



Deepen Discipleship

- Deepen Discipleship 1
- Introduction to Deepen Discipleship 8
- Permissions and Copyright 12
- Before You Begin 17
- Deepen Discipleship: Facilitator's Guide 25
- Table of Contents 34
- Luke (Part 1) 35
- Luke 1-3 41
- Luke 4-6 45
- Luke 7-9 51
- Luke 10-12 55
- Luke 13-15 62
- Luke (Part 2) & Acts (Part 1) 66
- Luke 16-19:972
- Luke 19-21 78
- Luke 22-24 82
- Acts 1-4 88
- Acts 5-8 96
- Acts (Part 2) 102
- Acts 9-11 107
- Acts 12-15 112
- Acts 16-18 120
- Acts 19-23 127
- Acts 24-28 131
- Romans 135
- Introduction 138
- Romans 1-2 141

- Romans 3-5 147
- Romans 6-8 151
- Romans 9-11 154
- Romans 12-16 161
- 1 and 2 Thessalonians 166
- 1 Thessalonians 1-2 169
- 1 Thessalonians 3-4 174
- 1 Thessalonians 5 179
- 2 Thessalonians 1-3 185
- Review & Catch Up 189
- Philippians 190
- Philippians 1 192
- Philippians 2 196
- Philippians 3 200
- Philippians 4 203
- Review 210
- Matthew (Part 1) 213
- Matthew 1-3 218
- Matthew 4-5 221
- Matthew 6-7 224
- Matthew 8-10 227
- Matthew 11-12 230
- Matthew (Part 2) 233
- Matthew 16-18 238
- Matthew 19-20 241
- Matthew 21-24 244
- Matthew 25-28 248
- Hebrews 254
- Hebrews 1-2 256
- Hebrews 3:1-6:12 265
- Hebrews 6:13-8:13 269
- Hebrews 9-10 273

- Hebrews 11-13 277
- James 281
- James 1 283
- James 2 287
- James 3 290
- James 4 292
- James 5 295
- 1 Corinthians 302
- 1 Corinthians 1-4 304
- 1 Corinthians 5-7 308
- 1 Corinthians 8-10 314
- 1 Corinthians 11-14 321
- 2 Corinthians 333
- 2 Corinthians 1-3 335
- 2 Corinthians 4-5 338
- 2 Corinthians 6-8 341
- 2 Corinthians 9-11 345
- 2 Corinthians 12-13 348
- Review 351
- Mark 353
- Mark 1 358
- Mark 2:1-6:6 362
- Mark 6:6-9:13 381
- Mark 9:14-13:37 385
- Galatians 393
- Galatians 1-2 395
- Galatians 3 399
- Galatians 4 403
- Galatians 5 407
- Galatians 6 411
- Titus, 1 Timothy (Part 1) 414
- Titus 1 416

- Titus 2 419
- Titus 3 422
- 1 Timothy 1-2 425
- 1 Timothy 3 428
- 1 and 2 Timothy 431
- 1 Timothy 4 435
- 1 Timothy 5 438
- 1 Timothy 6 441
- 2 Timothy 1-2 445
- 2 Timothy 3 448
- 2 Timothy and Ephesians 451
- 2 Timothy 4 454
- Ephesians 1-2 457
- Ephesians 3-4 463
- Ephesians 5-6 467
- 1 John 1-2 472
- 1, 2, 3 John 475
- 1 John 3 479
- 1 John 4-5 482
- 2 John 485
- 3 John 489
- Review 493
- John (Part 1) 495
- John 1-2 500
- John 3-4 504
- John 5-6 509
- John 7-8 513
- John 9-10 517
- John (Part 2) 520
- John 11-12 524
- John 13-14 527
- John 15-16 530

