” (Acts 16:12). Philippi was also Luke’s hometown.

25. **Discover the Facts:** Tell the story by filling out the rest of these statements from the text.

From Troas, we put out to ...

From Neapolis we traveled to ...

On the Sabbath, we ...

We sat down and ...

One of those listening was Lydia who ...

The Lord ...

When she and ...

Historical insight: Women in Macedonia were noted for their independence; under Roman law, freeborn women with 3 children or freed women with 4 children were granted lots of privileges including the right make legal transactions on their own initiative.

26. **Your Life Adventure:** Have there been times when God has intervened in your life to prevent you from going somewhere you wanted to go or doing something you thought you should do? Or, did He direct you somewhere else instead, some place you never expected to go? How did you respond?

27. **Deeper Discoveries (optional):** In Acts 16, members of both Lydia's and the jailer's households were saved and baptized along with them (vv. 15, 32, 34 after hearing the gospel). See also Acts 10:24, 33, 44; 18:8, Romans 16:10-11, and 1 Corinthians 1:16. Research Greek or Near Eastern culture during this time period, especially the meaning of "household." Does history give us any clue regarding the reason the households so quickly followed their masters in believing the gospel for themselves?

DAY FOUR STUDY

Read Acts 16:16-24.

28. **Discover the Facts:** One day things are fine; the next day seems to bring chaos.

Where were they going?

Whom did they meet?

What did she shout?

How did Paul respond?

What did her owners do and say?

What did the magistrates order?

What did the jailer do?

Historical insight: Her “spirit,” a “python,” was a demonic spirit associated with a mythical snake worshipped at Delphi that supposedly could tell the future. Such persons spoke involuntarily, so the term “ventriloquist” was used to describe them. (*NIV Study Bible*, p. 1678)

29. The declarations of the slave girl were true, so why would Paul become so troubled by what she was doing and saying?
30. Contrast the real reason Paul and Silas were seized (v. 19) with the expressed reason (vv. 20-21). You will see this again in Acts 19.

Read Acts 16:25-34.

31. **Discover the Facts:** Tell the story as though you were there.

About midnight ...

Suddenly there was ...

The jailer woke up, and ...

But Paul shouted ...

The jailer ...

Paul and Silas replied ...

Then Paul and Silas spoke ...

The jailer then (vv. 33-34) ...

32. Look at the experiences of Paul and Silas in vv. 22-24 contrasted with their response in vv. 25-28.

- What did they choose to do in their uncomfortable situation?
- Who enabled them to do so? See Ephesians 5:18-20.
- Who was benefited by their doing so?

Think About It: This is one of three beatings and several imprisonments to which Paul referred in 2 Corinthians 11:23-25. Yet, in 2 Corinthians 4:17, he calls them “light and momentary troubles.” Could you?

33. Look at the jailer’s response to all that he had witnessed (vv. 27-30).

- The jailer asks, “What must I do to be saved?” What is the “good news” message of v. 31?
- How was his home impacted by this event?

34. What do vv. 33-34 reveal to you about the immediate work of the Holy Spirit in his life?

35. **Your Life Adventure:** How does the response of Paul and Barnabas to difficult circumstances impact you? Who enables you to respond the same way? Have you experienced this yet? What happened? Are you willing to trust the Holy Spirit to do this in your life the next time you face difficult circumstances?

Read Acts 16:35-40.

36. When word came of their release from prison, what did Paul & Silas assert about their rights?

Historical Insight: Public beating for a Roman citizen would have been illegal, let alone beating without a trial. (*NIV Study Bible*, p. 1678)

37. The magistrates were alarmed at this news. Paul and Silas had not asserted their rights as Roman citizens before this. We don't know the reason. What would be the advantages to the Philippian believers of doing so now?

Think About It: In only two places in Acts was Paul harmed or threatened by Gentiles—in Philippi and in Ephesus (19:23-41). In both instances people were losing money in vested interests and in each case Paul was vindicated by a Roman official. (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 401)

38. Lydia is portrayed in Acts 16:15, 40 as a hospitable woman. How did Lydia's opening her home to Paul and his companions benefit them as well as other Philippians?

Historical Insight: Lydia came from Thyatira, a place famous for its unique purple dyes and the cloth made from it. Purple cloth was used in the togas of Roman officials. Royalty and the wealthy coveted it. It was very expensive. Thyatira was also famous for its worship of the sun god Apollo. There was a Jewish settlement in Thyatira that was especially interested in the dyeing industry. As a worshiper of God, Lydia had rejected the idolatry of her people and had become a Jewish proselyte instead. Lydia went against her culture. This is important to know about her.

The Lord opened Lydia's heart to respond to the gospel message. God was involved in the process. It is our responsibility to tell the gospel. It is God's responsibility to open their hearts so they'll understand and desire it. Then, it is the person's responsibility to respond with faith to trust the Savior. After believing, Lydia wanted to give—to open her home. As a result, her home became the

center of operations for Paul and his companions in Philippi and the new community of believers. Based on Paul's letters, we know that the Philippian church was characterized by joyful service, generous giving though in poverty, and consistent partnership in the gospel.

39. **Deeper Discoveries (optional):** Read "Christianity: The Best Thing that Happened to Women" in the RESOURCES section for additional application to this lesson.

40. **Your Life Adventure:** Paul and Silas were keenly aware of the Spirit's leading in their lives as they discerned where to go, what to do, and what to say. Read the "Think About It" below. Then, reflect and respond to what Chip Ingram says. How is obedience the key to discernment?

Think About It: We often learn about life and discern our life path / actions in the wrong way. It isn't the long-term accumulation of knowledge; it's how obedient to God we are with the information we can immediately discern. God would rather I have understanding of 2 verses that I **obey immediately** than 20 verses that I don't. Obedience is the key to discernment. It's not "capture and remember;" it's "hear and obey." (Chip Ingram)

41. **Deeper Discoveries (optional):** Read Philippians. What kind of relationship did Paul have with the Philippian believers? How did they encourage him as much as he did them?

GET FIRED UP FOR ADVENTURE:

42. **Hot Spot:** Where in this lesson did the Spirit grab your attention especially? What did you see Him do in your life this week?

Recommended: Listen to the podcast "[Finding Your Purpose during the Adventure](#)" after doing this lesson to reinforce what you have learned. Use the following listener guide.

Finding Your Purpose during the Adventure

TWO WHO BEGAN THEIR ADVENTURE AS TEENS

The first teen — Mark.

- When Mark was a teenager in Jerusalem, he knew Jesus. In fact, it is thought that the Last Supper was held at his mother's house and that he followed Jesus to the Garden. *Mark 14:51-52*
- For 14 years, Mark was part of the Jerusalem church community. Then, he went to Antioch in Syria to help his cousin Barnabas and Paul head up a growing church filled with Gentiles.
- Around the age of 30, Mark went with Barnabas and Paul on their journey to Cyprus. When they got to southern Turkey, Mark left them and headed back to Jerusalem.
- Three years later, Paul didn't want Mark on their second missionary journey. Barnabas wanted to continue mentoring his cousin so he took Mark with him to Cyprus again. Paul took Silas and headed north to Turkey. God had two mission teams.
- Then Mark went back to Jerusalem where he connected with Peter. For the next 15-20 years, Mark traveled with Peter, listening to Peter's sermons and recording them.
- Mark's relationship with Paul was restored so that both times when Paul is in prison in Rome, Mark is there with him. Paul calls Mark his fellow worker and very useful to him.
- It is generally believed that Mark adapted Peter's preaching and teachings about Jesus into the book we now call "Mark," arranged and shaped as he was guided by the Holy Spirit. So, the young teen who knew Jesus as a youth had many experiences that shaped his life and led him to the work that God had in mind for him. God was patient with Mark and was able to use Mark in a ministry totally different from Paul's but equally as important.

The second teen — Timothy

- Timothy's mother Eunice and grandmother Lois were devout Jews who became believers in Christ through Paul's preaching. Timothy's father was a Greek. Timothy first heard Paul preach the gospel on Paul's first visit to Lystra and trusted in Christ.
- Timothy wasn't wealthy, but he was rich in reputation and gifts God could use for ministry. The local church recognized this about him and told Paul. So, Paul invited Timothy to participate on the rest of his second missionary journey.

- For 3 years, Timothy traveled with Paul on this missionary journey, facing incredible odds. Timothy helped to establish and strengthen churches at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. He also traveled with Paul to minister to churches in western Turkey.
- Six of Paul's epistles to churches include Timothy in the salutations meaning Timothy was with him when Paul wrote the letters.
- After Paul's release from prison, Timothy and Paul traveled to Ephesus where Timothy was left as an "apostolic representative" with the authority to order worship, appoint elders and deacons as well as maintain the teaching of truth and sound Christian doctrine within all the churches located in that region.
- We can look at the lives of these young men and see that both had great potential for serving Christ. Timothy found his niche for serving Christ right away as a lifelong missionary and pastor. Mark tasted missionary life then backed off. Then, he came back strong in a different way as Peter's valued interpreter and writing assistant.

How the characteristics of teens are useful to God

- Bible teacher Chuck Swindoll said that teens are particularly useful to God because they are: (1) Available. (2) Risk-takers. (3) Desire to make a difference. (4) Have abundant energy.

FINDING YOUR PURPOSE DURING THE ADVENTURE

- God's Holy Spirit transforms the lives of ordinary people like you and I are and how He leads us in different ways to accomplish the purposes for which He created us.
- Stop looking at yourself and thinking that God doesn't have much purpose for you because you are ordinary. Women faithfully serving God in their ordinary spheres of influence are living lives of purpose even if not making a splash across social media.
- Remember our process for decision-making. Those apply to finding your purpose during the adventure of following Christ.
 - ✓ Align yourself with the purposes of God as described in His Word.
 - ✓ Consider options that also align with the purposes of God. Give Him your training, gifts, opportunities, and say to the Lord, "Use these for your glory, not mine."
 - ✓ Ask God for direction and for Him to show you the best choice of what you should be doing.
 - ✓ Submit to God's direction.

Let Jesus satisfy your heart with His Spirit's transforming power. And say yes to a life of adventure with Him!

Lesson 8: Living Life in the Extremes

(Acts 17:1-18:28)

Second Missionary Journey A.D. 49-52

Wildfires spread as long as there is fuel to feed them. Barriers such as large bodies of water, mounds of dirt piled high, and lifeless deserts stop them cold. The fire of the Spirit began spreading in Philippi and continued to spread throughout Macedonia. Receptive hearts ignited with fire; cold hearts barred the work of the Spirit within them. Enemies of the gospel kept trying to put out the fire.

Yet, the fire of the Holy Spirit burns brightly in believers who are committed to serving Jesus Christ regardless of the cost. Amazingly, and contrary to natural thinking, people in the midst of hardships and persecution respond with joy to the gospel of grace, and churches grow. As Paul writes, “in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 1:6).” Unquenchable joy!

Recommended: Read Acts 17:1-18:28 to get the whole picture.

DAY ONE STUDY

Read Acts 17:1-9.

Historical Insight: About 100 miles west of Philippi, Thessalonica was originally an ancient town named *Thermaí*, meaning “Hot Springs.” In time, it became an important city because of its strategic location near the Aegean Sea. In the Roman Empire, it became the capital of the province of Macedonia and its largest city with 200,000 people. Thessalonica stood on the *Via Ignatia*, the Roman highway to the East, making it an important city of commerce. In Paul’s day, it was a self-governing community with enough Jews in residence to warrant a synagogue

1. **Discover the Facts:**

Where did Paul and Silas stop?

What was there that wasn’t at Philippi?

What was Paul’s custom?

What was his message?

What was the initial response (v. 4)?

What did the jealous Jews do (v. 5)?

Where were Paul and Silas apparently staying?

Who was dragged out of the house (v. 6)?

What accusation was shouted to stir up the crowd (vv. 6-7)?

How did the officials respond (vv. 8-9)?

Historical Insight: Blasphemy—reviling the name of God or affronting His majesty and authority—was the gravest accusation for a Jew, but treason—to support a rival king above Caesar—was the worst accusation for a Roman citizen. By posting a bond, Jason was forced to guarantee a peaceful, quiet community, or he would face the consequences of losing his properties and perhaps even death. (*NIV Study Bible*, pp. 1527, 1679)

2. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:4-2:2. What does Paul write about his time in Thessalonica and the church started there?

Scriptural Insight: We know that Paul stayed in Thessalonica for longer than 3 weeks, supporting himself by manual labor (1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-10). The Philippian church sent money to Paul at least twice during this visit (Philippians 4:16). And, most of the converts were not from the synagogue but were Gentiles steeped in idolatry. (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 401)

3. **Deeper Discoveries (optional):** Read 1 and 2 Thessalonians to see what Paul writes to these believers.

Read Acts 17:10-15.

4. **Discover the Facts:** More adventure for Paul and his team.

Where did Paul and Silas go next (v. 10)?

What is said about the Bereans (v. 11) compared to the Thessalonians.

What did the Bereans carefully do (v. 11)?

Who responded to the gospel (v. 12)?

Who opposed it (v. 13)?

Who left?

Who stayed?

5. **Your Life Adventure:** The Bereans studied the Scriptures. What do you enjoy about Bible study? How has it affected your life? What are your goals whenever you do a Bible study? What hinders you?

Think About It: In a culture that usually degraded women, considering them not worth educating, notice the references to prominent women responding to the gospel (v. 12). These are women who have a voice and a platform in their communities. "Prominent (NIV) /leading (NAS)" translates the Greek *protos* (first in rank, influence and honor). Macedonian women had a well-earned reputation for their independence and enterprising spirit. If some of the women who believed the gospel at this time were the wives of leading citizens, the initiative to believe was theirs, not their husbands' initiative. (F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, p. 323)

6. Review Acts 16:13-15; 17:4,12. What would be some advantages of having prominent women accept the gospel and become part of the newly formed churches in their communities?
7. How did the unbelieving Jews use mob mentality to their advantage, and why do you think these Greek crowds, so proud of their intellectual heritage, went along with it?

Think About It: Intellectuals resist faith longer because they can: where ordinary people are helpless before the light, intellectuals are clever enough to spin webs of darkness around their minds and hide in them. (Dr. Peter Kreeft)

8. **Your Life Adventure:** Notice the example the Bereans set for us in carefully checking what they were taught against what the Scriptures actually said. Why is this so important for us still? What measures do you take to keep from being drawn into a mob mentality on any issue shared on social media, the news, or through email?

DAY TWO STUDY

Read Acts 17:16-34.

Historical Insight: Athens was located in Achaia, the southern province of Greece. Though once the capital of a nation and political seat of a great culture, by Paul's day it was no longer of political importance in the Roman Empire. Even as a small city of about 20,000, Athens was still the seat of learning for the known world, the home of a world-famous university, with all its rich environment and traditions. It exuded culture and what the world called "wisdom." Men talked about philosophy, poetry, politics, religion, anything and everything. Speaking of religion, one of the ancient writers tells us that at this time there were 30,000 statues of idols in Athens. One of the ancient historians said that it was easier to find a god in Athens than a man.

9. **Discover the Facts:** Picture yourself with Paul in Athens ...
What did Paul notice about Athens (v. 16)?

What was his initial response to that (v. 16)?

Besides in the synagogue, where else did Paul teach (v. 17)?

Who began to dispute with him?

Where did they take Paul (v. 19)?

What comment is given about the people living in Athens (v. 21)?

10. The Areopagus was a council that met to evaluate religions and morals. They considered themselves the custodians of teachings that introduced new religions and foreign gods. How did Athens respond to this newcomer (vv. 18-20)?

From the Greek: The word for “babblers” meant “seed picker,” a bird picking up seeds here and there. Then it came to refer to the loafer in the marketplace who picked up whatever scraps of learning he could find and paraded them without digesting them himself. (*NIV Study Bible*, p. 1680) Comment: doesn't this sound like social media in today's society?

11. **Discover the Facts:** There are some precious truths in the sermon in vv. 22-31. Read it below (NIV 2011 version). Underline statements that reveal something about God.

Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’ Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”

What information about God did you especially notice or find meaningful to you?

12. When Paul said the Athenians were very religious in verse 22 (some versions, superstitious), how did he use this information positively in his sermon?
13. Remembering how Paul geared his message to his audience in Acts 13:16-41 and 14:15-17, what does he use here (17:24-31) as points of contact with the Athenians?

Historical Insight: Epicurean philosophers followed the belief that happiness was the chief end of life so they pursued *sensual* desires, believing things were left to chance. Stoic philosophers emphasized the *rational* over the emotional, suppressing desires. They also taught that people should recognize their own self-sufficiency and independence. Although called by different names, these thought patterns are still around today. You can generally identify those who follow these trains of thought today and how they are influencing or trying to influence you or those closest to you.

14. Why does God reveal Himself in Creation (17:24-27)? See also Romans 1:19-20 and Hebrews 11:6.

Does this work in general? How about for you?

Think About It: The words of this beloved song reflect the essence of Paul's sermon. "You are not a god created by human hands, You are not a god dependent on any mortal man, You are not a God in need of anything we can give, by Your plan that's just the way it is. You are God alone from before time began. You were on Your throne, You are God alone. And right now in the good times and bad, You are on Your throne, You are God alone." (Phillips, Craig, and Dean, "You Are God Alone")

15. The Greek for "reach out / grope" (v. 27) means to handle, touch, and feel (see Luke 24:39). It pictures the blind groping of someone in a darkened room feeling along the walls to find the door. What does verse 27 tell you about God?

16. What did Paul call upon the Athenians to do and why? (17:30-31)

Historical Insight: Resurrection has one meaning only, a bodily resurrection. Nobody ever used it to mean life after death or a ghost wandering around after death. It means the restoration of a dead body in a new immortal form. To the Greek mind, the body was evil; the soul was good. Death rescued the soul from the body. There was no place in this thinking for resurrection. (N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, p. 145)

17. How did those listening respond?

Think About It: Did you notice Luke gave the names of both a prominent man and a woman present at the Areopagus? Women were essential partners in the spreading of the gospel and equal recipients of God's grace.

18. **Your Life Adventure:** Our culture today in many ways is more like that of the Athenians in Acts 17 than the Jews in Acts 2. We can no longer assume that our neighbor, co-worker, or friend has any working or even accurate knowledge of the God of the Bible, Bible stories, or Jesus. How should this affect our approach to them? What can we learn from Paul's approach and apply that to sharing the gospel with those who live in our "Acts 17" world?

DAY THREE STUDY

Read Acts 18:1-8.

Historical Insight: In Paul's day, the city of Corinth (located 65 miles west of Athens) had a population of 250,000 free persons plus as many as 400,000 slaves. It was an important commercial city at a crossroads for both land and sea travel. Though not a university town, its people were interested in Greek philosophy and placed a high value on wisdom. Corinth was a city of at least 12 temples to various Greek and Roman gods. Like any large commercial city, Corinth was a center for rampant immorality, especially prostitution associated with the worship of Aphrodite. So widely known did the immorality of Corinth become that the Greek verb "to Corinthianize" came to mean "to practice sexual immorality." (*NIV Study Bible*, page 1732)

19. **Discover the Facts:**

Paul left Athens and went to ...