- John 17-18 533
- John 19-21 537
- Colossians 541
- Colossians 1 544
- Colossians 2 548
- Colossians 3:1-17 551
- Colossians 3:18-25 555
- Colossians 4 558
- 1 and 2 Peter 561
- 1 Peter 1 564
- 1 Peter 2:1-3:7 569
- 1 Peter 3:8-4:19 572
- 1 Peter 5 576
- 2 Peter 579
- Philemon, Jude, and Revelation (Part 1) 583
- Philemon 586
- Jude 591
- Revelation 1 594
- Revelation 2-3 598
- Revelation 4-5 602
- Revelation (Part 2) 607
- Revelation 6:1-8:5 610
- Revelation 8:6-11:16 615
- Revelation 12-14 620
- Revelation 15-16 625
- Revelation 17-19 629
- Revelation (Part 3) 633
- Revelation 20 635
- Revelation 21-22 640
- Review 647
- Appendix 649
- IMB Key Terms 655

- Baptist Faith and Message 677
- My Opportunities Report 693

Section

Introduction to Deepen Discipleship

The Weekly Discipleship Process

First and foremost, we must commit to do the daily readings as well as prayer, reflection, and Bible memory. We begin by relating to God in this way.

Second, we will prayerfully plan and think through any appropriate responses to the main ideas of the reading.

Weekly, after completing the learning activities, often with someone else—a fellow participant, a spouse, a child when appropriate—we should gather with others to review the week, to encourage and pray for one another, and to celebrate what God is doing.

The **Go and Do** has many options from which to choose, but participants must complete the weekly discipleship activity portion. These weekly activities seek to develop routines in the eight categories of discipleship that are the specific focus of Deepen Discipleship.

Throughout the duration of Deepen Discipleship, every participant should be planning ways to partner together to complete the next week's activities. The goal is for each person to meet regularly with at least one other person (preferably two) for the purpose of mutual accountability and encouragement.

The Daily Reading Guide

There are five readings each week. We've attempted to divide up the daily reading into portions that more or less fit how the biblical writers have structured their

books, but this has not always been possible.

That said, you should feel free to go beyond the daily reading, particularly if the author's theme continues beyond the end of the daily reading section. Also, it would be wise to quickly review the previous day's text while looking for repeated themes and connections that span multiple daily readings.

We hope that part of the joy in this study will be discovering afresh what truths God the Holy Spirit inspired each human author to highlight. From here, there's only one next step: to joyfully respond to God's Word by changing how we think, speak, or live. Again, God communicates with us—and changes us—through his Word. Read, listen, and grow.

The object of these daily reading guides is not to answer the reflection questions in the Guide, but to understand and apply the Bible! Keep praying and looking at the trees and branches in light of the forest.

The reading guide is designed to be a help in understanding what the New Testament says and teaches. So, use the reading guide to assist you in getting into the Bible. Read every chapter carefully and prayerfully. Write down your thoughts in the notes/journal section of the E-book or some other journal. This is an excellent way to help you think clearly and accurately about Scripture; it will also serve as a reminder for later.

The Daily Deepen Discipleship Process

To accurately apply what God is saying to us in his Word, we must rightly understand the main point. That's the **Read and Learn** element—sometimes called observation—and we've attempted to guide interpretation with the comments provided on each reading.

The **Reflect and Change** element attempts to direct you in prayerfully considering

how the text should transform us. That is, we must ask hard questions: how does this part of God's Word change my values and priorities? How does it force me to adjust my understanding of what life is about? How does it teach me to live as though God were King and Ruler over all?

Genuine biblical application gets at our hearts and minds. It's not about superficial changes tacked on to an otherwise normal lifestyle. Every single day, we're bombarded with false ideas of the world such that when we read God's Word, we are faced with an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to re-frame our thinking and re-order our priorities. Genuine biblical application requires altering our basic mindset, attitudes, and even our worldview. This will only happen as we reflect slowly and deeply on what God has said to us through his Word.

Once we've reflected on the clear meaning and application of a passage, we should plan to respond in faith. Once we have discovered and understood what God is saying, we must act on it—not as a means to earn favor before God, but in response to the favor God has already shown us in Christ. It's unlikely that every daily reading will result in specific steps toward our sanctification. But over the course of these readings, it is likely that God the Holy Spirit will convict us as we study the Word sincerely, affording us regular opportunities to obey.

This truth is one of the main reasons it is best to engage Deepen Discipleship in groups who have the same goals. It's far simpler to develop routines of **Going and Doing** God's Word if we have others who are spurring us along to love and good deeds.