There he met ...

Paul went to see them and ...

Every Sabbath he ...

When Silas and Timothy came ...

When the Jews opposed Paul ...

Then Paul left the synagogue and ...

The results of that decision were ...

Historical Insight: According to Claudius's historian, the expulsion order was given (in 49 A.D.) because of the Jews' "continual tumults instigated by Chrestus" (a common misspelling of Christ). If "Chrestus" refers to Christ, the riots obviously were "about" him rather than led "by" him. Since no mention is made of a conversion, it is likely that Priscilla and Aquila were already Christians when Paul met them. Since Priscilla's name is usually mentioned first, this may indicate a higher social position for her. (*NIV Study Bible*, p. 1681, 1682)

20. Remembering what we saw in Acts 17:5-6, in what ways was it a risk for Priscilla and Aquila to take Paul into their home?

Historical Insight: Every Jewish man learned a trade as a boy/teen, particularly rabbinical students so they wouldn't have to charge for their teaching and could model a good work ethic. The gospel of grace is free of charge. Tent making was a portable occupation. Paul's home province Cilicia was famous for producing goat hair fabric (*cilicium*) with water repellent properties used for making tents.

21. Read 2 Corinthians 11:9 and Philippians 4:14-16. What did Silas and Timothy apparently bring with them from Macedonia (v. 5) so Paul could devote himself "exclusively to preaching?"
22. Paul longed for his own people, the Jews, to accept Jesus as their Messiah. He went to the synagogue first in every city. Once again, the Jews opposed the gospel. What was Paul's response to those who stubbornly rejected Christ in Corinth (Acts 18:6)?

Historical Insight: A synagogue ruler was a layman responsible for care of the building and supervising the worship service, calling readers and preachers, and maintaining order. Most synagogues had only one ruler. (*NIV Study Bible*, p. 1503, 1670)

23. Athens was noted for its culture and learning, Corinth for its commerce and immorality.
- Which city responded to the gospel more readily?
 - Why do you think that is?
 - Do you see anything similar to this in our culture? Explain.

24. **Your Life Adventure:** Do you, like Paul, love someone who stubbornly rejects Christ? Can you force their faith or win them with persuasive arguments? We can always pray for God the Father to draw them to Jesus (John 6:44) and for the Holy Spirit to convict them of their sin and need for righteousness (John 16:8-11). Take a moment to pray for your unsaved loved one(s).

Read Acts 18:9-17.

25. **Discover the Facts:** Tell the story of Paul's experience using the prompts below.

One night the Lord (vv. 9-10) ...

So, Paul (v. 11) ...

The Jews (vv. 12-13) ...

Gallio said to the Jews (vv. 14-15) ...

Then Gallio did this (v. 16) ...

The Jews then (v. 17) ...

26. Considering what happened to Paul in Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens,

- Why did the Lord speak to Paul in a vision?
- What does this tell you about the Lord we serve?

27. Looking at the court scene before Gallio and his ruling on this matter.

- How did this fulfill Jesus' promise to Paul (vv. 9-10)?
- In what ways do you think this ruling might have helped the spread of Christianity?

Historical Insight: Judaism was an accepted and established belief. Rome did not permit the propagation of new religions. Gallio was admired as a man of exceptional fairness and calmness. From an inscription found at Delphi, it is known that Gallio was proconsul of Achaia in 51-52 A.D. (*NIV Study Bible* p. 1681)

28. Does God still use secular authorities to protect the church and enable the spread of the gospel? Do you know specific examples of this? What does this teach us about God?

29. Paul lived through many extremes during his ministry. Read Philippians 4:11-13 and 2 Corinthians 6:3-10.

- What did he learn during those times?
- How did those extremes give opportunity to reveal Jesus' presence in him and with him?

Scriptural Insight: His time in Corinth, and his experiences with the Corinthian church during the years which followed his departure from Corinth, did much to deepen his human sympathy and to promote his pastoral ministry. (F. F. Bruce, *Paul Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, p. 248)

Paul and Silas were familiar with extremes. One day they were comfortably staying at a prosperous woman's house; the next day they were beaten and chained in a cold prison, released by an earthquake, and escorted out of town. The Bereans responded to the gospel in large numbers; the Athenians barely gave it their attention. At times, Paul worked as a tentmaker to support himself and others; other times, he was supported by generous gifts so that he could devote himself exclusively to preaching. Paul enters Corinth alone; he leaves accompanied by new co-workers (Acts 18:18-19). This has become such a part of his life following Christ that he can say a few years later, "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation ... I can do everything through Him who gives me

strength (Philippians 4:11-13).” Paul practiced learning to be content amidst the extremes of life and discovered that those extremes gave him opportunity to reveal Jesus in him. In fact, sometimes Paul voluntarily undertook extreme conditions for the sake of the gospel.

30. **Your Life Adventure:** What about you? What extremes characterize your life? How do you respond to those extremes? Have those experiences given you opportunity to reveal Jesus living in you? What word of encouragement have you received from Jesus to help you?

Think About It: Our reactions to those extremes, whether comfort or pain, reveal to those around us the reality of Jesus Christ in our lives. In fact, we discover more about our own hearts as we face the extremes of life—whether we will be faithful to Christ alone in the midst of what the world might consider “success” or “failure.” In each, we can learn to say with Paul, “To live is Christ.”

31. **Deeper Discoveries (optional):** Read 1 and 2 Corinthians to see what Paul wrote to the believers living there.

DAY FOUR STUDY

Read Acts 18:18-23.

32. **Discover the Facts:** Paul is on the move again ...

When he left Corinth, who went with him?

Before he sailed, what did he do (v. 18)?

Whom did he leave in Ephesus (v. 19)?

33. Paul’s vow was likely a Nazirite vow (Numbers 6:1-21), often made out of gratitude for past blessings. The Jewish tradition involved temporary abstinence from alcohol and cutting one’s hair. At the end, the shaved hair was offered as a sacrifice at Jerusalem. For what reason might Paul have been grateful during his time in Corinth?

34. **Your Life Adventure:** What do you do to express your gratefulness to God for His fulfilling His promises to you?

35. Ephesus was the leading commercial city of Asia Minor (modern western Turkey). Previously in Acts 16, Paul was blocked from going to Ephesus. Now, the Holy Spirit is allowing him to go there.

- Paul didn't stay very long even when asked to do so. But, what did he promise them (v. 21)?
- What does this tell you about his concern for this area?

Think About It: This 4-year-long missionary journey officially ended when Paul and Silas returned to Antioch (v. 22) for what we would call today "a furlough." No doubt, he and Silas "gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them" (Acts 14:27). What a praise service that must have been! Paul set out from Antioch on his third missionary trip, revisiting a number of the churches he had planted earlier (18:23) and heading to Ephesus where God had already been at work.

36. Though Paul didn't stay in Ephesus, he left Priscilla and Aquila there. Read Romans 16:3-4, 1 Corinthians 16:19, and 2 Timothy 4:19 for additional information about these two. Given Paul's mention of them in later letters, what kind of relationship must have formed in Corinth?

37. **Your Life Adventure:** God's gift of the friendship and encouragement from Priscilla and Aquila obviously blessed Paul and his ministry. Do you have friends that you consider to be partners with you in your life and ministry? How do you encourage one another? If you don't have a friend to partner with you in ministry, will you trust Jesus to give you someone? Go ahead and ask Him for that now.

Read Acts 18:24-28.

Historical Insight: Alexandria in Egypt was the second most important city in the Roman Empire (Ephesus being the third). It was a center of culture and education, and had a large Jewish population.

38. **Discover the Facts:** While Priscilla and Aquila were in Ephesus ...

Who came to Ephesus?

What was known about him?

Of what did he speak accurately?

His experience was limited to what?

When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, what did they do?

39. How did this loving action taken by Priscilla and Aquila benefit the spread of the gospel (vv. 27-28)?

40. What Priscilla and Aquila did is true disciple-making. Someone older in the Lord helping someone younger in the Lord understand and apply biblical truth. Discipling someone is truly a shared adventure with Jesus for the ones meeting together.

- When was the last time you disciplined someone, and in the process, corrected their understanding of God and Jesus' work on the cross for us? Are you willing to do so for someone who needs it? Ask Jesus to show you someone who needs to be disciplined.
- Or, do you need someone to do this for you? Ask Jesus to provide someone to disciple you so you can be confident in the truths about Jesus and the Christian life He offers you.

GET FIRED UP FOR ADVENTURE:

41. **Hot Spot:** Where in this lesson did the Spirit grab your attention especially? What did you see Him do in your life this week?

Recommended: Listen to the podcast "[Joy in the Extremes](#)" after doing this lesson to reinforce what you have learned. Use the following listener guide.

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Joy in the Extremes

LIVING LIFE IN THE EXTREMES

- Living in the extremes had become an accepted part of Paul's life following Christ.
Philippians 4:11-13
- Paul practiced learning to be content amidst the extremes of life and discovered that those extremes gave him opportunity to reveal Jesus in him.

EXPECTATIONS CAN BECOME SINKHOLES FOR US.

- Two types of storms hit us—those caused by our own disobedience and those that hit through no fault of our own.
- When we go through such difficulties of life, we all have what we would consider acceptable outcomes. But, those expectations can become sinkholes if we try to hold onto them too tightly.

JOY REQUIRES US TO RELEASE OUR EXPECTATION OF ACCEPTABLE OUTCOMES.

- When we approach troubles with expectations of what we think are acceptable outcomes and then something else happens, our disappointment and anger can explode like geysers shooting out of a “now-empty pond.”
- We need to hold onto those expected answers with open fingers. We must release them to Jesus, and let Him decide what to do.
- Paul gave us an example of how to do that regarding his own life and ministry.
Philippians 1:12-18
- Paul released his expectation of only one acceptable outcome. Getting out of prison would be great. But, if God chose to leave him there or to have him executed, Paul considered those as acceptable outcomes as well. And, he could rejoice at any one of God's acceptable outcomes.

[Paul] could maintain a truly joyful attitude, even in unpleasant circumstances, because he derived his joy from seeing God glorified—rather than from seeing himself exalted. (*Dr. Tom Constable's Notes on Philippians 2019 Edition*, p. 32)

“Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it.” (Chuck Swindoll)

REJOICE AT GOD'S ACCEPTABLE OUTCOME

- When you release your expectation of acceptable outcomes, you can rejoice at what God has done or is going to do instead of complaining about what God did not do.
John 11: 1-44
- We can avoid the sinkholes of unreleased expectations by releasing them. Trust in His goodness in whatever He chooses to do in that situation.
- It's okay to ask for your heart's desire. But, leave the decision in His hand. Accept the outcome that He provides. And, let Him fill your heart with joy in whatever He chooses to do.
- What trials are you going through right now? What in your mind do you expect to happen as acceptable outcomes? Maybe it's time to release those expectations and stay on solid ground.

Our reactions to those extremes, whether comfort or pain, reveal to those around us the reality of Jesus Christ in our lives. In fact, we discover more about our own hearts as we face the extremes of life—whether we will be faithful to Christ alone in the midst of what the world might consider “success” or “failure.” In each, we can learn to say with Paul, “To live is Christ.”

That's the adventure of living life in the extremes with Christ. We can do it joyfully.

Let Jesus satisfy your heart with His Spirit's transforming power. And say yes to a life of adventure with Him!

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Lesson 9: Revealing the Fire Power

(Acts 19:1-20:38)

Third Missionary Journey A.D. 53-57

“So I boast in Christ Jesus about the things that pertain to God. For I will not dare to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in order to bring about the obedience of the Gentiles, by word and deed, in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit of God. So, from Jerusalem even as far as Illyricum (Albania) I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.” (Paul, Romans 15:17-19)

We serve a powerful God. Paul saw God’s firepower displayed in amazing, obvious ways—not only in signs and miracles, but also in what the power of the Spirit did in his own life. Paul faced the daily pressure of responding to the power God displayed through him and around him. Yet, he chose to remain humble and deflect all the glory and credit to Jesus Christ Himself. As he wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:7, “But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.”

This all-surpassing power is at work in our lives in countless ways we cannot see as well as at those times when He makes Himself entirely obvious. How are you at letting God display His power in you? Now’s the time to “get fired up” for the adventure ahead!

Recommended: Read Acts 19:1-20:38 to get the whole picture.

DAY ONE STUDY

Read Acts 19:1-7.

1. When Paul arrived at Ephesus (fulfilling his promise that he would return), Paul met 12 men. Based on vv. 3-4, what did they have in common with Apollos (Acts 18:24-26)?
2. When Paul recognized that these men were deficient in their understanding of the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit, what did he do?

Scriptural Insight: The reception of the Holy Spirit in Acts does not follow any set pattern. He came into believers before baptism (Acts 10:44), at the time of or after baptism (8:12-16; 19:6), and by the laying on of apostolic hands (8:17; 19:6). Yet Paul declared (Romans 8:9) that anyone without the Holy Spirit is not a Christian. Quite obviously, the transitional book of Acts is not to be used as a doctrinal source on *how* to receive the Holy Spirit. (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 409)

Paul's laying on of hands was a demonstration of apostolic authority. Like Apollos, these men did not have the complete gospel message. Now, they did, and as a result, they were connected to the rest of the body of Christ. By God's design, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is "the Holy Spirit placing a believer into the body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:13), thus identifying the believer with Christ in His death and resurrection (Romans 6:3-4). This occurs when anyone receives Jesus as their Savior. At the same time, the believer is permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit, thus empowering every believer to live a life pleasing to God. See the "Spirit Baptism" essay after Lesson 2.

Read Acts 19:8-22.

Historical Insight: Two words describe Ephesus: **prominent** and **obsessed**. It was prominent as a Roman capital, the third largest commercial center in the Roman Empire, with a multi-ethnic population of about 250,000 people. As a seaport on the west coast of Asia Minor (modern Turkey), it was a major commercial center along many trade routes. As the center for spiritualism in the Roman world, it was a stronghold obsessed with the occult—the realm of magic, psychics, astrologers, and palm readers. The people had a great fear of evil spirits that could make their lives miserable. Anything they could count on to defeat the enemy so they could live a "successful" life was worth a try. For the Ephesians, it was all about power, and their identity came from their power sources.

3. **Discover the Facts:** As promised, Paul returns to Ephesus ...

How long did Paul teach in the synagogue?

Why did he leave?

Where did he go to teach for the next two years?

How effective and far-reaching was Paul's mission in Ephesus (v. 10)?

God did what through Paul (vv. 11-12)?

What were some Jews doing (v. 13)?

What did the evil spirit say and do to Sceva's sons (vv. 15-16)?

When this became known, what happened (v. 17)?

What did the new believers do (vv. 18-19)?

What was the result (v. 20)?

After three years in Ephesus, where did Paul want to go (v. 21)?

What did he do instead (v. 22)?

Historical Insight: Lecture halls were available for traveling teachers from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. when most people would eat lunch and rest before returning to work.

4. The Ephesians' concept of power was that of an impersonal substance one could harness to one's own advantage. What did God do to get the attention of these obsessed people to view **Him** as the true and best source of power (vv. 11-12)?
5. Invoking names to control evil spirits was a form of magic practiced in Ephesus, even by Jews. Discuss what was revealed in vv. 13-16.

Think About It: "Magic" historically is a deviation from a sanctioned religious practice that crosses the line into magic when attained through the management of supernatural powers in such a way that results are virtually guaranteed. For both Jews and Christians, reliance on the aid of "powers" (falling into magical / mystical activity) betrays a lack of confidence in the one God. (Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic*, p. 19)

6. In light of the "Think About It" above, what lessons can we learn from the Jewish "magicians?"

7. **Your Life Adventure:** What are some ways, even if subtle, that Christians get involved in the practice of magic (sorcery, witchcraft), fortune-telling, spiritualism (attempt to communicate with the dead), or other non-biblical practices used to solve life's problems? Are you doing this? If so, repent of this lack of confidence in God, pray for strength to flee from such practices, and trust the Holy Spirit to replace that false reliance with complete trust in our trustworthy God. Ask someone to pray for you.

Focus on the Meaning: In the biblical concept of magic, real supernatural spirits (demonic) are invoked to acquire knowledge or perform works of wonder. This is not parlor magic—entertaining with tricks that are in apparent violation of natural law. This also differs from the “magic” in fantasy (fiction), which does not invoke real supernatural spirits but draws upon the rules of the world created by the author. (Dr. Jennifer Newton-Savard, Associate Professor of English)

8. **Your Life Adventure:** Beth Moore, in her book *To Live Is Christ* (p. 111), says that God works in countless ways we cannot see. Sometimes He makes Himself entirely obvious so that what we see will strengthen our faith in what we cannot see. Read Colossians 1:29 and 2 Corinthians 4:7.

- In what ways does God make Himself obvious in your life so that what you see strengthens your faith in what you cannot see?
- What do we allow to get in the way of recognizing God's power in us and giving Him all the glory?
- Are you willing to let Him “show off” His Son in you and not give the credit for it to something else including yourself? Explain.

DAY TWO STUDY**Read Acts 19:21-41.**

Paul's desire is to go to Greece on his way to Jerusalem and eventually visit Rome (v. 21, Romans 1:15; 15:22-28). So, he sends two men ahead of him to Macedonia. While he remains in Ephesus, a "great disturbance about the Way" occurs.

9. Discover the Facts:

Who is Demetrius?

What are his complaints (vv. 25-26)?

What is the perceived danger (v. 27)?

When the tradesmen heard this, what happened (vv. 28-29)?

What did Paul want to do?

Who wouldn't let him do that (vv. 30-31)?

What did the Jews do (v. 33)?

How did the crowd respond then (v. 34)?

What did the city clerk do and say (vv. 35-39)?

What was his concern (v. 40)?

Historical Insight: The Ephesians considered Artemis to be more powerful than any other deity or evil forces working against them, calling upon her as deliverer from sickness and enemies. They built for her a gigantic temple, one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world.

10. The theater was the largest place for assembly in the city, capable of seating 25,000 people. With what wisdom does the unnamed official successfully dispel the riot?
11. Reread verse 31. Together with what the city clerk said, we get a clue about Paul's relationship with the government officials of Ephesus. What do you conclude?
12. **Deeper Discoveries (optional):** Read Paul's letter to the Ephesians written several years later, probably while he was a prisoner in Rome. Keep in mind the people and events you just studied. How does the Ephesian letter encourage your heart that what we have in Jesus Christ is more powerful and more valuable than any substitutes we could trust instead? What does He offer us in the way of spiritual power?

DAY THREE STUDY

Read Acts 20:1-6.

Historical Insight: By weaving the book of Acts together with Paul's letters, we can see Paul's plan for this time of travel. He wanted to leave Ephesus, preach in Troas on his way to Macedonia, meet Titus at Troas with a report from Corinth (2 Corinthians 2:12-13), and continue collecting the offering for Judea (1 Corinthians 16:1-4). He may also have gone to Illyricum (Albania) at this time (Romans 15:19). It's believed that Paul wrote three letters during this third missionary journey: 1 Corinthians from Ephesus; 2 Corinthians during his stay in Macedonia (Acts 20:1-2); and Romans during his three months in Corinth (Acts 20:2-3).

13. **Discover the Facts:** This time of travel and visiting likely lasted 6 months or more ...
Where did Paul go first (vv. 1-2)?

How long did he stay in Greece (Corinth)?

What happened then (v. 3)?

Who accompanied him?

Who must have joined the group again in Philippi (the use of “us” in v. 5 and “we” in v. 6)?

Where did they go from Philippi?

Focus on the Meaning: Twice Paul is said to have encouraged / exhorted the believers as he traveled (vv. 1-2). The Greek word used there is *parakaleo* which means to call to one side to admonish, instruct, and urge one to pursue some course of conduct, always looking to the future.

14. **Deeper Discoveries (optional):** Read the letter to the Romans to see what Paul wrote during his time in Corinth. Do you recognize elements of Paul’s preaching and experiences with churches and people in this letter?

Read Acts 20:7-12.

15. **Discover the Facts:** Tell the story using the following prompts ...

On the first day of the week ...

Paul spoke to the people and ...

There were many ...

Seated in a window was ...

When he fell asleep ...

Paul went down ...

Then Paul went ...

The people took the young man ...

16. You may have heard this story before today. What did you especially notice as you read it this time?

17. How does a young man named Eutychus (literally, “fortunate,” a common name for freed slaves) prove to be true to his name?

Think About It: The church was now meeting on the first day of the week (Sunday) instead of the Jewish seventh-day Sabbath. The first day was the day Jesus was resurrected. See also *The Lord’s Day* in “The Rest of the Story” in the RESOURCES section for more information. How else might selecting this day benefit them?

18. We’ve seen Paul bounce back from an interruption to his preaching several times. See Acts 14:20-21. Would you say he was a man focused on his mission?

19. **Your Life Adventure:** What have you learned from Acts 20:1-12 that you want to apply to your life? Reflect and respond to what the Holy Spirit pointed out for you to notice.

DAY FOUR STUDY**Read Acts 20:13-38.**

20. **Discover the Facts:** Continue to experience Paul's travels in vv. 13-17 ...

Where did Paul walk?

When Paul joined his team on the ship, they sailed for several days and arrived where?

Why did Paul decide to sail past Ephesus?

What did Paul do at Miletus (v. 17)?

Saying goodbye is hard. In this passage (vv. 18-38), Paul models how to say goodbye. After calling together the Ephesian elders, his pastor's heart encourages them and warns them of danger. His desire is that they stay loyal to Jesus and shepherding their flock well. Let's look more closely at what Paul told them.

21. What had Paul modeled for them (vv. 18-19)?

22. What did Paul do to stay loyal to Jesus and the mission he was given (vv. 19-24)? Be specific here.

23. What does he reveal to them in v. 25?

24. Why does he say that he is innocent of the blood of all men (vv. 26-27)?

25. What warnings does he give in vv. 28-31?

26. Of what does he remind them in vv. 32-35?

27. What happens next in vv. 36-38?

Think About It: Notice in v. 28, Paul stresses the role of the Holy Spirit in choosing overseers/elders in a church and enabling them to be shepherds of their local flocks for Jesus' sake. Whom does each local church belong—the congregation or Jesus?

28. **Your Life Adventure:** Recall a time when you said goodbye. Were you leaving a child at college or camp? Were you embracing a close friend before you moved to another city? Were you sitting by the hospital bed of a loved one? Changing jobs? Leaving a ministry that drew you together? How did you feel? What did you learn? Name some healthy ways to handle separation.

29. Based on his own experience, Paul warns the church to be on guard against threats from both inside the church and from outside. What are some specific ways these attacks manifest themselves against the Church today? No names please. ☺ Divide them into the categories that Paul used.

Among themselves ... Internal corruption

Savage wolves ... External attack

30. **Your Life Adventure:** Looking at what you listed above ...

- How can we be on guard against these attacks?
- Who empowers us to discern? See 1 Corinthians 2:10-16 and Philippians 1:9-11.
- Have you previously asked Him to help you discern influences in your life? What happened?
- If you need that discernment now, ask Jesus for it. This would be a great time to pray for your church leadership as well.

31. **Your Life Adventure:** On his way to Jerusalem, he felt compelled to meet with them to say goodbye but also to remind them of how he modeled serving Jesus for them and to warn them about what would surely happen to distract them from their loyalty to Jesus alone in how to approach life. We can remain loyal through the Holy Spirit's enabling fire in us. But, loyalty is a daily choice—based upon lifelong convictions and pre-decisions that we make. What steps do you take to stay loyal to Jesus and stay committed to adventure with Him?

GET FIRED UP FOR ADVENTURE:

32. **Hot Spot:** Where in this lesson did the Spirit grab your attention especially? What did you see Him do in your life this week?

Recommended: Listen to the podcast "[Adventure Tests Our Loyalty](#)" after doing this lesson to reinforce what you have learned. Use the following listener guide.

Adventure Tests Our Loyalty

Loyalty is defined as, “the quality of devotion or attachment to somebody or something.” It’s both a feeling and an action. Some of us by nature tend to be loyal. Others are more skeptical, preferring to be mavericks out on our own. Loyalty is tested every day in homes and businesses and human relationships across this planet. Who demands your loyalty? Who has the right to it? Do they receive it from you? How good are you at remaining loyal? Loyalty affects how you approach life—God’s way or the world’s way. In Acts, we can learn 4 truths about loyalty to Jesus on our walk of faith.

TRUTH #1: JESUS AS LORD DESERVES OUR LOYALTY. HE DESERVES YOUR LOYALTY.

In Acts 20:19-24, Paul referred to Jesus as “Lord” 3 times. Paul declared that Jesus as his Lord deserved his loyalty.

- The moment you trust in Jesus Christ as your savior, you get a new life fused together with His and a new identity. You are now said to be in Christ, a Child of God, one of God’s saints, totally accepted and loved by Him. You can never lose this new identity.
- You are set free to live a radically different kind of life. And, in that freedom, you have a choice. Who are you going to serve with your life now? God or yourself? The best choice to make is saying to Jesus, “I am YOUR woman forever. I serve you.”
- How do we do that with all the distractions around us? By that, I don’t mean our families or jobs. Serving them well is serving Jesus loyally. I mean, all the other ways of approaching life. All of those voices calling out to us from our culture. How do we remain loyal to Jesus as our master and His way of approaching life?
- In Acts chapter 20, Paul described what he did to remain loyal to Jesus. He served the Lord with humility and did not consider his life worth anything to himself but only to his Lord.

TRUTH #2: LOYALTY REQUIRES HUMILITY.

- In the New Testament, humility refers to how you think of yourself. It pictures a servant bowing before her master.
- In Jesus’ invitation to us in Matthew 11, he used two words to describe Himself that are related—gentle and humble. In Ephesians 4, Paul put those same two words together to describe how we are to live as believers. Gentleness in the Bible carries the idea of strength under control. It is the outworking of humility and a work of the Holy Spirit. *Matthew 11:28-29; Ephesians 4:1-2*
- You choose humility before God by recognizing His authority over you. You know that you’ve made that decision when you are willing to trust in God’s goodness and accept

His dealings with you as good without fighting Him on it. Then that choice is reflected in your gentle behavior towards others.

- Humility is the opposite of self-assertiveness and self-interest. It is recognizing that you do some things well because God gave you the genetics, intelligence, and opportunity to do so. And, you give Him the credit for it.

TRUTH #3: HUMILITY LEADS TO OBEDIENCE.

- What good is a servant who refuses to obey? Or, who is out there trumpeting herself and her own will, and occasionally remembering to do what Jesus wants?

God would rather I have understanding of 2 verses that I obey immediately than 20 verses that I don't. **Obedience is the key to discernment. It's not "capture and remember;" it's "hear and obey."** (Chip Ingram, DTS Leader Board)

- It's obedience to God's will for us revealed in His Word that grows us to maturity. Humility before God means you have already got obeying God settled in your mind. Now, you can obey Him in the rest of what He desires for your life to please Him.
- What are some hindrances to our obedience? One is lack of understanding of God's commands. Another hindrance is selectively choosing what we will obey. That leads us to being what the Bible describes as weak-willed women, always learning but never able to recognize truth for what it really is (2 Timothy 3:6). Lack of seeing the ugliness of our sin also hinders obedience. Obedience is necessary to remain loyal to Jesus and not get carried away by sin and all those other ways of approaching life.

TRUTH #4: OBEDIENCE OFFERS PROTECTION

- Obedience is necessary to protect yourself from those who distort the truth and draw you away from Jesus and His way of approaching life. *Acts 20:28-31*
- The best teachers are 80-90% right in what they teach and would love to know where they are wrong so they can change it. Compare their words with what the Bible says.
- When you humble yourself before Jesus as your master and choose to obey His commands revealed to you in the Bible, you will be able to recognize truth from anything that is distorted. But, when you resist the discipline that comes from obedience, you are vulnerable to embracing whatever new heresy comes along as a fad. And, you cannot recognize the truth when you see it.

Loyalty affects how you approach life—Jesus' way or all those other options out there that offer nothing lasting. Jesus as Lord deserves our loyalty. Loyalty requires humility. Humility leads to obedience. Obedience offers protection from being sucked into every new fad that comes along. Have you already made that decision to say, "Lord Jesus, I am YOUR woman every day?" If not, will you do that today?

Let Jesus satisfy your heart with His Spirit's transforming power. And say yes to a life of adventure with Him!

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Lesson 10: Carried by Fire

(Acts 21:1-24:27)

A.D. 57-59

Danger! Would you have risked returning to Jerusalem when everyone who loved you was warning you to stay away? Paul didn't know what awaited him there, but he felt compelled by the Spirit to go. Just like his master Jesus Christ felt compelled to go to Jerusalem (Mark 10:32-34), Paul was willing to follow no matter the threat. Soon he was seized, dragged, beaten and bound. Yet through it all he felt completely carried by the Spirit, who gave him multiple opportunities to do exactly what Paul wanted—to share his story with crowds and kings alike (Acts 20:24).

Have you ever endured a season when you had little or no control over your circumstances? When each day brought new and unexpected challenges? When life seemed to be spinning out of control? When you had a close call with danger or death? During those times, the Holy Spirit sustains you and carries you. Did you feel it? Amazingly, it is often those times when we are weakest and rely on His strength most that give us a story to share with others later—our story of His faithfulness as we are carried by the Spirit's fire.

Recommended: Read Acts 21:1-24:27 to get the whole picture.

DAY ONE STUDY

Paul heads to Jerusalem, concluding his third missionary trip with a report to the leaders and bringing a sizable offering from the Gentile churches to the suffering church there.

Read Acts 21:1-16.

1. **Discover the Facts:** Retell the story using the prompts given.

After sailing from Miletus for several days, we landed at Tyre and (vv. 3-4) ...

When it was time to leave (v. 5) ...

We next landed at Ptolemais, where ...

We reached Caesarea and (vv.8-9) ...

After a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came and (v. 11) ...

When we heard this, we ...

Then Paul said (v. 13) ...

When he would not be dissuaded (v. 14) ...

As we went to Jerusalem (v. 16) ...

2. Compare Acts 20:22-23 and 21:4, 10-14.

- What does the Holy Spirit consistently declare to Paul?
- How do his Christian friends respond to this message?
- What is Paul's consistent response to both them and to the Spirit?

Scriptural Insight: In view of the phrase, "through the Spirit," was Paul wrong in pursuing his course to Jerusalem? Probably he wasn't violating God's will for several reasons: 1) Acts 19:21, 20:22; 21:14 imply it was God's will for Paul to continue on to Jerusalem. 2) The comfort given by God (23:11) implies Paul had not stubbornly refused the Lord's will. 3) In 23:1 Paul declared he had lived in all good conscience to that day. Probably ... they knew through the Spirit that Paul would suffer in Jerusalem; therefore, concerned for his safety, they tried to dissuade him. (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 415)

On certain issues, God makes His will known to all of us very clearly in the Bible (i.e., avoid sexual immorality, don't steal, don't worship idols). In other areas, He allows us the freedom to make our own choices as we individually follow His leading. Paul and his friends agreed that the Holy Spirit promised suffering if Paul went to Jerusalem, but they differed concerning what Paul should do in light of the warning.

3. **Your Life Adventure:** In light of the information above ...

- Have you ever tried to protect anyone from doing what they believed was the will of God for his / her life? What was your motivation? What happened? What did you learn?
- Have you ever felt led to serve God in a situation that might become dangerous? If so, where? Did loved ones show concern for your safety? If so, how did you feel? What did you learn from that experience?

Read Acts 21:17-26.

4. **Discover the Facts:** Paul as he returns to Jerusalem for Pentecost with 9 Gentile friends ...
How were Paul and the others received in Jerusalem?

Whom did they visit right away?

How did the elders respond to Paul's report (v. 20)?

What false report had been circulating among the believers in Jerusalem (vv. 20-22)?

According to James and the elders, what was the solution (vv. 23-24)?

What did they hope to accomplish (v. 24)?

How did Paul submit to their authority and maintain a good conscience (v. 26)?

5. Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. What principle of ministry is seen here in Acts?

6. **Your Life Adventure:** When befriending those who haven't experienced the love of Jesus yet, consider Paul's ministry philosophy of doing what it takes to influence them for Christ. Expect them to behave like nonbelievers—language, lifestyle, or relationships. You can ask Jesus to help you not act shocked or offended by their language or behavior when you are in their presences. You can ask Him to help you feel compassion for where they are in life. Remember that it's not our job to "fix" them but to give them hope by pointing them to Jesus who **can** give them new life. Think through gracious and inviting communication of your own.
- *What **not** to do or say:* What would not be considered gracious? What words, facial expressions, or body reactions would not be welcoming or inviting?
 - *What **to** do or say:* What would be gracious? What words, facial expressions, or body reactions would likely be welcoming or inviting?

DAY TWO STUDY

Read Acts 21:27-36.

7. **Discover the Facts:** Although Paul's action satisfied the Jerusalem church elders, his frequent presence at the temple put him in public view of his enemies ...

Who saw Paul at the Temple?

How did they stir up the crowd against Paul (v. 28)?

What assumption had they made (v. 29)?

What did the people do (vv. 30-31)?

When the Roman commander heard the news, what did he do then (v. 32)?

What did he do to Paul (v. 33)?

Why could he not get the truth about Paul (v. 34)?

What did he order regarding Paul?

When Paul reached the steps, what happened (vv. 35-36)?

8. What false accusation was proclaimed about Paul and by whom? Does this surprise you? Have they caused trouble for Paul before this? Explain using what you learned in Lessons 6 & 9.

Historical Insight: Gentiles were forbidden from passing beyond the outer court into the inner courts on pain of death. Roman authorities sensitive to these scruples authorized the death sentence for this trespass even when the offenders were Roman citizens, also for any defilement of the Temple by word or deed (Acts 6:13-14; 7:48). (F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, p. 409)

9. In a matter of minutes, Paul was seized by an angry mob (v. 27), dragged (v. 30), beaten (vv. 31-32), and bound (v. 33). Yet, Paul kept his cool.
- Why could he do this? Read John 16:33, 17:9-15, and Mark 13:9-11.
 - In Christ, what comfort and confidence in the midst of such horror can be ours? Find other verses to back up your answer.
10. **Your Life Adventure:** How should we react when we hear accusations concerning other believers? When accusations are made against us? Have you experienced a time of accusation without the accuser having a desire for truth? How did you handle it? Share something that you learned about yourself and God.

Read Acts 21:37-22:22.

11. **Discover the Facts:** Focus on Acts 21:37-40 first then we'll cover the rest of Paul's speech.

What did Paul ask the commander (v. 37)?

Who did the commander think that Paul was (v. 38)?

What was Paul's answer (v. 39)?

When given permission to speak, what did Paul do (v. 40)?

In the midst of this chaos, Paul seizes the opportunity not to defend himself against the accusation but to share with this huge, angry crowd his story of an encounter with the resurrected Jesus and decision to follow Him as a Christian. [We covered part of this in Lesson 4.]

12. What information does Paul give in his story (22:1-5, 19-20) to identify with the Jews in the audience?

13. What does he say in vv. 6-16 to verify that there were many witnesses to what happened to him, including highly respected Jews?

14. What does he say happened to him while he was praying at the Temple in Jerusalem, thus holding the Temple in high honor (vv. 17-18)?

15. What did Paul say at the end of his talk that caused the Jews to stop listening and explode (vv. 21-22)? Why?

Scriptural Insight: Preaching to Gentiles could not have caused such a response because the religious authorities of Israel had preached to Gentiles (Matt. 23:15). The message that infuriated the mob was that Jews and Gentiles were equal without the Law of Moses (Eph. 2:11-12; 3:2-6; Gal. 3:28). (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 418)

Read Acts 22:22-29.

16. **Discover the Facts:** Citizenship comes in handy again ...

How did the crowd react?

What did the commander order?

As Paul was about to be flogged, what did he say?

When the centurion heard this, what happened?

What did the commander ask Paul?

Paul declared what about his citizenship (vv. 27-28)?

Those who heard this did what?

Historical Insight: As a Roman citizen, Paul had the right to a public hearing and could not be beaten with rods, scourged, or crucified. Unless proven guilty of a crime, he could not be flogged either. (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, pp. 401, 419)

17. Paul looked like he was between a rock and a hard place. How did he use the legal protection available to him?

18. **Your Life Adventure:** Have you shared your “story” with anyone lately? Could you share it with someone who might harm you? Use the “Shape Your Faith Story using Three Words” worksheet in the Resources section to prepare a simple version of your own encounter with the resurrected Jesus and decision to follow Him. Ask Jesus to give you other opportunities to tell your story this week. Trust the Holy Spirit to guide you and speak through you.

DAY THREE STUDY

Read Acts 22:30-23:11.

19. **Discover the Facts:** The commander sought to know why Paul was being accused, so he assembled the Jewish high court (the Sanhedrin). Another opportunity for Paul to tell his story, this time before influential religious authorities.

What did the commander do the next day?

What did Paul say first (23:1)?

How did the high priest respond?

What was Paul’s response to being struck?

When challenged about insulting the high priest, what did Paul say?

What did Paul declare next (v. 6)?

What happened as a result (vv. 7-8)?

How did some Pharisees defend Paul (v. 9)?

When the dispute became violent, what did the commander do?

Who came to give courage to Paul (v. 11)?

What confirmation did Jesus also give (v. 11)?

Historical Insight: Ananias served as the “high priest” from A.D. 47-59. He is not to be confused with the high priest Annas (A.D. 6-15). Ananias was noted for cruelty and violence. When the revolt against Rome broke out, he was assassinated by his own people. (*NIV Study Bible*, p. 1691)

20. Why do you think Paul reacted so strongly when he was struck on the mouth (23:2)?

Scriptural Insight: Jewish law considered a person innocent until proved guilty, but Ananias had punished Paul before he had even been charged, much less tried and found guilty. Paul reacted indignantly and uttered a prophecy of Ananias' judgment that God fulfilled later. A “whitewashed wall” was one that was frequently inferior on the inside, but looked good outwardly. Paul's reaction was extreme, but as he proceeded to explain, it resulted from misunderstanding. Paul may not have known that the person who commanded the soldier to strike him was the high priest for any number of reasons: Paul had not been in Jerusalem for an extended visit for over 20 years, and may not have recognized the current high priest by sight. Perhaps Ananias was not wearing his high priestly robes, this occasion not being a regular meeting of the Sanhedrin. Or perhaps Paul was looking in another direction when Ananias gave the order to strike him. (*Dr. Constable's Notes on Acts 2017 Edition*, p. 328)

21. Having once been a companion of this prestigious group (25 years earlier), and knowing their own beliefs and divisions, what was his tactic as he spoke to them? Was this a wise move? Explain.