Ultimately, the process of daily reading God's Word should naturally enable God's people to teach this Word simply and plainly in other contexts; put simply, you can't teach what you don't know. After completing the four modules, participants should automatically be thinking about how the three steps—**Read and Learn, Reflect and Change, Go and Do**—could apply in other contexts. Hopefully, committed

participants will grow accustomed to approaching God's Word in such a way that they will be comfortable not only in reading the Bible, but also in explaining it to others personally or even teaching it in the local church.

Section

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Section

Before You Begin

① The Deepen Discipleship Process

Reading *Deepen Discipleship* will be challenging—and to do it well, we'll need a community of believers and a lot of time. But this shouldn't surprise us: following Jesus faithfully also takes people and time.

Slow Down. Take time to read slowly, pray, and reflect on the Word. Take time to be with others, bless your church, and reach out.

Deepen Discipleship is a simple process, but it's not easy.

Deepen Discipleship is an interactive discipleship process that will prepare Christians for both local and global disciple-making in the context of local church community. Of course, it's also about deepening your relationship with God and others.

Deepen Discipleship will help you develop and deepen discipleship routines **in community**. In other words, it's not designed as a Bible reading plan to be done alone. You should find at least one other *Deepen Discipleship* partner so that you can learn and obey together.

① Three Great Resources

1. The Word of God
2. The Spirit of God
3. The People of God

Even the name *Deepen Discipleship* is intended to suggest the process by which the Holy Spirit takes the clear message of God's Word and writes it on our lives as we live out the gospel among the people of God in the local church. Primarily, we do this by making and multiplying [disciples](#). This is a relational process of going deeper with Christ and with one another!

Participants will read quickly through the entire New Testament with guided reflections and activities that are designed to deepen habits of obedience [in eight main discipleship categories](#).

i Organization

The process is organized around four modules, each of them six weeks long. In them, you will Read and Learn, Reflect and Change, and Go and Do. All of this is meant to be done in community, preferably some fellow church members. This aspect is important because it's the committed community of a local church that best enables connections for both loving God and loving others well.



i Process in Community

Christian community invites the Word of God to dwell in us richly as we teach each other, love each other, pray together, and obey Jesus together. The pinnacle of this kind of community is found in the local church, especially in its weekly gathering. But it also happens any time followers of Jesus intentionally meet with one another for the purpose of doing spiritual good to one another. It happens whenever and wherever the Word of God works lasting change in the people of God by the Spirit of God, all for the glory of God. In sum, the local church gathering jump-starts the Christian life for a week of disciple-making in all sorts of contexts.

Christian community should work like an advertisement to the watching world that says, "Following Jesus Christ is the good life!" As followers of Jesus live to show and tell the gospel to fellow followers, as they seek to love both God and neighbor, they're ministering out of the overflow of their abiding in Christ.



A simple [Facilitator's Guide](#) will help the group leader to encourage and advise participants. (For those preparing for cross-cultural disciple-making, Deepen Discipleship will provide equipping consistent with and

appropriate for IMB service.) This guide is designed to both plan for and execute the weekly gatherings in a way that is meaningful and efficient.

There is also a checklist in the [Facilitator's Guide](#) that will assist facilitators in both preparing for weekly community times and encouraging the participants to be doers of the Word.

i Faster Reading Through the New Testament

Participants must learn to read quickly but carefully through the New Testament. In doing so, they'll discover the overarching themes of the Gospels, Acts, letters, and Revelation. The goal in this study is to focus on what's clear and plain in the Word and to put these instructions into practice, often in groups of two or more.

Ultimately, *Deepen Discipleship* is an attempt to provide a pattern that promotes two things: being a faithful follower of Jesus and second, helping others be a faithful follower of Jesus—whether in the United States or across the globe. It's really that simple.



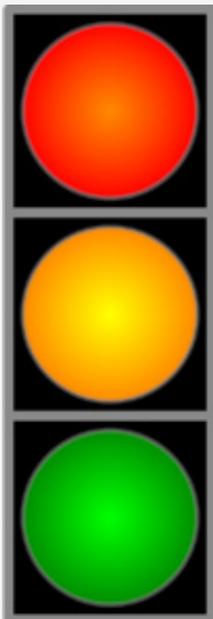
If the Bible is a forest, then its books are trees, its chapters are branches, and its verses are leaves. Working backward, these leaves are connected to branches which are parts of trees that belong in a certain forest.

So, as we look at the New Testament, we'll primarily be looking at branches and their connections to certain trees. Yes, we'll inspect the occasional leaf up close, but we will spend most of our energy looking for main ideas that

will be found in larger sections of the New Testament. We will then seek to understand how these larger sections fit into their respective books as well as the larger Bible forest.

Practically, this means we will be reading quickly so that we can learn the New Testament's forest, trees, and branches, not so much its leaves.

The first module begins with you reading three chapters per day in Luke and Acts. When we get to Philippians, it slows down to just a chapter or two per day. When we slow down, we'll be doing so to reflect on what's clear and plain in Scripture; that is to say, we won't skip over the clear and plain so that we can slow down for a chapter's difficult or strange phrases or sentences. As we slow down, we want to ask one main question: How should I respond to this clear teaching of God's Word?



Sometimes, God's Word will compel us to **START** doing something we haven't previously been doing—maybe we need to take the opportunities to share the gospel with our neighbors, or show more patience in our work and home. Other times, it's likely that God's Word tells us to **STOP** doing something we have been doing; perhaps the text will encourage a change in our thinking, or we'll be compelled to confess a sin and turn from it. Hopefully, there will also be occasions when we just need to **CONTINUE**, with God's help, a good routine or attitude. At any rate, we want the clear teaching of the New Testament to guide our responses.

We hope this kind of approach to Bible reading will develop your understanding of Scripture's big ideas and major themes. We also hope

that once these ideas are grasped, you'll be encouraged to then reflect on Scripture, making plans to put into practice what you've learned to be clear and central. In this way, we might avoid our common tendency to give most of our attention to the relatively rare portions of the New Testament that at first glance are confusing. Scripture's main message is clear, and we invite you to read more about of the clarity of Scripture [here](#).

i What We Believe about the Bible

We believe the Bible was inspired by God in such a way that every word was exactly what He wanted it to be. Whatever the Bible says, God says. As a result of this, we affirm four other convictions about the Bible.

First, the Bible is completely true. It has no error in it. Whatever the Bible affirms to be true is true, and we can trust it completely.

Second, the Bible is absolutely authoritative. Since it is the Word of God, it carries the authority of God, and God is the King of kings and Lord of lords who rules over the entire universe. We cannot pick and choose which parts we like and which parts we don't. We owe confidence, acceptance, and obedience to everything the Bible tells us.

Third, the Bible is sufficient. We don't need any other authority to interpret the Bible for us, and we don't need any other source of information to teach us who God is, how we are to be saved, or how we are to live as His disciples.

Fourth, the Bible is clear in everything we need to know. God does not fail in communication. It's true that equally committed believers disagree

on parts of the Bible, and there are other parts that everyone struggles to understand. Given how much bigger God's mind is than ours, this is no surprise. However, God knows what we need to know about Him, ourselves, the world, salvation, and the Christian life. He has made those things clear in His Word.

i Understanding the Bible

1. **Read Prayerfully.** The Holy Spirit is the ultimate author of the Bible, and that same Holy Spirit lives in everyone who believes in Jesus. Because we are small, finite, sinful people, we cannot handle Scripture correctly on our own. However, it is specifically the job of the Holy Spirit to lead us into truth (John 16:13, 1 Cor. 2:12–16). Pray for Him to open your mind and shine His light so that you can understand.
2. **Hero Worship.** Recognize that God is the only Hero of the Bible. The human characters are shown honestly, with their flaws as well as their strengths. Only God is always good, and this is ultimately a book about Him.
3. **Find Jesus.** Read the Bible as a book that points to Jesus. It really is all about Him. Some of it shows us why we need Him, and much of the Old Testament lays the groundwork for His coming, but always draw the biblical line to Jesus.
4. **The Big Story.** Read every passage in light of its place in the Grand Narrative of Scripture. These are not disconnected stories, and it matters where each individual passage lies in the Big Story of the Bible. For example, if you read the dietary laws in Deuteronomy 14 without knowing Jesus' comments on them in Mark 7, you will probably reach a very inappropriate conclusion!
5. **In context.** Always read everything in context. Word studies—think of