22. Was Paul's imprisonment a surprise or disappointment to Jesus? What is His plan for Paul?

23. **Your Life Adventure:** Read 2 Timothy 1:7 and the music lyrics below.

No guilt in life, no fear in death—this is the pow'r of Christ in me;
From life's first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny.
No pow'r of hell, no scheme of man, can ever pluck me from His hand;
Till He returns or calls me home—here in the pow'r of Christ I'll stand. ("In Christ Alone,"
Keith Getty & Stuart Townend)

Was there a time where you needed courage from God? Did you receive it? How did that help you face the situation? Do you need courage now? Ask the Holy Spirit to give you His courage to replace your fear.

Read Acts 23:12-34.

24. **Discover the Facts:** Answer these questions to get the picture of what happened.

What oath did the conspirators take against Paul (v. 12)?

How many were involved in the plan against Paul (v. 13)?

What plan was devised to get to Paul (vv. 14-15)?

Who overheard the plot?

What did Paul do then?

What did the commander do (v. 19)?

What did Paul's nephew say to the listening commander (vv. 20-21)?

What did the commander say to the young man (v. 22)?

How many men were provided for Paul's escape at 9:00 that night?

A letter was sent. To whom? From whom?

Who took Paul to Caesarea (vv. 31-33)?

What did the governor Felix decide upon Paul's arrival (vv. 34-35)?

25. What did the commander Claudius Lysias say in his letter to Governor Felix that shows his respect for Paul?

26. God is good all the time—even in hard times, in different ways to different people, and through preventing many of those things from happening to us that we might consider "bad." How is God good to Paul throughout this whole event?

27. **Your Life Adventure:** Can you think of a close call you have had with serious trouble, even death? How was God good to you through that time? In what ways did He rescue you from what you perceive might have happened to you?

DAY FOUR STUDY

Read Acts 24:1-27.

28. Now the religious leaders have secured the services of a lawyer. After complimenting Felix (vv. 2-4), what charges did Tortullus bring against Paul (vv. 5-9)?

29. **Discover the Facts:** Here's another opportunity for Paul to tell his story. That's 3 in 12 days—this time to governmental authorities.

How did Paul defend himself against the charges in vv. 10-13?

What did he admit to be true (vv. 14-16)?

What did he say he was doing in Jerusalem (vv. 17-18)?

Who should have been there to answer to the court (v. 19)?

Was there a legitimate reason for Paul being brought to trial (vv. 19-20)?

What was Felix's response to Paul's defense at this time (vv. 22-23)?

What opportunities did God give to Felix through Paul (vv. 24-26)?

What action did Felix take at the end of his term?

Historical Insight: Felix was the governor of Judea from A.D. 52-58. A man of weak character, one historian said, "He held the power of a tyrant with the disposition of a slave." He was recalled to Rome in A.D. 59/60 to answer for disturbances and irregularities in his rule. (*NIV Study Bible*, pp. 1692-93)

30. Paul was in prison in Caesarea for two years. What opportunities were given to his friends to minister to him at this time? Review the first part of Acts 21 to see who was near.

31. Read the following verses and summarize Paul's attitude about being a prisoner in Rome later:

- Ephesians 6:19-22—
- Philippians 1:12-14—
- Colossians 4:3-4—
- 2 Timothy 1:8-9; 2:8-10—

Summary:

32. **Your Life Adventure:** Are there areas of your life in which you can relate to how Paul must have felt being imprisoned unjustly because of his faith? Glean from the verses above, and apply them to your own situation.

GET FIRED UP FOR ADVENTURE:

33. **Hot Spot:** Where in this lesson did the Spirit grab your attention especially? What did you see Him do in your life this week?

Recommended: Listen to the podcast "[Experience God's Goodness on the Adventure](#)" after doing this lesson to reinforce what you have learned. Use the following listener guide.

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Experience God's Goodness on the Adventure

GOD IS GOOD ALL THE TIME.

*"You [God] **are** good, and what you **do** is good." (Psalm 119:68 NIRV)*

- Everything about God is good. He is good in Himself. And, what He does is good. That means God allows nothing to happen to His children—to those who love Him—that is not for their good.
- God gives to His children only that which is good. God is good all the time, and He works all things together for good. *Romans 8:28*

GOD IS GOOD EVEN IN THE TOUGH TIMES

- God is the perfect parent and knows what will help His children grow into maturity. That sometimes includes pain.
- God teaches His children through tough things He allows in our lives that help us grow up. They help us learn to trust God. They help us learn to give up trying to do things our own way—which may not be the best way—and start doing things God's way—which is always the best way. ANYTHING that draws us closer to God and makes us depend upon Him is good for us.

GOD IS GOOD IN DIFFERENT WAYS TO EACH OF US.

- God's goodness looks different in each person's life. In Acts, Paul and his friends were traveling so they needed a place to stay in Philippi. There, they met Lydia. Lydia didn't need a place to stay. She needed God. Paul shared God with Lydia; Lydia shared her home with Paul and his friends. Different needs met by God's goodness. God's goodness will definitely look different in my life than it does in your life.

GOD IS GOOD IN WHAT HE ALLOWS OR DOESN'T ALLOW INTO OUR LIVES

- Not everyone gets cancer or has a serious injury. Not everyone endures long-term unemployment. Not everyone loses a child or experiences the desertion of a spouse. Throughout the Bible are many verses stating how God healed someone or protected someone in a dangerous situation. We don't even know all the dangers God is protecting us from daily! We should thank Him all the time for doing that.

GOD'S GOODNESS TO PAUL

- Did you see all the ways that God was good to Paul? God used the Roman commander to give Paul protection from an angry, vicious mob. Paul's nephew was in the right place at the right time to overhear the plot against Paul. The commander listened to the nephew and took action to protect Paul. The commander wrote a letter to the governor basically declaring Paul's innocence. What about all those soldiers to

escort and protect one ordinary citizen? Paul was well-protected. Many impartial Roman representatives repeatedly confirmed the innocence of Paul and his message regarding Roman Law.

- Here's the best: The Lord Himself came to him and spoke to him to give him encouragement. Notice what Jesus said to Paul—his instrument, in the center of His will, doing what He wants Paul to do. *Acts 23:11*
- Notice Jesus didn't say, "I'm getting you out of this mess you created for yourself." "Walk out of the barracks with me. You're free to go on your way." "I'll make sure you stay comfortable while this is going on." Or, "I'm done with you."
- Instead, our Lord Jesus who was also Paul's Lord Jesus stood by him. He was present with Paul. Then, Jesus said, "Take courage!" That word in the Greek literally means "be of good courage, have confidence, be of good cheer." It's the same word Jesus used in John 16: 33 and Acts 18:9-10.
- Jesus hasn't changed His mind about Paul. And, He is with him all the way. If Jesus told Paul that he could trust His goodness in the manner in which Jesus got Paul to Rome, you know we can trust His goodness in whatever He chooses to do in our lives as well.

TRUST HIS GOODNESS IN WHATEVER HE CHOOSES TO DO.

*"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding."
(Proverbs 3:5)*

- We've got to bank on God's goodness and trust His choosing. That's dependent living. Human parents raise their children to be more independent as they grow up. God raises His children to be less independent of Him and more dependent on Him as we grow up to maturity. Anything that teaches us how to depend on Him is good for us.

"There were always two answers to your prayers—either she was going to be healed or she was going to be healed. Either she was going to live or she was going to live. Either she was going to be with family or she was going to be with family. Either she was going to be well taken care of or she was going to be well taken care of. Victory belongs to Me because of what I've already done for you. The two answers to your prayer are yes and yes." (Jonathan Evans, Eulogy for his mother)

- When you release your expectation of acceptable outcomes, you can rejoice at what our Lord does instead of complaining about what He does not do. You look at everything with the Lord's perspective. In any and all situations, you can count on the fact that God is good all the time, and you can trust Him in whatever He chooses to do. Take heart. Be of good cheer. Have confidence in that!

Let Jesus satisfy your heart with His Spirit's transforming power. And say yes to a life of adventure with Him!

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Lesson 11: Adventure in God's Protective Hand

(Acts 25:1-28:31)

A.D. 59-62

At the beginning of this study, we defined adventure as, “an unusual or exciting, typically hazardous, experience or activity.” Our English word comes from the Latin for “about to happen.” Wow! What a way to look at life following Jesus—something’s about to happen! The interesting thing for the believer is that the journey is just as important as the destination. That’s the adventure.

The Holy Spirit told Paul he would be going to Rome. Paul just didn’t know the adventure would take so many bends and turns that all seemed to be part of God’s plan for him. Even more remarkable is Paul’s response to the delays and obstacles—waiting patiently, maintaining respectful relationships with authorities, and considering God to be helping him all the time (Acts 26:22). Paul faces the worst and still sees himself enclosed in God’s protective hand during his adventure.

Most of us would prefer to choose our own “adventure,” complete with detailed itinerary and plans for our comfort. Rather than viewing delays, discomfort, and opposition as God’s leading through opportunity, we see those as a hindrance to being “successful” in life as a believer. But that’s not adventure, at least not what is promised by our God. Jesus says to us, “Follow me!” wherever, whenever, and however He leads. That’s the adventure. And, He promises His Spirit is with us through it all. We are never out of our God’s protective hand. Will you trust Him for the adventure in your life?

Recommended: Read Acts 25:1-28:31 to get the whole picture.

DAY ONE STUDY

Read Acts 25:1-22.

1. **Discover the Facts:** Another governor, another trial ...

What happened 3 days after Festus arrived?

What did the Jews want (v. 3)?

When Festus got to Caesarea, what did he do (vv. 6-7)?

What defense did Paul make (v. 8)?

What did Festus propose (v. 9)?

What was Paul's response?

What did Festus declare then (v. 12)?

Who arrived a few days later?

What one thing did Festus remember about the Jews' dispute with Paul (v. 19)?

How did Agrippa respond to this recounting of Paul's story (v. 22)?

Historical Insight: Festus served in Judea only 2 years, but his record shows wisdom and honesty superior to those before and after him. (*NIV Study Bible*, p. 1693)

Agrippa was ~30 years old, the son of the king struck down by God in Acts 12:23 [Herod Agrippa, grandson of Herod the Great]. Agrippa was a friend of the Roman imperial family, appointed the Jewish high priest, and was well acquainted with the Jews' religion. He was not Jewish. (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 423)

Bernice was Agrippa's younger sister.

2. The Jews asked Festus to do them a favor by having Paul transferred to Jerusalem (v. 3). Why do you think Festus would consider doing the Jews a favor (v. 9)? See also v. 24.

3. What reason did Paul give for claiming his right as a Roman citizen (vv. 10-11)?

Historical Insight: It was the right of every Roman citizen to have his case heard before Caesar (at this time Nero) or his representative in Rome. Winning such a case at this highest court of appeal could have led to Paul's acquittal as well as official recognition of Christianity as distinct from Judaism. (*NIV Study Bible*, p. 1694)

Read Acts 25:23-26:32.

4. **Discover the Facts:** Paul gets another opportunity (4th since Acts 21:1) to tell his story before kings and authorities ...

Who was in the audience that day (v. 23)?

What did Festus think of Paul's guilt (v. 25)?

What is his dilemma (vv. 26-27)?

5. How does v. 23 fulfill Jesus' plan for Paul given in Acts 9:15?
6. What does Paul say at the beginning of this "sermon" that would invite Agrippa and the others to listen (26:1-3)?
7. Read the introduction written below that Paul gave in vv. 6-8. Circle every reference to hope / hoping. Underline the question Paul asks the audience.

And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our ancestors that I am on trial today. This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. King Agrippa, it is because of this hope that these Jews are accusing me. Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?

What did you notice?

8. **Discover the Facts:** We covered Paul's salvation story in Lesson 4. Let's look now at what comes afterwards in Acts 26:17-32.

For what purpose has God sent him to the Gentiles (vv. 17-18)?

What does Paul declare to King Agrippa in vv. 19-21?

What does he confidently have through all his experiences (v. 22)?

What does Paul say next (vv. 22-23)?

How does Festus respond (v. 24)?

Why does Paul think King Agrippa would be interested in his story (vv. 25-26)?

What appeal does Paul make to Agrippa (v. 27)?

How does Agrippa respond (v. 28)?

What appeal does Paul make to the entire audience (v. 29)?

What is their decision concerning Paul (vv. 30-32)?

This opportunity to hear Paul's story is evidence of God's grace toward Festus, Agrippa, and the other influential people. They hear the gospel message wrapped in the testimony of someone who has lived out its truth for all to see.

9. What is their response to the gospel message in Paul's talk? In other words, what did they miss for themselves?

10. **Your Life Adventure:** Paul presents himself honorably, truthfully and respectfully. This is the work of the Holy Spirit (Mark 13:9-11). Have you ever experienced a stressful situation where an outside observer was amazed at how you handled yourself? Have you recognized the Spirit's work in helping you through that?

DAY TWO STUDY

In this historical account, Luke's detailed description of the voyage is one of the most instructive documents for the knowledge of ancient seamanship.

Read Acts 27:1-12.

11. **Discover the Facts:** "Setting Sail"

Who is traveling with Paul besides Luke?

Early in the journey, what kindness did the centurion Julius show to Paul (v. 3)?

How was the trip progressing (vv. 4-8)?

What did Paul perceive and warn would happen if they continued their voyage (vv. 9-10)?

What did the centurion decide to do (vv. 11-12)?

Historical Insight: The Alexandrian ship was from Egypt, bound for Rome with a cargo of grain. Rather than stay on the first ship up the coast to Macedonia and follow the inland highway from there, Julius chose to change ships for a direct voyage to Rome though Romans usually considered sailing that late in the season to be risky. (*NIV Study Bible*, pp. 1697-98)

12. Read Acts 19:29; 20:1-5; and Colossians 4:10. What other "adventure" had Aristarchus experienced alongside Paul?

13. **Your Life Adventure:** Have you ever voluntarily walked beside a friend through danger, hardship, or other challenging "adventure," knowing it would be very hard on you as well? What was that like? What kept you going? How did that affect your friendship? Has someone done that for you?

Read Acts 27:13-26.**14. Discover the Facts:** “The Storm”

What threatened the ship (vv. 14-15)?

What steps did the sailors take to save them (vv. 16-19)?

What was the feeling of everyone on board (v. 20)?

Paul stood before them and spoke to everyone to give them encouragement (after an “I told you so” to the centurion and ship owner).

What did Paul say to those listening (vv. 21-22, 26)?

What has God graciously given him (vv. 23-24)?

What does Paul believe about God (v. 25)?

15. What other times in Acts have we seen God encourage Paul in frightening situations? See Acts chapters 18, 22 and 23.

16. Your Life Adventure: What do you glean from this passage that you can apply to your life at home, work, or church?

DAY THREE STUDY

Read Acts 27:27-44.

17. **Discover the Facts:** “The Shipwreck”

As the ship got into shallow waters, what did the sailors do (vv. 29-30)?

What warning did Paul give (v. 31)?

How did the centurion respond this time (v. 32)?

The morning after, what did Paul say and do for all of them (vv. 33-37)?

How many passengers and crew were on board the ship?

What happened to the ship (vv. 39-41)?

When the ship ran aground, what were the soldiers planning to do (v. 42)?

What was the centurion’s response (vv. 43-44)?

Historical Insight: If the sailors in v. 31 had been allowed to desert the ship in seeking to save themselves, the passengers would have been unable to beach the ship the following day. (*NIV Study Bible*, p. 1698)

18. In the course of the voyage, what part of Paul’s warning in Acts 27:10 came true?

19. Which part of Paul’s warning did not happen, and why not?

Scriptural Insight: Verses 24 and 31 provide an interesting illustration of the Biblical viewpoint regarding divine sovereignty and human responsibility. God knew that all on the vessel would be preserved (and if God knows it, it is certain and cannot be otherwise). At the same time, God's sovereignty which insured their safety was not intended to discourage human effort, for this was the means by which God would achieve the end in view. (*Dr. Constable's Notes on Acts 2017 Edition*, p. 358)

20. Compare Julius's regard for Paul's advice in 27:10-12 with 27:31-32. Why the change?

Historical Insight: The soldiers would have had to pay with their lives if their prisoners had escaped (cf. 12:19; 16:27). The "centurion" was willing to take responsibility for the prisoners' safe-keeping in order to spare Paul's life. This unusual concern for the apostle raises the unanswerable question of whether this man may have become a Christian on this trip. (*Dr. Constable's Notes on Acts 2017 Edition*, p. 359)

21. Paul had been shipwrecked 3 times before this. Read 2 Corinthians 11:25, 12:7-10, and Philippians 4:6-7 to find out what Paul learned about a life of "adventure" with Christ. How is this demonstrated in Acts 27:23-26, 33-38?

Think About It: God kept His promise to keep Paul and his fellow travelers safe (cf. v. 24). As the sign on a church marquee put it: "God promises a safe landing, not a calm passage." (*Dr. Constable's Notes on Acts 2017 Edition*, p. 359)

22. **Your Life Adventure:** Are there circumstances in your life you feel are so distressing that it's impossible for God's peace to calm you? Does this seem biblical in light of what you've just read? Peace is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. It is promised to you in John 14:27 and Philippians 4:6-7. How does Paul's situation encourage you? Say to the Lord, "Lord Jesus, I can't go through this on my own. I will trust you to go through this with me and to give me peace." Then, watch what He does!

Read Acts 28:1-10.

23. **Discover the Facts:** These verses reveal once again God's grace and kindness to men ...

What happened when they got to shore (vv. 1-2)?

Then, what happened to Paul (vv. 3-5)?

What were the islanders thinking about this (vv. 4-6)?

What did the chief official do (vv. 7-8)?

After God healed his father through Paul, what happened (vv. 9-10)?

Whom did God use to give Paul and his companions "refuge" from their traumatic journey?

Think About It: Malta was known as Melita by the Greeks and Romans. The name Melita was first given to the island by Phoenician seafarers; it is the Canaanite word for "refuge." (F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, p. 497)

24. Since the angel told Paul the ship must run aground on some island, and Malta turns out to be the island, landing there seems to be part of God's plan, not something that surprised God.

- What did Paul do on Malta that was consistent with his entire mission from God?
- What good did God do for the islanders through Paul during his three-month stay there?

The islanders' response in v. 4 is historical pagan thinking, "If good things happen, the gods are happy with me. If bad things happen, the gods are angry with me and are punishing me." That is not biblical thinking. As was discussed in the last lesson, God is good all the time—even in the hard times and in different ways to different people.

25. Looking back over Acts 27:1-28:10, what are some examples of God being good in different ways to different people so that what looks “bad” for one is actually “good” for that person or for someone else?

Example: Paul was a prisoner on the way to Rome (looks bad) but the Sidon believers got to see Paul again (good for them)

26. **Your Life Adventure:** Thinking about your own life, describe some instances where what looked “bad” for you actually turned out to be a blessing for you or for someone else. Have you thanked God for that specifically? If not, consider doing so and tell someone about it this week.

DAY FOUR STUDY

Read Acts 28:11-31.

27. **Discover the Facts:** After more sea travel, Paul and his companions finally arrive in Italy ...

How did the Italian believers show their support for Paul (vv. 14-15)?

Recalling what he had just been through, how did this support affect Paul (v. 15)?

When Paul got to Rome, what happened (v. 16)?

What does he do shortly after his arrival (v. 17)?

What does he tell them about his situation?

What does he say to reassure the Jews (vv. 19-20)?

What information did the Jewish leaders give to Paul (vv. 21-22)?

Then, what happened (v. 23)?

What was the response to Paul's teaching (vv. 24-27)?

What did Paul continue to do for two years after this confrontation with the Jews?

The Italian believers traveled 43 miles to greet and accompany Paul the rest of the way. At last, Paul is finally in Rome, where he had wanted to go for quite some time! He is still a prisoner because of his appeal to Caesar and restricted in his mobility (but not his speech or writing).

28. According to Paul's preaching you've seen throughout Acts, what does Paul mean when he says he is, "wearing this chain for the sake of the hope of Israel" (v. 20)?

29. What does Luke's statement in v. 31, "Boldly and without hindrance" reveal about Paul's view of his circumstances?

30. Review Acts 26:22. What confidence does Paul have in His God?

31. In what ways was he fired up for any adventure Jesus planned for him?

Historical Insight: During this two-year period, Paul wrote what are commonly called his "Prison Epistles"—Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians. What happened after this two-year captivity? Perhaps no charges were filed in Rome and Paul was released. Probably Paul returned to the provinces of Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia and then turned west to Spain according to his original plans. Then he administered once more in the Aegean area where he was taken prisoner, removed to Rome, and executed. (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 431)

32. **Your Life Adventure:** How do you view delays, discomfort, and opposition—as God’s leading through opportunity or as a hindrance to being “successful” in life as a believer? Looking back on your struggles, how was Jesus protecting you and helping you through them?
33. **Deeper Discoveries (optional):** Read “The Rest of the Story” in the RESOURCES section to get more information on how the early churches continued to develop and function.

FIRED UP FOR ADVENTURE:

34. **Hot Spot:** Where in this lesson did the Spirit grab your attention especially? What did you see Him do in your life this week?

Jill Briscoe once said that women are naturally fear-driven, performance-oriented creatures. We want the environment and circumstances in our lives to be perfect. Then we think we can function well, without hindrance. That’s not biblical. The Holy Spirit’s fire in Paul enabled him to continue to serve God wholeheartedly, doing what Jesus called him to do, going on every adventure Jesus planned for him, in spite of his circumstances and in the midst of less-than-ideal circumstances. Just like Paul, the Holy Spirit will get you fired up. God is calling you to be adventurous for Him. Will you tell Jesus, “YES!” today?

Think About It: Jesus Christ gave His life for you so He could give His life to you so He could live His life through you. (Major Ian Thomas, *The Saving Life of Christ*)

Recommended: Listen to the podcast “[Adventure in God’s Protective Hand](#)” after doing this lesson to reinforce what you have learned. Use the following listener guide.

Adventure in God's Protective Hand

WHAT'S LEFT WHEN OUR PROPS ARE REMOVED?

- Props are those things in life that give us support and take care of our needs.
Example: the story of Martin and Gracia Burnham who were held hostage for more than a year. Gracia discovered that she was never out of God's protective hand even in the worst of situations.

GOD'S PROTECTIVE HAND

Jesus told His disciples:

*My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; **no one will snatch them out of my hand.** My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; **no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.** (John 10:27-29)*

- As we saw in our lesson today, nothing could take Paul out of God's protective hand. The Romans couldn't do it. The sailors couldn't do it. The centurion couldn't do it. The storm couldn't do it. The sea couldn't do it. The snake couldn't do it. The chained confinement in Rome couldn't do it. And, Paul experienced all those not-so-comfortable things while in God's protective hand.
- But, he also enjoyed the blessings of his trust in the Lord. All along the journey to Rome and in Rome, nothing could take Paul out of God's protective hand.

He got to tell about Jesus to governors, kings, and high ranking officials.

Friends stuck to him like glue as he set foot on the ship for Rome.

The ship held together in the raging storm for 2 weeks!

He got a word from the Lord not just for him but for everyone.

The centurion respected him and spared his life.

All those onboard the sinking ship were saved.

Paul got to see God perform lots of miracles on the island of Malta.

Many brothers in Christ whom he had never met joined him on his travel by foot to Rome.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35, 37-39)

- Nothing you do or that anyone does to you—can ever separate you from the love of God. No one and no thing can ever take you out of God's protective hand.

OUR ADVENTURE IS WITH JESUS.

- Christianity is Christ! It's not a lifestyle or rules of conduct. It's not a society whose members were initiated by the sprinkling or covering of water. We are called first and foremost to a relationship with a **Person—Jesus Christ**.

God's plan for your life is simple: Follow His Son. But, you won't follow someone you don't trust. You can't trust someone you don't know, and you cannot know Christ apart from His Word. (Rebecca Carrell, heartstrongfaith.com)

- That's why we study the Bible. We have not physically beheld the risen Christ as the apostles did. We must see Him through eyes of faith and allow the gospels to leap off the page revealing our Lord. And, Jesus isn't just in the gospels. You have seen repeatedly how Jesus was involved in everyone's lives throughout the book of Acts.
- I think the last few chapters of Acts are key for every believer to carefully study. Luke records from an eyewitness perspective how a Christian (Paul) can follow Christ through the ups and downs of life and see how God is continually there helping him or her. From the moment Paul heard the words, "I am Jesus," he had one master. He was convinced and committed. But, that didn't protect him from the dangers and hardships of life. He still felt fear and hunger. At other times, he was prosperous, and life was going smoothly. The key for him was being obedient to his Lord and recognizing the Holy Spirit's working in his life and turning things that looked bad for him into blessings for him and for others. Paul continually gave praise to God for the Holy Spirit Hot Spots in his life.
- We saw his example and realized that we can do that just as much as he could. Obedience. Take the next step that God provides, whether it matches what you planned or not. And, then give Him the praise and thanksgiving for the results. It's really not that hard in theory. But, it is so hard in practice! Yet, we are not ever alone to do this life by ourselves. Jesus was with Paul continually. He is with us continually. Our job is to live in daily dependence on Him and take the next step that He opens for us.
- The Holy Spirit's transforming power works through every situation and opportunity we face daily. It's lifelong work. But, oh so worth it. Adventure with Jesus is the greatest adventure you could ever take. With the most rewarding results.

Let Jesus satisfy your heart with His Spirit's transforming power. And say yes to a life of adventure with Him!

Keep reading to get a peek at Lesson One of the next study in the "Adventure with Jesus" series, *Graceful Living*. Experience a life of freedom and joy as you take hold of the essential truths of your faith in Christ.

Preview of "Graceful Living: Experience a Life of Freedom and Joy!"

Listen to the Podcast: The Promise of Graceful Living

Recommended: Listen to the podcast ["The Promise of Graceful Living"](#) as an introduction to the whole study.

WHAT IS GRACE?

- Biblical grace is God giving favor to someone, not because they are good enough to deserve it but because His love chooses to do so. God's grace springs from God's love.
- The Bible says that God's grace is so abundant it's like a cup overflowing. *1 Timothy 1:13-14*
- God's invitation to you and your acceptance of it is wrapped up in one phrase—by grace you are saved through faith.

BY GRACE YOU ARE SAVED THROUGH FAITH

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

By grace you are saved through faith. Three important words in that phrase explain the basis of your salvation and why you can be confident in it—grace, saved, and faith.

God gives His GRACE.

- Biblical grace is God giving favor to someone, not because they are good enough to deserve it but because His love chooses to do so. Grace is a free gift from God that you accepted when you received Christ through faith.
- Our faith begins with receiving the love of God and understanding it in the Gospel. We start with how much God loves us. Then, we see His love in His grace to us. *1 John 4:19*
- God's grace is His undeserved favor abundantly poured out on those who desperately need Him and respond to Him by faith.

By God's grace, you are SAVED.

- To be saved means "to be rescued, spared from disaster." When you receive Christ, you are rescued from spiritual death and eternal separation from God.

- You can know that you have a secure and personal relationship with God because you are saved through faith in Jesus Christ.

You are saved, through FAITH in Jesus Christ.

- Faith is placing your trust in God and His Word. It is a full commitment to Christ.
- It is by faith alone that you are saved. *Ephesians 2:9*
- If you were standing before God and He asked you, "Why should I let you into my heaven?" Now, you can say, "I know I am saved by your grace through my faith in your Son Jesus Christ." You are in!

When you trust in Christ for your salvation, God's grace is abundantly poured on you. And, with that grace comes so many blessings and benefits.

THE PROMISE OF GRACEFUL LIVING

Graceful living is for everyone who has accepted God's gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Your salvation is an undeserved gift from God. You cannot earn it. You can't win it. You only receive it by faith.

- "Graceful living" begins and continues through Jesus Christ. He gave His life for you by grace, so He could give His life to you by grace, so He could live His life through you by grace.
- "Graceful living" is life overflowing with His grace giving you rest from trying to earn God's favor. *Matthew 11:28-30*
- "Graceful living" is knowing Christ's love for you and letting that love motivate you to live for Him in obedience.
- "Graceful living" leads you to serve Christ through serving others. That's letting His life in you overflow to others around you, especially those who need to know Him.
- "Graceful living" is seeing your transformation from being a selfish, sinful being into having the likeness of Jesus Christ Himself. God's Holy Spirit does this to us from the inside out. We grow up into mature Christians who are beautiful in God's sight and bring His glory to everyone around us.

This *Graceful Living Bible Study* will help you build a foundation for successful, enjoyable Christian living based on God's **grace** to you and for you. Understanding God's grace given to you is essential to enjoying the life that God has planned for you. That's the promise of "Graceful Living."

Let Jesus satisfy your heart with His grace so that your life overflows with His grace every day. You will experience a life of freedom and joy!

Lesson 1: Christ, the Grace-Gift

From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (John 1:16-17)

DAY ONE STUDY

Jesus Christ presented himself as the answer to every need of the human heart. The New Testament writers unanimously taught the same. Multitudes of people throughout the centuries since have witnessed that he does indeed do what he promised for those who trust and follow him.

I have been a Jesus follower for more than 40 years now. Not once have I regretted that decision. I am a lifelong learner, a student of God's Word and my Lord's life. He teaches me in many ways.

Recently, someone asked me, "How has Jesus disciplined you? What has made the most impact on your life?"

When it comes to knowing who I am and where I stand with God, the best teaching I have had was a course at my church that effectively covered the foundational principles of Christianity—who Christ is, what he accomplished on the cross for us, what the resurrection means for us, and our identity in him. It communicated clearly and succinctly to me what I needed to know to live dependently on Christ and rest in my assurance of life **in** him and **through** him. I learned more about the purpose for the cross and the resurrection than I had ever known before. I learned how to recognize the poison of legalism in a Christian's life. It was through this teaching that I became aware that my flesh is not getting better the longer I know Christ. I need to depend 100% on him now as I ever did as a young believer in the 1970s. These timeless truths are essential for every believer to enjoy the life God has planned for them. So, I've adapted the original teaching I received (given as a series of lectures) into this Bible study called *Graceful Living*.

The heart of *Graceful Living* is the message of God's love and grace in Jesus Christ and the reality of "Christ alive and living in me." This study will help you build a foundation for successful, enjoyable Christian living based on God's "**grace**" to you and for you. Understanding God's grace given to you is essential to enjoying the life that God has planned for you. As you apply these truths in your life, you will experience a life of freedom and joy.

God's invitation to a life of freedom and joy

1. Read John 10:10 and Matthew 11:28-30. What does Jesus promise to his followers?

Focus on the Meaning: Full is not empty. Full means to have purpose and meaning. Full does not mean easy, though. Fullness means that even when we are weary and burdened (Matthew 28:28-30), we can go to him with open hands and receive the rest and guidance that he readily gives. Jesus's invitation says, "Come to me. Connect to me. Learn from me. Rest with me." That sounds pretty wonderful. Jesus Christ invites you to a life of fullness, freedom and joy. Are you interested?

2. Read John 8:31-32. What does Jesus promise to his followers?

Truth. It is critically important for anyone who knows Christ to have sound theology (rational, systematic understanding of God). Theology is inescapable. Any thoughts you have about God or information you receive about God is theology. You may not realize it, but you live according to your theology.

Anyone's theology can be based on truth or error. Truth and error lead to dramatically different results. If truth sets you free, then the opposite is also true. Error binds you. When you know the truth that is revealed to you in the Bible, you will experience freedom. With freedom comes a life of joy. Do you want a life of joy? Stand firmly on God's truth revealed to you in his Word, the Bible.

3. Read John 1:16-17. What do Jesus' followers receive?

What Jesus offers to you, as one of his followers, is a life **full of grace**. What is grace? In particular, what is God's grace?

Focus on the Meaning: Grace is commonly defined as unmerited favor, an undeserved gift. It is God's gift to an undeserving humanity. God gives his grace because of his great love and mercy (Ephesians 2:4-7).

Would you like a life full of God's grace? You are in the right place!

Christianity is Christ

The New Testament opens with the births of John the Baptist and Jesus. About 30 years later, John challenged the Jews to indicate their repentance (turning from sin and toward God) by submitting to water baptism—a familiar Old Testament practice used for repentance. It was also used when a non-Jew (usually called Gentile) converted to Judaism (to be washed clean of idolatry).

Shortly after that, Jesus presented himself to the public. The account of his earthly life is recorded in 4 books known as the Gospels, the biblical books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John named after the compiler of each account. Each Gospel presents Jesus as "the Christ."

From the Greek: This title "the Christ" is from the Greek word *christos*, a translation of the Hebrew term "Messiah" meaning "anointed one." The Old Testament prophets promised that the Messiah, as the anointed one of God, would come and do many wonderful things for God's people, including restoring God's Kingdom on earth. Christians are followers of Jesus, who is the Christ.

If you have heard the good news of the gospel and believed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God who gave himself for your sins, you have eternal life just by believing in him as your Savior. But more than salvation, Jesus Christ calls you into a relationship with himself.

Christianity is Christ! It is not a lifestyle, rules of conduct, or a society whose members were initiated by the sprinkling or covering of water. Christ calls all humans into a close relationship with him as brothers, sisters, and friends.

Yet, he is also our Lord, the one who sits at the right hand of his Father God as head over everything else in heaven and on earth. As Lord, Jesus Christ is our *master*—the one to whom we should willingly give our obedience. He is our *model* of how to live as humans in a dependent relationship with God, and he is our *mentor* in walking with us in that dependent relationship.

Jesus' disciples 2000 years ago were no different than we are except they physically beheld the risen Christ. We must see him through eyes of faith and allow the Gospels to leap off the page revealing our Lord. This is so that we may know this God-man who changed our lives as we received the Good News. We need to frequently read the Gospels, watch movies based on them, and tell the stories about Jesus as often as needed to know his life well because Christianity is Christ!

Through this study, you will get to know this Christ who is the ultimate grace gift to us.

4. **Graceful Living:** What questions do you have about Jesus or Christianity? Feel free to be honest here. God is faithful and has revealed so much that you can know for sure. Trust him to show you.

Respond to God in prayer about what he has shown you today.

DAY TWO STUDY—WHO IS JESUS?

According to the Bible, God chose to reveal himself to the nation of Israel and, through Israel to the world. Many truths about God ("attributes") are taught in the Old Testament. Our God is self-existent, all-powerful, all-knowing, present everywhere, holy, just, good, loving, and merciful.

But, there is one thing clearly and relentlessly asserted about God in the Old Testament.

*"Hear, O Israel! The LORD our God, **the LORD is one!** Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)*

Then, God himself spoke these words through Isaiah:

"You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior." (Isaiah 43:10-11)

Jesus of Nazareth presented himself to the people living in a very religious culture who held strongly to the belief that there is only one God. When Jesus came on the scene, he called people to a spiritual relationship with himself as well as with God the Father. It is no wonder that many of the Jewish leaders were appalled at what Jesus said. But, Jesus demonstrated that what he claimed was indeed the truth.

Of all the world's religions, Jesus is the only "founder" who claimed to be equal with God. For the next few days, we will see what the scripture says about who Jesus Christ is.

What does the Bible say that Jesus claimed about himself? (Observation)

Let's look at what the Bible text says. Read the following verses from John 5. Mark the specific things that Jesus declares about himself. Then answer the question that follows.

So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. In his defense Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working." For this reason, they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. (John 5:16-18)

Jesus gave them this answer: "Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him. (John 5:19-23)

"Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so He has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. (John 5:24-27)

"I have testimony weightier than that of John [the Baptist]. For the works that the Father has given me to finish—the very works that I am doing—testify that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life." (John 5:36-40)

"But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me." (John 5:45-46)

5. What does Jesus claim about himself in each of the following sections of John 5:16-47?

- Vv. 16-18—
- Vv. 19-23—
- Vv. 24-27—
- Vv. 36-40—
- Vv. 45-46—

In this “sermon,” Jesus appeals to the audience to view the work he’s doing as evidence that he has been sent by the Father (God). The Scriptures testify about him, and Moses himself wrote about him. Pretty strong claims! Like a lawyer trying a case, Jesus presents undeniable evidence that he is the promised Messiah who is the Son of God. He claimed and demonstrated that he was God in human flesh.

6. Jesus made more claims to rights and authority that are only associated with God. What right or authority does Jesus claim in the following passages?

- Mark 2:1-12—
- Luke 8:26-33—
- Luke 17:11-19—
- John 14:12-14—

Did you catch all that Jesus claimed and did that only God could or would do? Jesus was not just a good teacher. He claimed and demonstrated that he was God in human flesh.

7. Read John 6:35-40. What claims did Jesus make about himself?

- V. 35—
- Vv. 37-38—
- Vv. 39-40—

Not only does Jesus promise to meet the spiritual hunger and thirst of everyone who comes to him, but he also claims to have come down from heaven and to have been sent by God the Father. This is a claim of pre-existence, that is, Jesus is claiming to have existed before his human birth.

Jesus goes on to say that he has been sent by his Father to do the Father's will on earth. That will is to draw people to God and have authority over their eternal destiny. Only God has authority over eternal destiny. Jesus Christ claimed and demonstrated that he was God in human flesh.

8. **Graceful Living:** What did you learn about Jesus in the lesson today that you had not known before this study?

Respond to God in prayer about what he has shown you today.

DAY THREE STUDY

What does the Bible say that Jesus claimed about himself?

Let's look again at what the Bible text says. Read the following verses from John 8. Mark the specific things that Jesus declares about himself. Then answer the question that follows.