them as “leaves” on a tree—can be useful, but ultimately, a given word has meaning only in the context of the actual sentence in which it is used. Sentences—thinner branches on the tree—only have meaning in the context of their paragraphs. Paragraphs—thicker branches— only have meaning in the context of their chapters, and so on. **Never take anything out of context.** Never interpret a verse to mean something that doesn't fit into the flow of its paragraph, chapter, and book—trees—of the Bible—or forest. Always ask, “What is the point of this word/phrase/sentence/verse in the flow of the larger passage in which it is written?” Never read anything into a text of Scripture that does not flow naturally from the text in its context. Make sure you read the large context around each verse or passage before you interpret it.

Remember: Forest, Trees, Branches, Leaves! This may be the most important rule for interpreting the Bible.

6. **Scripture interprets Scripture.** God does not contradict Himself. Never interpret one part of the Bible in a way that contradicts another part. If one passage is unclear to you, find other places in the Bible that speak to the same issue more clearly, and let the clear parts interpret the less clear parts. Never build a basic doctrine on that which is not clear in the Word.
7. **Interpret the Bible in the community of the Church.** We all have blind spots. We need the community of fellow Christ-followers to interpret the Bible safely and well. (That seems to be what the Bereans did in Acts 17:11.) That community includes your own church fellowship and also the fellowship of all believers across time and geography. If you come up with an interpretation that no one else has ever thought of, it is almost certainly wrong!

Section

Deepen Discipleship: Facilitator's Guide

This guide is to help you plan your weekly Deepen Discipleship meetings. These meetings should be a time to:

8. **Review** what was learned;
9. **Encourage** one another toward obedience to the Word;
10. **Pray** for each other and those to whom you are reaching out;
11. **Plan** for the upcoming week.

Aim for a combination of healthy challenge and sincere encouragement. Jesus seemed to model both invitation and challenge. The Word also invites us to intimacy with God even as it challenges us to continual repentance and faith.

i The Weekly Deepen Discipleship Routine

Read and Learn: Five days of reading the Word with a reading guide.

NOTE: Module One starts with three chapters per day in Luke and Acts but in Philippians it's one chapter a day. The length of daily reading is not consistent, but varies with the genre and book of the New Testament.

Reflect and Change: Daily reflection on your reading and how it challenges you to change. Sometimes this is a question; sometimes it's a truth or application from Scripture.

Go and Do: Daily activities to obey the Word and reach out to those

around you.

Weekly Discipleship Activities: These aim at developing or deepening routines in the [eight categories of discipleship](#) which are the specific focus of Deepen Discipleship. Encourage both husbands and wives to work together on these as appropriate.

Review, Encourage, and Pray: Weekly time with accountability partners and the weekly small group meeting to encourage and challenge each other in the activities, to celebrate progress, and to plan together for growth.

Lead Well, Be a Model: Participants should be able to use your model to practice leading group meetings.

i Weekly Group Meetings

Review (15-20 min)

1. **Pray**, asking God to guide the time; to encourage and teach each of you; and to give everyone the humility and grace to bless one another. Pray for any urgent prayer needs. (Ask for other prayer requests later.)
2. **Ask** for reports on last week's activities. Celebrate what's working!
3. **Practice** telling each other the gospel. Model these parts: God, Man, Christ, Response, and a Changed Life. Try to avoid language non-Christians would not understand, especially phrases like "inviting Christ into your heart" or "being washed by the blood." Help each other keep it simple and clear. Show people how to use a passage/theme from the weekly reading to share the gospel.

Encourage and Celebrate (30 minutes)

Start with a short and simple summary of the week's readings (or part of them), and ask your group to narrate a brief retelling or talk about the highlights. Ask participants to share what they learned through the "Reflect and Change" questions.