*So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him."
(John 8:28-29)*

Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. (John 8:42)

Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God." (John 8:43-47)

Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and obey his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." "You are not yet fifty years old," they said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" "Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds. (John 8:54-59)

9. What does Jesus claim about himself in each of the following sections of John 8:28-59?

- Vv. 28-29—

- V. 42—

- Vv. 43-47—

- Vv. 54-59—

Jesus claims to speak what Father God has taught him and to always do what pleases God. And, no man can prove him guilty of any sin. These are fantastic claims to make by anyone who was not absolutely certain that they are true. Jesus knew who he was. He knew his purpose.

Scriptural Insight: When Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I am," that "I am" was the name by which the Jews knew their God—in Hebrew, *Yahweh*. The listeners knew immediately that Jesus was claiming to be God himself. That infuriated them. But, Jesus claimed it without hesitation regardless of the danger to himself.

Regarding his innocence: Though Jesus was executed by Rome as a state criminal (the meaning of crucifixion), his innocence was repeatedly confirmed by others: Pontius Pilate (Luke 23:4,13-15,22), King Herod Antipas (Luke 23:8-12,15), a crucified criminal (Luke 23:41), and a Roman centurion (Luke 23:47).

10. What does Jesus claim about himself in John 17:5, 24?

Twice in this beautiful prayer of John 17, Jesus spoke about the relationship he had with his Father before he was sent to earth and even before the world was ever created. Together they had existed in relationship, and it was special to Jesus, a relationship of love between the Father and the Son. From this love relationship flows the love that Jesus has for all those who follow him.

11. Read Psalm 110:1. what position of authority would the promised Messiah (my Lord) hold?

12. Read Daniel 7:13-14 and Mark 14:61-64.

- According to Daniel's vision, how would the promised Messiah (my Lord) come to earth?
- What position of authority would the promised Messiah (son of man) hold?
- In Mark 14, what did Jesus claim about himself regarding his being the promised Messiah?

Jesus claimed these truths for himself in the gospels. He called himself the Son of Man (seen often in Luke's gospel). During his trial, though he did not defend himself against accusations of

wrongdoing, he did answer the questions related to his identity. Jesus said that he would be seen sitting at the right hand of God (Psalm 110:1) and coming on the clouds of heaven (Daniel 7:13-14). There is absolutely no doubt that Jesus claimed to be God and to have the authority of God.

The coming of Jesus Christ into human history was not an event that suddenly burst upon an unsuspecting world. It was the fulfillment of a long line of prophecies that started with the beginning of human history (Genesis 3:15). The arrival of Jesus in human form was planned before the creation of the world as well as the mission he was sent to accomplish—reconciling the world to God (2 Timothy 1:9; 1 Peter 1:20).

Our God is a God you can know

13. Read John 14:6-10. What does Jesus say about our being able to know God?

A relationship with God must be based on a true knowledge of the God who is. The Bible teaches that man can know truth about God. Jesus declared that one must go through him to know God the Father. Jesus also demonstrated that seeing and knowing him is the same as seeing and knowing God the Father. Both Jesus' words and his works come from God living in Jesus. The New Testament asserts that the invisible God can be known through his Son. Jesus is our Savior and our ultimate grace gift from God!

14. ***Graceful Living***: Read Matthew 16:13-17. Notice the question Jesus asked his disciples. This is the world's most important question: "Who do you say Jesus is?" Many want to tell you that he was just a great religious teacher. But, was he just that?

In his book *Mere Christianity*, the great 20th century thinker C. S. Lewis posed this solution:

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse ...You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. (C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pages 54-55)

As we have seen in this lesson, Jesus Christ claimed equality with God. Either he was God, or he was not God. If he was not God, then he was a liar (knew he wasn't God but claimed it anyway) or a lunatic (thought he was God). Either way, you must decide. Who do you say that Jesus is?

Respond to God in prayer about what he has shown you today.

DAY FOUR STUDY***What others claimed about Jesus***

Many modern skeptics say that Jesus never claimed to be God and that the writers of the New Testament never claimed that he was God. It is important that we test these statements against what the New Testament writers did claim about the deity of Christ.

15. Read the following passages to answer the question, "What claims do the New Testament writers make about Jesus?" John and Peter were part of the 12 disciples of Jesus known as "Apostles."

- John (one of the 12 Apostles) in John 1:1-3, 14—

- Peter (one of the 12 Apostles) in Acts 2:32-36—

- Peter in 2 Peter 1:16-18—

- Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8—

- Paul in Philippians 2:5-11—

- Paul in Colossians 1:15-18; 2:9—

- The writer of Hebrews in Hebrews 1:1-4—

The New Testament writers are consistent in their claims about Jesus. They effectively declared that Jesus was truly God and not just a great teacher. If these writers knew that Jesus was not God and yet claimed that he was, you would conclude that they were liars, promoting a myth in order to somehow profit from it. But, they did not do that. They declared what they had seen, heard, touched, and known to be absolutely true.

Historical Insight: There were, to be sure, ways of coping with the death of a teacher, or even a leader. The picture of Socrates was available, in the wider world, as a model of unjust death nobly borne. The category of 'martyr' was available, within Judaism, for someone who stood up to pagans, and compromising no-better-than-pagans, and died still loyal to YHWH (the Hebrew name for God). The category of failed but still revered Messiah, however, did not exist. A Messiah who died at the hands of the pagans, instead of winning YHWH's battle against them, was a deceiver...Why then did people go on talking about Jesus of Nazareth, except as a remarkable but tragic memory? The obvious answer is the one given by all early Christians actually known to us (as opposed to those invented by modern mythographers). **Jesus was raised from the dead.... The resurrection, however we understand it, was the only reason why his life and words possessed any relevance two weeks, let alone two millennia, after his death.** (N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God, Volume 2*)

From the beginning, the church has maintained that Jesus Christ, crucified and risen from the dead, is Savior and Lord of heaven and earth. Apart from his resurrection from the dead, historians have no feasible theory for the birth and progress of the Church. Paul confirms what was being taught everywhere about Jesus: that he died for our sins, that he was buried, and that he was raised from the dead—all according to what was promised in the Scriptures. his resurrected body was seen by more than 500 people and on at least 6 occasions. There were plenty of eyewitnesses to these truths.

16. **Graceful Living:** Do you believe that Jesus was raised from the dead according to the eyewitnesses who claimed this truth? How does your faith about this truth influence your life?

Scriptural Insight: The Christian church rests on the resurrection of its Founder. Without this fact, the church could never have been born, or if born, it would soon have died a natural death. The miracle of the resurrection and the existence of Christianity are so closely connected that they must stand or fall together. If Christ was raised from the dead, then all his other miracles are sure, and our faith is impregnable; if he was not raised, he died in vain, and our faith is vain. It was only his resurrection that made his death available for our atonement, justification, and salvation; without the resurrection, his death would be the grave of our hopes; we should be still unredeemed and under the power of our sins. A gospel of a dead Savior would be a contradiction and wretched delusion. (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, Volume 1*, page 172)

What does the Bible say about the "Trinity?"

While confirming that there is only one true God, believers have worshiped Jesus Christ and have spoken of him in terms appropriate only of deity from the earliest days of Christianity. The Holy Spirit is also known as deity. You may be confused how Jesus could be God and the Spirit could be God and the Father could be God. Who is the one that is really God? The answer is all of them: three-in-one.

The Bible clearly teaches three Divine Persons, each rightly called God, yet all the one and same God. The doctrine of the *Trinity* (or "Tri-unity," a man-made label) is a summary of the teachings of the Bible regarding the nature of God.

17. Read the following verses where the three representations of the one true God are mentioned together and fill in the blanks.

Matthew 28:18-20: "...baptizing them in the name of the _____ and of the _____ and of the _____."
2 Corinthians 13:14: "May the grace of the _____, and the love of _____, and the fellowship of the _____ be with you all."
1 Peter 1:1-2: "...who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of _____, through the sanctifying work of the _____, to be obedient to _____."
Luke 3:21-22: "... _____ was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the _____ descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are _____, whom I love."

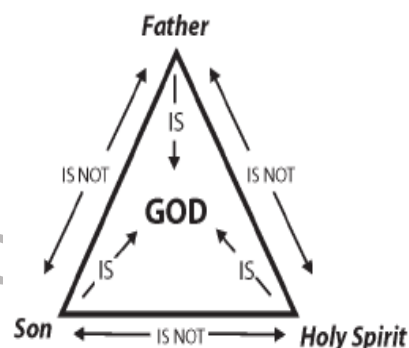
The doctrine of the Trinity ("Tri-unity") was formulated by the church after many years of reflecting on the biblical data and after rejecting many inadequate theories. The "problem" answered by the doctrine was created by apparently contradictory assertions:

- Biblical monotheism - the insistence that there is only one true God. *Exodus 20:2-3; Isaiah 42:8; 45:5*
- That *without denying biblical monotheism*, the apostles and early church worshiped Jesus Christ, and honored three Persons as God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. *Matthew 28:18-20; 2 Corinthians 13:14*
- Therefore, outsiders accused the church of falling into either *polytheism* (belief in more than one God) or *idolatry* (improperly worshiping someone as God - in this case, Jesus).

Church leaders gathered in Nicaea (modern Turkey) to verbalize what God revealed about himself: one in essence, three in persons. They wrote what is known as the Nicene Creed.

I believe in one God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made; Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary...And I believe in the Holy Spirit the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified... (*Nicene Creed*, AD 325)

The doctrine of the Trinity was defined after careful Bible study and debate. Since the earliest century, it has stood as an accurate representation of the Bible's teaching: **God is one in essence, three in Person**. The diagram at right is an attempt to picture this.



18. **Graceful Living:** Read 1 Timothy 2:3-6. God invites all men into a personal relationship with himself through faith in his Son Jesus Christ. *If Jesus Christ is who he claimed to be, then knowing him is the single most important issue in all of life.*

- Are you confident that you have made the choice to put your faith in Jesus? If not, you can do so right now. Just tell God that you know you have sinned in his sight. Tell him that you are putting your trust in Jesus for your salvation. Accept God's gift of forgiveness for all of your sins. Thank him for his goodness to you and his gift of eternal life.
- If you are confident that you have already put your faith in Jesus, what choice(s) as a Christian do you need to make in order to grow in the process of knowing him?

Think About It: "Today, all sorts of subjects are eagerly pursued; but the knowledge of God is neglected...Yet to know God is man's chief end, and justifies his existence. Even if a hundred lives were ours, this one aim would be sufficient for them all." (John Calvin)

Respond to God about what he has shown you in this lesson.

Recommended: Listen to "[Treasuring the Gift of Jesus Christ](#)" after doing this lesson to reinforce what you have learned. Use the following listener guide.

Treasuring the Gift of Jesus Christ

CHRISTIANITY IS CHRIST

- Christianity is Christ! It is not a lifestyle. It's not rules of conduct. It's not a society of people who have joined together by the sprinkling or covering of water. Christianity is a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

WHAT JESUS CLAIMED ABOUT HIMSELF

- Not only did Jesus claim to be God, but He also claimed to be the answer to the needs of the human heart. He consistently calls God His father. He declared His right to judge and said that He deserves the honor that belongs to God.
- Even in His trials before the Jewish and Roman leaders, Jesus clearly and boldly claimed His identity as the promised anointed one of God. He claimed to be the Son of Man who was also the Son of God.

JESUS WAS FULLY HUMAN.

- Jesus was fully human. He experienced the normal process of body development from a child to an adult man. He obeyed His parents and learned to live with at least 4 brothers and 2 sisters. In His human body, Jesus felt hunger and thirst, tears and anger, distress and pain.
- Because Jesus was fully human, He understands every single one of your heartaches, physical pains, feelings of rejection, strained relationships, abuse, grief, and impatience. He gets your joy, too.
- Jesus was fully human, but He did not sin because He lived in perfect love for God the Father, His Father. Because He loved God perfectly, He lived in perfect dependence on God the Father and perfect obedience. And, He gave us a pattern to follow so that we can learn to love God and to depend upon Him by faith, too.

JESUS WAS FULLY GOD.

- Jesus is the image of the invisible God. He is the exact representation of God's likeness. We're not talking about His face but His character. *Colossians 1:15; John 14:9*
- Jesus as the Son of God is the firstborn **over** all creation. This refers to Him being the one who had priority and supremacy over everything that God the Father owned. He inherited it all. *Colossians 1:15*
- Jesus was the Creator. He was not created. All things were created by Him and through Him. *Colossians 1:16; John 1:3*
- Jesus holds all things together. Christ is the controlling and unifying force in nature. *Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3*

- Jesus is also Head of the Church. The Jews and Gentiles are combined into one body of believers, and He is the Head of that body. *Colossians 1:18*
- All God's fullness dwells in Jesus. The totality of God's powers and attributes are in Jesus. There is nothing missing. There is nothing more of God that we can get apart from Jesus. *Colossians 1:19*
- Jesus Christ is fully God and is Lord over all. Jesus not only claimed Psalm 110:1 for Himself but also demonstrated that He was the Son of God who sits at God's right hand. Jesus is the Christ. He is also the Lord. Lord means master.
- As fully God and fully man, you can be confident that Jesus as human understands how you feel and is powerful enough as God to take care of your every need. When you go to Him in prayer, you can trust that He understands, that He knows how you are feeling and what your needs are at that moment. You can trust His compassion toward you to meet your needs. Are you confident of that?

JESUS DEMONSTRATED HOW MUCH HE LOVED AND VALUED WOMEN.

- The Lord Jesus also demonstrated in His life on earth how much He loved and valued women. He taught them truth about God, forgave them for their sins, accepted them in His circle of followers, and gave new life to them after His resurrection. His care for them was so countercultural to what they had previously known. Women recognized that and responded with love for Him and a desire to serve him. Jesus Christ entered into the midst of their lives, visibly representing God to them, loving them dearly, and changing their lives forever! He does the same for you and me today.
- Jesus invites you to trust in what He says about Himself—that He is the Son of God—and believe that He died on the cross for you. Have you done that?
- As soon as you trust in Christ to be your Savior, you begin a loving relationship with the God of the universe. From then on, you have a new spiritual life with God's Spirit living inside you and producing many new qualities in you as you respond to Him.
- You receive complete love and acceptance by God as your Father. You receive treasure that is yours to know and experience for the rest of your earthly life. When you trust in Christ, He is in your life forever. You will never be without him. Ever.
- The treasure that God offers you in Jesus Christ is greater than anything you could substitute for Him. Why not spend the rest of your life getting to know this Jesus who gave Himself for you so you could have a new life? That's graceful living.

Let Jesus satisfy your heart with His grace so that your life overflows with His grace every day. You will experience a life of freedom and joy!

Get *Graceful Living* at melanienewton.com as well as most online bookstores.

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The Rest of the Story

The following information is adapted from *Glimpses of Church History* (Issues #8, #9, and #217), published by Church History Institute.

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE TWELVE APOSTLES?

The New Testament tells of the fate of only two of the apostles: Judas (Iscaiot), who betrayed Jesus and then went out and hanged himself, and James the son of Zebedee, who was executed by Herod about 44 A.D. (Acts 12:2). As to the rest of the apostles, reports and legends abound, though not always reliable, but still giving us some clue as to what might have happened. An early legend says they cast lots and divided up the world to determine who would go where, so all could hear about Jesus. They suffered greatly for their faith and in most cases met violent deaths on account of their bold witness.

PETER and PAUL were both executed in Rome about 66 A.D., during the persecution under Emperor Nero. Paul was beheaded. Peter was crucified upside down, at his request, since he did not feel he was worthy to die in the same manner as his Lord.

ANDREW went to the "land of the man-eaters," in what is now the Soviet Union. Christians there claim him as the first to bring the gospel to their land. He also preached in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) and in Greece, where it is thought he was crucified.

THOMAS was probably most active in the area east of Syria. Tradition has him preaching in India, where the ancient Marthoma Christians revere him as their founder and claim that he died there when pierced through with the spears of four soldiers.

PHILIP possibly had a powerful ministry in Carthage in North Africa and then in Asia Minor, where the wife of a Roman proconsul accepted the gospel. In retaliation, the proconsul had Philip arrested and cruelly put to death.

MATTHEW the tax collector and writer of the Gospel bearing his name, ministered in Persia and Ethiopia. Some of the oldest reports say he was not martyred, while others say he was stabbed to death in Ethiopia.

BARTHOLOMEW (also known as Nathaniel) had widespread missionary travels attributed to him by tradition: to India with Thomas, back to Armenia, and also to Ethiopia and Southern Arabia. There are various accounts of how he met his death as a martyr for the gospel.

JAMES the son of Alphaeus, is one of at least three James referred to in the New Testament. This James is reckoned to have ministered in Syria. The Jewish historian Josephus reported that he was stoned and then clubbed to death.

SIMON THE ZEALOT, so the story goes, ministered in Persia and was killed after refusing to sacrifice to the sun god.

Little is known of Thaddaeus (also known as Judas, not Iscaiot).

MATTHIAS was the apostle chosen to replace Judas. Tradition sends him to Syria with Andrew and to death by burning.

JOHN is the only one of the company generally thought to have died a natural death from old age. He was the leader of the church in Ephesus. During Domitian's persecution in the middle 90's, he was exiled to the island of Patmos. There he wrote the last book of the New Testament—Revelation. An early Latin tradition has him escaping unhurt after being cast into boiling oil at Rome.

AGAINST ALL ODDS: THE SPREAD OF THE EARLY CHURCH

How did the early Christian church survive? Humanly speaking, the odds were all stacked against it. It was unthinkable that a small, despised movement from a corner of Palestine could move out to become the dominant faith of the mighty Roman Empire, an empire steeped in fiercely defended traditional pagan religions. The spread of the Christian church in its earliest centuries is one of the most amazing phenomena in all of human history. The church was considered a *religio prava*, an illegal and depraved religion. Wave after wave of persecution was unleashed to squash it. At least two of the persecutions were empire-wide and intended to destroy the church. So how did this young fledgling movement make it?

MORE THAN A BUILDING

The earliest Christians did not have church buildings. They typically met in homes. (The first actual church building to be found is at Dura Europos on the Euphrates, dating about 231.) They did not have public ceremonies that would introduce them to the public. They had no access to the mass media of their day. So how can we account for their steady and diverse expansion over the first three centuries?

After the Apostle Paul, we do not run across many "big names" as missionaries in the first few hundred years of Christian history. Instead the faith spread through a multitude of humble, ordinary believers whose names have been long forgotten.

TO THE CITIES!

Early Christianity was primarily an urban faith, establishing itself in the city centers of the Roman Empire. Most of the people lived close together in crowded tenements. There were few secrets in such a setting. The faith spread as neighbors saw the lives of the believers close-up, on a daily basis.

And what kind of lives did they lead? Justin Martyr, a noted early Christian theologian, wrote to Emperor Antoninus Pius in A.D. 153 and described the believers:

"We formerly rejoiced in uncleanness of life, but now love only chastity; before we used the magic arts, but now dedicate ourselves to the true and unbegotten God; before we loved money and possessions more than anything, but now we share what we have and to everyone who is in need; before we hated one another and killed one another and would not eat with those of another race, but now since the manifestation of Christ, we have come to a common life and pray for our enemies and try to win over those who hate us without just cause."

In another place, Justin points out how those opposed to Christianity were sometimes won over as they saw the consistency in the lives of believers, noting their extraordinary forbearance when cheated and their honesty in business dealings.

CARE AND PRAYER

Christians became known as those who cared for the sick. Many were known for the healing that resulted from their prayers. Christians also started the first "Meals on Wheels." By the year 250, they were feeding more than 1500 of the hungry and destitute in Rome every day.

When Emperor Julian ("the Apostate") wanted to revive pagan religion in the mid-300s, he gave a most helpful insight into how the church spread. This opponent of the faith said that Christianity

"has been specially advanced through the loving service rendered to strangers and through their care of the burial of the dead. It is a scandal that there is not a single Jew who is a beggar and that the [Christians] care not only for their own poor but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help we should render them."

On the surface, the early Christians appeared powerless and weak, they were an easy target for scorn and ridicule. They had no great financial resources, no buildings, no social status, no government approval, and no respect from the educators. And after they became separated from their first-century association with the Jewish synagogues, they lacked institutional backing and an ancient tradition to appeal to.

But what finally mattered is what they did have. They had a faith. They had a fellowship. They had a new way of life. They had a confidence that their Lord was alive in heaven and guiding their daily lives. These were the important things. And it made all the difference in laying a Christian foundation for all of Western civilization.

GOING TO CHURCH WITH THE EARLY CHRISTIANS

What was a typical worship service like in the century after Christ and the apostles died? In a letter to the emperor around A.D. 153, Christian philosopher and layman Justin Martyr explained what Christians believed and what they actually did when they gathered. From Justin's account, we learn that the central elements of worship have for the most part remained consistent from the earliest days of the church until today: The Word of God (both read and preached), corporate prayer (including the Psalms), Communion (using bread and wine), and an offering (so the church could care for the poor).

THE LORD'S DAY

The early Christians gathered on Sunday (the pagan name of the first day of the week), which they usually called the "Lord's Day."

"We all make our assembly in common on Sunday, since it is the first day, on which God changed darkness and matter and made the world, and Jesus Christ our Savior arose from the dead on the same day. For they crucified him on the day before Saturn's day [Saturday], and on the day after (which is the day of the Sun) he appeared to his apostles and disciples and taught these things, which we have offered for your consideration."
(From the *First Apology of Justin Martyr*)

They read Scripture aloud, usually the writings that became the New Testament and/or the Old Testament. The reader read as long as time permitted. The average person could not read so these readings provided the main opportunity for Christians to learn the Bible.

The congregational leader—the "presiding brother" who was bishop, overseer, or pastor—gave a sermon. The sermon was based on the Scripture reading of the day and made a practical application, urging the congregation to imitate "these good things."

BROTHERS AND SISTERS

The congregation stood and prayed together. In the early church, a person kneeled or prostrated himself to express humility, repentance, and confession of sin. Standing was a sign of joy and boldness. They stood when they prayed because they believed that as God's children they had the freedom and privilege to come boldly into His presence through Christ. As Justin describes it, their prayer began with an address to God as Father and Creator, glorified Him for His mighty acts,

moved from giving thanks to asking for God's help, and closed with praise—all in the name of Christ.

Besides singing the Psalms as prayer, early Christians also sang other poetic sections of the Bible and composed their own hymns. Our earliest Christian "hymnbook" is The Odes of Solomon from the second or third century.

They kissed each other. At least on occasions when there was a baptism, Justin wrote, "we salute one another with a kiss." The "holy kiss" was an expression of brotherly love, a sign of being in fellowship with one another. It welcomed newly baptized believers into the family of God.

COMMUNION (THE LORD'S SUPPER)

They set apart bread and wine. The bread and wine may have been ordinary, but they were now set apart and given new meaning. In the first century, the Lord's Supper was celebrated as part of an entire meal.

The leader gave thanks to God. The New Testament usually refers to communion as "the breaking of bread," but second century Christian writers called it the "thanksgiving" (Latin, Eucharist). Unlike the bloody sacrifices of pagan religions, Christians offered the spiritual sacrifice of prayer and thanksgiving. The leader sent "up praise and glory to the Father through the name of his Son and of the Holy Spirit and makes thanksgiving at length for the gifts we were counted worthy to receive from him."

The congregation said "Amen." The word amen is Hebrew for "may it be so." Just as in the Jewish synagogues, the early Christians gave their amen after the prayer or doxology to show their assent to what had been said. This was an acclamation—shouted out, not mumbled.

The bread and wine were distributed by the deacons. Sharing the bread and wine expressed the fellowship of the believing community. The deacons even carried them to those who were sick at home or unable to be present physically.

Everyone who wanted to do so gave money. Unlike the "dues" of clubs and private associations that were so common in the Roman Empire, the Christians' offerings were entirely voluntary—a free gift. The money benefited orphans, widows, the sick, prisoners, and strangers.

BACK TO THE BASICS

Worship was balanced. In the first part of the service (focused on the Word), God speaks to human beings through Scripture, and humans speak to God through prayer. In the second part of the service (focused on the Lord's Supper), the bread and wine represent God's gift to His people, and the offering represents the people's gifts to God.

Who Is the Holy Spirit?

Adapted from an article written by Sid Litke, Th.M., accessed at www.bible.org

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the triune Godhead (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14).

He Is Personal—The Spirit is not an impersonal “it” or simply an influence but a personal being just as the Father and the Son. He has intelligence (1 Cor. 2:10-11), emotions (Ephesians 4:30), and a will (1 Cor. 2:11). He teaches (John 14:26), commands (Acts 8:29), and intercedes for us in prayer (Rom. 8:26).

His Role in the Old Testament—Prior to the Church Age, the Holy Spirit took part in creation (Genesis 1:2; Job 33:4; Psalm 104:30). He guided and protected Israel (Isaiah 63:10-14). He spoke through prophets to produce Scripture (1 Peter 1:11; 2 Peter 1:20-21). He selectively and temporarily indwelt certain people in the Old Testament, specifically enabling each to do a particular task (Genesis 41:38; Numbers 27:18; and 1 Sam. 10:9,10; 16:13).

His Role in Salvation—In the Church Age, the Spirit is central in salvation. He directs and enables evangelistic efforts (Philip/Ethiopian, Acts 8:26,29; Great Commission, Acts 1:8). He convicts the unbeliever of sin (John 16:8-11) and regenerates (saves) the person. He cleanses the person from sin and gives him the new nature (Titus 3:5). As He performs this spiritual “new birth,” the person enters “the kingdom of God” gaining eternal life (John 3:3-7,16). The Spirit seals (eternally secures) the person. The presence of the Holy Spirit is the “seal” or guarantee that a person is saved and will remain saved (Eph. 1:13). And, the Spirit gives spiritual gifts to believers, graciously enabling all believers to serve in spiritual ministry.

The Baptism of the Spirit—The Holy Spirit baptizes (places) the person into the body of Christ. It is the Spirit’s work of uniting us with Christ – spiritually identifying us with Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-5). It is the Spirit’s work to incorporate us into the universal church, the “body of Christ” made up of all church age believers (1 Cor. 12:13). This baptism of the Spirit occurs once and for all at the salvation of each believer (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:26-28).

The Indwelling of the Spirit—The Spirit indwells all believers permanently in this age (Romans 5:5; 8:9; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; John 14:16). The Spirit’s indwelling is the basis for His other ministries in believers’ lives. He teaches and illumines us about scripture (John 16:13). He aids in prayer (Romans 8:26). He assures us of our salvation (Romans 8:16) and enables us to grow (Ephesians 5:18).

The Filling of the Spirit—The Holy Spirit “fills” believers. The “filling of the Spirit” describes the crucial work of God enabling the believer to live a transformed life. The only way we grow spiritually is by the empowering work of God (1 Peter 1:3). It is specifically the ministry of the Holy Spirit that gives a Christian the capability of change and growth in righteousness (Rom.8:13; Gal.5:22-23). We are either controlled by our self-centered flesh, or we are controlled by the Holy Spirit who indwells us (Rom. 8:4-11; Gal. 5:16,17). Eph. 5:18 describes this controlling/empowering ministry of the Spirit as the “filling” of the Spirit. “Filling” is a metaphor (picture) of control. We can be filled/controlled by fleshly desires (like alcohol) or be filled/controlled by the Spirit. Although it’s the Spirit’s power that is at work, the believer must choose to be controlled/empowered by the Spirit. It is a command to “Be filled” and likewise to “Walk in the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16). The Spirit’s presence is permanent (indwelling), but we must repeatedly choose to yield to God to experience the Spirit’s transforming power to change and grow us. In actual experience, “walking in the Spirit” or “being filled with the Spirit” means living the Christian life (facing temptations, making decisions, etc.) with a conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit. He is the one who enables us – producing godly “fruits” (Gal. 5:22-23).

Christianity: The Best Thing That Ever Happened to Women

by Sue Bohlin

The Low Status of Women in Jesus' Day

Some feminists charge that Christianity, the Bible, and the Church are anti-female and horribly oppressive to women. Does God really hate women? Did the apostle Paul disrespect them in his New Testament writings? In this article, we'll be looking at why Christianity is the best thing that ever happened to women, with insights from Alvin Schmidt's book *How Christianity Changed the World*.

"What would be the status of women in the Western world today had Jesus Christ never entered the human arena? One way to answer this question," writes Dr. Schmidt, "is to look at the status of women in most present-day Islamic countries. Here women are still denied many rights that are available to men, and when they appear in public, they must be veiled. In Saudi Arabia, for instance, women are even barred from driving an automobile. Whether in Saudi Arabia or in many other Arab countries where the Islamic religion is adhered to strongly, a man has the right to beat and sexually desert his wife, all with the full support of the Koran ... This command is the polar opposite of what the New Testament says regarding a man's relationship with his wife. Paul told the Christians in Ephesus, 'Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.' And he added, 'He who loves his wife loves himself.'"

Jesus loved women and treated them with great respect and dignity. The New Testament's teaching on women developed His perspective even more. The value of women that permeates the New Testament isn't found in the Greco-Roman culture or the cultures of other societies.

In ancient Greece, a respectable woman was not allowed to leave the house unless a trustworthy male escort accompanied her. A wife was not permitted to eat or interact with male guests in her husband's home; she had to retire to her woman's quarters. Men kept their wives under lock and key, and women had the social status of a slave. Girls were not allowed to go to school, and when they grew up they were not allowed to speak in public. Women were considered inferior to men. The Greek poets equated women with evil. Remember Pandora and her box? Woman was responsible for unleashing evil on the world.

The status of Roman women was also very low. Roman law placed a wife under the absolute control of her husband, who had ownership of her and all her possessions. He could divorce her if she went out in public without a veil. A husband had the power of life and death over his wife, just as he did his children. As with the Greeks, women were not allowed to speak in public.

Jewish women, as well, were barred from public speaking. The oral law prohibited women from reading the Torah out loud. Synagogue worship was segregated, with women never allowed to be heard.

Jesus and Women

Jesus' treatment of women was very different. The extremely low status that the Greek, Roman, and Jewish woman had for centuries was radically affected by the appearance of Jesus Christ. His actions and teachings raised the status of women to new heights, often to the consternation and dismay of his friends and enemies. By word and deed, he went against the ancient, taken-for-granted beliefs and practices that defined woman as socially, intellectually, and spiritually inferior.

The humane and respectful way Jesus treated and responded to the Samaritan woman [at the well] (recorded in John 4) may not appear unusual to readers in today's Western culture. Yet what he did was extremely unusual, even radical. He ignored the Jewish anti-Samaritan prejudices along with prevailing view that saw women as inferior beings.

He started a conversation with her—a Samaritan, a woman—in public. The rabbinic oral law was quite explicit: "He who talks with a woman [in public] brings evil upon himself." Another rabbinic teaching prominent in Jesus' day taught, "One is not so much as to greet a woman." So we can understand why his disciples were amazed to find him talking to a woman in public. Can we even imagine how it must have stunned this woman for the Messiah to reach out to her and offer her living water for her thirsty soul?

Among Jesus' closest friends were Mary, Martha and Lazarus, who entertained him at their home. "Martha assumed the traditional female role of preparing a meal for Jesus, her guest, while her sister Mary did what only men would do, namely, learn from Jesus' teachings. Mary was the cultural deviant, but so was Jesus, because he violated the rabbinic law of his day [about speaking to women]." By teaching Mary spiritual truths, he violated another rabbinic law, which said, "Let the words of the Law [Torah] be burned rather than taught to women ... If a man teaches his daughter the law, it is as though he taught her lechery."

When Lazarus died, Jesus comforted Martha with this promise containing the heart of the Christian gospel: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26) These remarkable words were spoken to a woman! "To teach a woman was bad enough, but Jesus did more than that. He called for a verbal response from Martha. Once more, he went against the socioreligious custom by teaching a woman and by having her publicly respond to him, a man."

"All three of the Synoptic Gospels note that women followed Jesus, a highly unusual phenomenon in first-century Palestine ... This behavior may not seem unusual today, but in Jesus' day it was highly unusual. Scholars note that in the prevailing culture only prostitutes and women of very low repute would follow a man without a male escort." These women were not groupies; some of them provided financial support for Jesus and the apostles (Luke 8:3).

The first people Jesus chose to appear to after his resurrection were women; not only that, but he instructed them to tell his disciples that he was alive (Matt. 28, John 20). In a culture where a woman's testimony was worthless because she was worthless, Jesus elevated the value of women beyond anything the world had seen.

Paul, Peter, and Women

Jesus gave women status and respect equal to men. Not only did he break with the anti-female culture of his era, but he set a standard for Christ-followers. Peter and Paul both rose to the challenge in what they wrote in the New Testament.

In a culture that feared the power of a woman's external beauty and feminine influence, Peter encouraged women to see themselves as valuable because God saw them as valuable. His call to aspire to the inner beauty of a trusting and tranquil spirit is staggeringly counter-cultural. He writes, "Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful."

Equally staggering is his call to men to elevate their wives with respect and understanding: "Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder

your prayers.” Consideration, respect, fellow heirs; these concepts sound good to us, but they were unheard of in the first century!

The apostle Paul is often accused of being a misogynist, one who hates and fears women. But Paul’s teachings on women reflect the creation order and high value God places on women as creatures made in his image. Paul’s commands for husbands and wives in Ephesians 5 provided a completely new way to look at marriage: as an earthbound illustration of the spiritual mystery of the union of Christ and His bride, the church. He calls wives to not only submit to their husbands as to the Lord, but he calls husbands to submit to Christ (1 Cor. 11:3). He calls men to love their wives in the self-sacrificing way Christ loves the church. In a culture where a wife was property, and a disrespected piece of property at that, Paul elevates women to a position of honor previously unknown in the world.

Paul also provided highly countercultural direction for the New Testament church. In the Jewish synagogue, women had no place and no voice in worship. In the pagan temples, the place of women was to serve as prostitutes. The church, on the other hand, was a place for women to pray and prophecy out loud (1 Cor. 11:5). The spiritual gifts—supernatural enabling to build God’s church—are given to women as well as men. Older women are commanded to teach younger ones. The invitation to women to participate in worship of Jesus was unthinkable—but true.

Misogyny in the Church

Author Dorothy Sayers, a friend of C.S. Lewis, wrote:

Perhaps it is no wonder that the women were first at the Cradle and last at the Cross. They had never known a man like this Man—there had never been such another. A prophet and teacher who never nagged at them, who never flattered or coaxed or patronized; who never made arch jokes about them, never treated them either as ‘The women, God help us!’ or ‘The ladies, God bless them!’; who rebuked without querulousness and praised without condescension; who took their questions and arguments seriously, who never mapped out their sphere for them, never urged them to be feminine or jeered at them for being female; who had no ax to grind and no uneasy male dignity to defend; who took them as he found them and was completely unselfconscious.

She continues: “There is no act, no sermon, no parable in the whole Gospel that borrows its pungency from female perversity; nobody could possibly guess from the words of Jesus that there was anything ‘funny’ about woman’s nature.” And this is one of the unfortunate truths about Christianity we have to acknowledge: over the centuries, many Christ-followers have fallen far short of the standard Jesus set in showing the worth and dignity of women.

In the second century, Clement of Alexandria believed and taught that every woman should blush because she is a woman. Tertullian, who lived about the same time, said, “You [Eve] are the devil’s gateway ... You destroyed so easily God’s image, man. On account of your desert, that is death, even the Son of God had to die.” Augustine, in the fourth century, believed that a woman’s image of God was inferior to that of the man’s. And, unfortunately, it gets even nastier than that.

Some people mistakenly believe these contemptuous beliefs of the church fathers are rooted in an anti-female Bible, but that couldn’t be farther from the truth. People held these misogynistic beliefs *in spite of*, not because of, the biblical teachings. Those who dishonor God by dishonoring His good creation of woman allow themselves to be shaped by the beliefs of the surrounding pagan, anti-female culture instead of following Paul’s exhortation to not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2). The church in North America does the same

thing today by allowing the secular culture to shape our thinking more than the Bible. Only nine percent of Americans claiming to be born-again have a biblical worldview. The church in Africa and Asia does the same thing today by allowing animism, the traditional folk religion, to shape their thinking more than the Bible.

It's unfortunate that some of the church fathers did not allow the woman-honoring principles found in Scripture to change their unbiblical beliefs. But that is the failing of imperfect followers of Jesus, not a failure of God or of His Word. Jesus loves women.

Effects of Christianity on Culture

As Christianity spread throughout the world, its redemptive effects elevated women and set them free in many ways. The Christian ethic declared equal worth and value for both men and women. Husbands were commanded to love their wives and not exasperate their children. These principles were in direct conflict with the Roman institution of *patria potestas*, which gave absolute power of life and death over a man's family, including his wife. When *patria potestas* was finally repealed by an emperor who was moved by high biblical standards, what a tremendous effect that had on the culture! Women were also granted basically the same control over their property as men, and, for the first time, mothers were allowed to be guardians of their children.

The biblical view of husbands and wives as equal partners caused a sea change in marriage as well. Christian women started marrying later, and they married men of their own choosing. This eroded the ancient practice of men marrying child brides against their will, often as young as eleven or twelve years old. The greater marital freedom that Christianity gave women eventually gained wide appeal. Today, a Western woman is not compelled to marry someone she does not want, nor can she legally be married as a child bride. But the practice continues in parts of the world where Christianity has little or no presence.

Another effect of the salt and light of Christianity was its impact on the common practice of polygamy, which demeans women. Many men, including biblical heroes, have had multiple wives, but Jesus made clear this was never God's intention. Whenever he spoke about marriage, it was always in the context of monogamy. He said, "The two [not three or four] will become one flesh." As Christianity spread, God's intention of monogamous marriages became the norm.

Two more cruel practices were abolished as Christianity gained influence. In some cultures, such as India, widows were burned alive on their husbands' funeral pyres. In China, the crippling practice of foot binding was intended to make women totter on their pointed, slender feet in a seductive manner. It was finally outlawed only about a hundred years ago.

As a result of Jesus Christ and His teachings, women in much of the world today, especially in the West, enjoy more privileges and rights than at any other time in history. It takes only a cursory trip to an Arab nation or to a Third World country to see how little freedom women have in countries where Christianity has had little or no presence. It's the best thing that ever happened to women.

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About the Author: Sue Bohlin is an associate speaker with Probe Ministries (a non-profit ministry whose mission is to assist the church in renewing the minds of believers with a Christian worldview and to equip the church to engage the world for Christ). All the original articles and sources cited can be found at Probe's website under Articles: Current Issues.

Shape Your Faith Story using Three Words!*

Your story is Jesus' story in your life. Only you know it and can share it. Someone might reject the gospel facts, but it's very hard to argue with someone's experience of the gospel.

1. Choose the first word to describe your life, feelings, situation, or thoughts before trusting in Christ. Examples: angry, independent, manipulative, miserable, hopeless, empty, addicted, me-centered, restless, striving, confused, insecure, worried, childlike.

WORD #1 _____

2. Choose the second word to describe how you came to trust in Christ. Examples: *creation, studied, concert, grew, Bible, friend, trouble, observation, evangelist, spouse, loved, teacher, parent.*

WORD #2 _____

3. Choose the third word to describe your life, feelings, situation, or thoughts since trusting in Christ. Examples: *peaceful, loving, trusting, freedom, servant, hopeful, compassionate, confident.*

WORD #3 _____

Using your three words, create 2-4 sentences for each word—just a brief explanation of how each word relates to your story. See the example at right using *me-centered*, *evangelist*, and *trusting*.

[illegible]

Example:

*"Before coming to faith in Jesus Christ, I was **ME-CENTERED** and thought I was in control of my life. If I wanted something to happen (specifically, get a boyfriend!), I had to make it happen!"*

*My sisters came to faith before I did, and through them I saw a lack in my own life. When I heard an **EVANGELIST** on TV present the gospel, I realized what the lack was. It was a Person, Jesus Christ, and I prayed and asked Him to forgive my sins.*

Now, I am most blessed in relinquishing control to Him, **TRUSTING** Him with all my heart, leaning not on my own understanding, acknowledging Him in all my ways and allowing Him to straighten my paths.

**Adapted from "Create Your Own 3 Word Testimony" at www.evantell.org.*

Small Group Discussion Guide

Lesson 1 Discussion Guide

Note: This discussion guide is based on a 90-minute group meeting. Adjust accordingly to your time frame.

- ✓ Read Lesson One introduction on page 5. This is vision-casting for the study.
- ✓ Ask participants to read the verses and the extras. I'll just say "Read" and you'll know what I mean.

DAY ONE STUDY:

- ✓ Read the "Who is the Holy Spirit?" section. While reading, tell women to mark anything that jumps out at them or is new to them. Ask Q1.
- ✓ Read the ABCs. While covering this, tell women to mark anything that jumps out at them or is new to them. Ask Q2.
- ✓ Read "Think About It." Go over the "Hot Spots" stuff on top of page 8.
- ✓ Read "Think About It." Ask Q3.

DAY TWO STUDY:

- ✓ Read Luke 1:1-4. Ask Q4.
- ✓ Read "Focus on the Meaning." Ask Q5.
- ✓ Read Acts 1:1-3. Ask Q6.
- ✓ Read "From the Greek." Ask Qs7-8.

DAY THREE STUDY:

- ✓ Read Acts 1:4-11. Ask Q9.
- ✓ Read "Focus on the Meaning." Skip Q10.
- ✓ Ask Q11.

DAY FOUR STUDY:

- ✓ Read Acts 1:12-26. Cover Qs 12-15.

WRAP-UP:

- ✓ Point out some things about decision-making while living in dependence on Christ. Here's [my blog on that](#). It also includes information about the difference between what is descriptive and what is prescriptive in narratives, especially. It's important to recognize the difference.
- ✓ Then, challenge them with Q16.
- ✓ Close in a worship song such as "Build My Life" because the words fit the message of the book of Acts.

Lesson 2 Discussion Guide

Opening question: share your Holy Spirit Hot Spots. Guidance for decisions? What God showed you this week? How you trusted Him?

- ✓ Highlight strategic points from the introduction. Ask for comments on the “Scriptural Insight.”

DAY ONE STUDY:

- ✓ Read Acts 2:1-13. Ask Q1.
- ✓ Summarize “Historical Insight.” Ask Qs2-5.
- ✓ Read “Think About It.” Ask Q6.
- ✓ Read Acts 2:22-24; 29-41. Ask Qs7-8.
- ✓ Read “Historical Insight.” Ask Q10. Skip Q11—just summarize it after Q12.
- ✓ Read “Focus on the Meaning” and ask Q13.

DAY TWO STUDY

- ✓ Read Acts 3:1-10. Ask Qs14-21.
- ✓ Read Acts 3:11-26. For Q22, select a few to ask. Ask Qs23-25

DAY THREE STUDY

- ✓ Read Acts 4:1-7. Ask Q26 – sum up the first 3 questions. Ask #4
- ✓ Read Acts 4:8-22. Ask Q2. Skip Q28. Ask Q29.
- ✓ Read Acts 23-31. Ask Qs30-31.
- ✓ Consider having everyone pray together aloud at the same time, in whatever language they knew—praising God, asking for Him to show you His wonders and to enable you to speak boldly for Him.

DAY FOUR STUDY

- ✓ Read Acts 4:32-37. Ask Qs32-33. Skip Q34 unless you are all part of the same church.
- ✓ Read Acts 5:1-11. Ask Q35 What jumped out at you?
- ✓ Ask Q36. Skip Q37.
- ✓ Read “Think About It” instead. Asked for feedback from the “Something’s About to Happen” essay.

WRAP-UP:

- ✓ Sing “Build My Life” and close in prayer.

Lesson 3 Discussion Guide

Opening question: share your Holy Spirit Hot Spots. Guidance for decisions? What God showed you this week? How you trusted Him?

- ✓ Have someone read the Introduction 2nd paragraph.

DAY ONE STUDY:

- ✓ Read Acts 5:12-16. Ask Qs1-2.
- ✓ Read “Scriptural Insight,” emphasizing the last sentence.
- ✓ Read Acts 5:17-42. For Q3, select a few to ask. Ask Q4
- ✓ Read “Focus on the Meaning.” Ask Qs5-6
- ✓ Q7—Ask for 1-2 people to share for either part.
- ✓ Skip “Deeper Discoveries.”

DAY TWO STUDY

- ✓ Read “Historical Insight” before reading Acts 6:1-7. Ask Qs8-9
- ✓ Skip Q10. Ask Qs11-12. Skip Q13.
- ✓ Read “Focus on the Meaning” last sentence then ask Q14.

DAY THREE STUDY

- ✓ Read Acts 6:8-15. Ask Qs15-16. Skip Q17.
- ✓ Read “Scriptural Insight.” Ask Qs18-19.

DAY FOUR STUDY

- ✓ Read selections from Acts 7:1-53 that show the pattern of God’s promises and the rejection of the promise or the messenger. Ask Qs20-21
- ✓ Read “Think About It,” including 1 Corinthians 2:6-10.
- ✓ Read Acts 7:48-53. Ask Q24.
- ✓ Read “From the Greek” if time. Ask Qs25-26.
- ✓ Read “Think About It.” Ask Qs27-29.
- ✓ Ask Q30.

WRAP-UP:

- ✓ Sing “Build My Life” and close in prayer.

Lesson 4 Discussion Guide

Opening question: share your Holy Spirit Hot Spots. Guidance for decisions? What God showed you this week? How you trusted Him?

DAY ONE STUDY:

- ✓ Highlight strategic points from the introduction.
- ✓ Read Acts 7:58-8:3. Ask Q1.
- ✓ Read Acts 8:4-8. Ask Qs2-3
- ✓ Read Acts 8:9-25. Ask Qs4-10 (avoid rabbit trail on Simon the magician)

DAY TWO STUDY

- ✓ Read Acts 8:26-40. Ask Qs11-12.
- ✓ Ask Qs13-14.

DAY THREE STUDY

- ✓ Q16—read those verses and discuss chart. Ask Q17
- ✓ Read Acts 9:1-9. Ask Qs18-19. Ask Q20—read Acts 26:12-16.
- ✓ Read Acts 9:10-19. Ask Qs22-25.
- ✓ Read Acts 22:14-15. Ask Qs27-28.

DAY FOUR STUDY

- ✓ Read Acts 9:20-31. Ask Qs30-33.
- ✓ Ask Q34. Read Acts 22:17-21 and ask Q35 if time.
- ✓ Read Acts 9:32-43 and ask Qs36-38 if time.
- ✓ Ask for questions about essay that follows. Have them turn to page 67. Read paragraph under section “A Life Transformed.” Look at chart at top of page to see where Paul’s traits were redirected to God’s purposes or transformed to better ones. Give them time to list their own good and not-so-good traits developed early in life. How has God redirected the good ones and transformed the not-so-good ones to be more like those of Jesus?

WRAP-UP:

- ✓ Sing “Reckless Love of God” and close in prayer.

Lesson 5 Discussion Guide

Opening question: share your Holy Spirit Hot Spots. Guidance for decisions? What God showed you this week? How you trusted Him?

- ✓ Highlight strategic points from the introduction, especially the “unexpected.”

DAY ONE STUDY:

- ✓ Read Acts 10:1-8. For Q1 ask, “What did you notice?”
- ✓ Read Acts 10:9-23. Ask Q2, skip Q3. Ask Q4

DAY TWO STUDY:

- ✓ Read Acts 10:23-48. For Q5 ask, “What did you notice?”
- ✓ Ask Qs6-10.
- ✓ Read Acts 11:1-18. Ask Qs11-13.

DAY THREE STUDY

- ✓ Read Acts 11:19-26. For Q14, select a few to ask.
- ✓ Ask Qs15-17. Skip Q18.
- ✓ Ask Qs19-20.

DAY FOUR STUDY

- ✓ Read Acts 12:6-17. For Q21 ask, “What did you notice?”
- ✓ Combine Qs22-23. Ask Q24.
- ✓ Read Acts 12:19-25 if there is time. Ask Qs25-26.

WRAP-UP:

- ✓ Sing “Build My Life” and close in prayer.

Lesson 6 Discussion Guide

Opening question: share your Holy Spirit Hot Spots. Guidance for decisions? What God showed you this week? How you trusted Him?

- ✓ Highlight strategic points from the introduction, especially that “changes” are opportunities.

DAY ONE STUDY

- ✓ Read Acts 13:1-12. For Q1, select a few to ask.
- ✓ Ask Qs2-5.

DAY TWO STUDY

- ✓ Read Acts 13:13-16, 38-52. For Q6, select a few to ask.
- ✓ Skip Q7. Ask Qs8-10.
- ✓ Sum up Qs11-12. Ask Q13.
- ✓ Skip Q14. Ask Qs15-17.
- ✓ Ask Qs18-19, if time.

DAY THREE STUDY

- ✓ Read Acts 14:1-7. Ask Qs20-21.
- ✓ Read Acts 14:8-20. Ask Qs22-27

DAY FOUR STUDY

- ✓ Read Acts 14:20-28. Ask Qs28-30.
- ✓ Extra Q for small group discussion then sharing with large group: What have you learned from Paul's first missionary journey that can help you serve God faithfully wherever He has appointed you to live and go?

WRAP-UP:

- ✓ Sing “You Are God Alone” and close in prayer.

Lesson 7 Discussion Guide

Opening question: share your Holy Spirit Hot Spots and what fills your heart with joy from the Lord.

- ✓ It's JOY day! Emphasize how often joy is mentioned in today's lesson.

DAY ONE STUDY

- ✓ Read Acts 15:1-5. For Q1, select a few to ask.
- ✓ Read Acts 15:6-11. For Q2, select a few to ask. Ask Q3 then skip Q4.
- ✓ Acts 15:12-21 Don't read. Sum up Qs5-6.
- ✓ Ask Qs7-8 then skip Q9. Combine Qs10-11.

DAY TWO STUDY

- ✓ For Acts 15:22-35, read vv. 24-35 only.
- ✓ For Qs12-13 ask, "What grabbed your attention from this letter?"
- ✓ Ask Q14 and read "Think About It." Skip Q15.
- ✓ Read Acts 15:36-41. For Q16, ask "What grabbed your attention?"
- ✓ Ask Qs17-18 and read the last part of "Scriptural Insight." Ask Q19.

DAY THREE STUDY

- ✓ Read Acts 16:1-10. (Do the two sections together.) Skip Q20 except for the one about Timothy
- ✓ Ask Q21 then skip Q22. For Q23, focus on vv. 6-10. Read paragraph at the top of p. 101.
- ✓ Read Acts 16: 11-15. Ask Qs24-25

DAY FOUR STUDY

- ✓ Read Acts 16:16-24. For Qs26-28, have a general discussion about what happened
- ✓ Read Acts 16:25-34. For Q29, select a few to ask.
- ✓ Ask Qs30-33.
- ✓ Read Acts 16:35-40. Ask Qs34-36.
- ✓ Read paragraph after Q36. Ask Q37. Ask for comments about essay on women in the back of the guide.

WRAP-UP:

- ✓ Sing "Build My Life" and close in prayer.

Lesson 8 Discussion Guide

Opening question: share your Holy Spirit Hot Spots. Guidance for decisions? What God showed you this week? How you trusted Him?

DAY ONE STUDY

- ✓ Read Acts 17:1-9. For Q1, sum up the first few then ask selected ones. Ask Q2.
- ✓ Read Acts 17:10-15. For Q3, select a few to ask. Read "Think About It."
- ✓ Ask Qs 5-6 and read "Think About It." Ask Qs4&7 combined.

DAY TWO STUDY

- ✓ Read Acts 17:16-34. For Q8, select a few to ask. Ask Q9.
- ✓ For Q10 ask, "What was meaningful to you?"
- ✓ Ask Qs11-14.
- ✓ Summarize Q15 and read "Historical Insight." Ask Qs16-17.

DAY THREE STUDY

- ✓ Read Acts 18:1-18. For Q18, select a few to ask.
- ✓ Ask Qs19-20. Skip Q21. Ask Qs22-23.
- ✓ Read Acts 18:9-17. Skip Q24. Ask Qs26-29.
- ✓ Read "Think About It" and ask Q29.

DAY FOUR STUDY

- ✓ Read Acts 18:18-23. Skip Q30. Ask Qs31-35.
- ✓ Read Acts 18:24-28. Ask Qs36-38

WRAP-UP:

- ✓ Sing "You Are God Alone" and close in prayer.

Lesson 9 Discussion Guide

Opening question: share your Holy Spirit Hot Spots. What God showed you this week? How you trusted Him?

DAY ONE STUDY

- ✓ Read Acts 19:1-7. Ask Qs1-2. Read paragraph at top of p. 124.
- ✓ Read Acts 19:8-22. Read "Historical Insight." For Q3, select a few to ask.
- ✓ Ask Q4 then skip Q5. Read "Think About It."
- ✓ Ask Qs6-7 and read "Focus on the Meaning." Ask Q8.

DAY TWO STUDY

- ✓ Read Acts 19:21-41. Ask Q9.
- ✓ Ask Qs10-11.

DAY THREE STUDY

- ✓ Read Acts 20:1-6. Read Historical Insight. Ask Q12.
- ✓ Read Acts 20:7-12. Skip Q13. Ask Qs14-17.

DAY FOUR STUDY

- ✓ For Acts 20:13-38, read in sections. Don't read vv. 13-17 but ask Q18.
- ✓ Read vv. 18-27. Ask Qs 19-22.
- ✓ Read vv. 28-38. Ask Qs 23-28.
- ✓ Read Loyalty paragraphs. Ask Q29

WRAP-UP:

- ✓ Close with prayer for churches represented in your group.
- ✓ Give 3-word story handout for Lesson 10, Question 18 to those who didn't get it already.

Lesson 10 Discussion Guide

Opening question: What has the Lord done in your life or through you to influence others in the past 11 years? (Time from Paul's first missionary journey to his arrest in Jerusalem.)

To have plenty of faith-story sharing time (Q18), I suggest you don't read all the verses in chapters 21-22.

DAY ONE STUDY

- ✓ Acts 21:1-16—read vv. 10-14. For Q1 ask, "What did you notice?"
- ✓ Ask Q2 and read "Scriptural Insight." Ask Q3.
- ✓ Acts 21:17-26. For Q4, select a few to ask.
- ✓ For Q5, read 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. Ask Q6

DAY TWO STUDY

- ✓ Acts 21:27-36. For Q7, select a few to ask. Ask Qs8-10.
- ✓ Acts 21:37-22:22—read vv. 17-22. Skip Q11 but read the paragraph after it.
- ✓ Ask Q12. Skip Q13, do Q14, skip Q15.
- ✓ Acts 22:22-29. Summarize and skip Q17.
- ✓ Come back to Q18 at the end so you can spend lots of time in faith-story sharing.

DAY THREE STUDY

- ✓ Acts 22:30-23:11—read vv. 1-11. For Q19, select a few to ask.
- ✓ Ask Qs20-22. Skip Q23.
- ✓ Acts 23:12-34. For Q24, select a few to ask.
- ✓ Ask Qs25-27.

DAY FOUR STUDY

- ✓ Acts 24:1-27—read vv. 10-27. Ask Qs28-31. Skip Q32
- ✓ Go back to Q18—share faith stories using the 3-word story worksheet.

WRAP-UP:

- ✓ Sing "In Christ Alone" and close in prayer.

Lesson 11 Discussion Guide

Opening question: share your Holy Spirit Hot Spots. What God showed you this week? How you trusted Him?

- ✓ To have plenty of time to cover Paul's voyage to Rome, I suggest you don't read all the verses in chapters 25-26.

DAY ONE STUDY

- ✓ Acts 25:1-22. For Q1, select a few to ask. Skip Qs2-3.
- ✓ Acts 25:23-26:32—read in sections. For Q4, select a few to ask. Skip Q5.
- ✓ Read vv. 1-8. Ask Qs6-7.
- ✓ Read vv. 17-32. For Q8, select a few to ask. Ask Qs9-10.

DAY TWO STUDY

- ✓ Read Acts 27:1-12. For Q11, select a few to ask. Ask Qs12-13.
- ✓ Read Acts 27:13-16. Ask all of Q14. Ask Qs15-16.

DAY THREE STUDY

- ✓ Read Acts 27:27-44. Ask Qs17-19.
- ✓ Read Scriptural Insight and ask "What did they have to do through human effort?"
- ✓ Skip Q20. Ask Q21.
- ✓ Read Acts 28:1-10. Ask Q23 all.
- ✓ Skip Q24. Ask Qs25-26.

DAY FOUR STUDY

- ✓ Read Acts 28:11-31 if time. For Q27, select a few to ask.
- ✓ Skip Qs28-31.
Read "Historical Insight" and ask Q32.
- ✓ Read "Think About It."
- ✓ Suggest reading "The Rest of the Story" after this lesson.

WRAP-UP:

- ✓ Sing "Build My Life" and close in prayer.

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