Help your group learn to teach and explain the Bible by:

1. **Reviewing** the week's reading and weekly activity;
2. **Asking questions** about how the readings should change our lives, using the Reflect and Change questions. This is not an inductive study. Avoid long discussions on difficult-to-interpret passages, and direct people to other people or resources for those questions. Keep the discussion on what is clear and our obedient response to those truths.
 - Ask individuals to share what they learned and did (short and simple!) with a focus also on experiential learning. For example, ask: What did you learn through the "Go and Do" this week? How are you working to obey and apply what we learned last week? The leader can answer first.
 - Who are you sharing truth with? How did they respond? Model inter-group dialog by asking follow-up questions, and asking other individuals if they have questions or encouragements for each other from what they learned.
 - Celebrate obedience, growth in character, faith, and openness. Affirm ways members are stretching themselves, stepping out of comfort zones, and pursuing daily obedience. Help group members find ways to point out each other's growth and faithfulness. Model healthy ways for group members to be aware of and articulate their own development. Having a set form for this can be helpful, like saying, "I used to . . . but now God has helped me to . . ." Remember

that God is gracious and kind!

- Remember the Stop, Start, Continue approach. For some participants, the next step is actually continuing a good routine or habit. For others, it will be stopping something. And for some, it will be starting a new habit or routine.
- Look ahead to the coming week. If starting a new book, go over the book introduction together or other supplemental reading.

Pray (10–20 minutes)

1. Start with thanksgiving: name ways you've seen God's faithfulness and presence in the last week. For the first few meetings, start this part yourself to model the "short and simple" principle. (Occasionally have others lead in prayer from prayers developed in Activities section on Praise, Confession/Repentance, or Thanksgiving.)
2. Assign individuals to pray for:
 - Opportunities to share, boldness to share, and increasing ability to share. See the included [MOR faithfulness guide](#).
 - An unreached people, using the [UUPG Virtual Prayer Walk](#) or another tool like Operation World to systematically pray for different unreached peoples around the world. Consider adopting a people group every month and focus on that group.
 - Faithfulness to live out your group's specific commitments.
 - Ears to hear, humility to receive, and hearts to obey God's Word this coming week.
 - God's grace to be at work through last week's action steps and concerns, including those they met and shared with, as well as new ethnic groups to reach out to.

Plan (8–10 minutes)

1. Plan together for **Go & Dos** and Discipleship Activities, helping each person plan two or three action steps. Remind your group of your goals/commitment statement. Customize appropriately for your context, troubleshoot obstacles or concerns, and take notes to give to the *Deepen Discipleship* feedback forum.
2. Action steps should always include the transfer of learning or inviting someone to go along as you do your activities. You should be telling someone each week something they are learning, beginning with someone close to them and eventually including a new friend from a different cultural background.
3. Set up a simple form of accountability—could be in-group texts/calls or a Telegram group—and list personal commitment steps that can be reviewed next week, having each participant define their goals to the group.

Using this guide, your meetings should last 60–90 minutes. But the weekly meeting is only one part of the process. It's important for group members to know they can rely on you to be well-organized, timely, and prepared to welcome and facilitate.

i Preparation for the First Group Meeting

Preparation Before the Meeting (15–30 minutes)

1. **IMPORTANT:** Before your group begins Day 1 of *Deepen Discipleship*, your participants need to complete the reading explained in the introduction. There is extra reading as you start, so don't be discouraged by all the intro material. You should point these pages out to your participants and be prepared to summarize them in case they

haven't read them.

2. Plan the location of meeting. It should be private enough for free sharing of concerns, challenges, and prayer.
3. Review weekly readings and Discipleship Activities.
4. Check in with each group member to encourage or guide their Go & Dos and Discipleship Activities. Choose one group member to focus on with more prayer and encouragement each week.
5. Prepare ideas for next week's Discipleship Activities.
6. Prepare a short summary of prayer items for an unreached people group from the [IMB's virtual prayer walk](#) (or another chosen site).
7. Plan to allow for some flexibility in how various participants work through *Deepen Discipleship* and the activities, but encourage faithfulness and persistence, relying on God's grace.

i Helping Others Lead

After some time meeting together, start helping others lead the weekly meetings. Coach and encourage them, and don't have someone else lead alone until you've watched them lead at least once.

Suggested community questions

1. How and why did you come to this group and desire this kind of discipleship?
2. What gets you most excited in life right now?
3. What are your personal hopes and goals for this season?
4. What are you learning about God and from God?
5. What are you learning about yourself?

Short and Simple Principle

Without oversimplifying or preventing opportunities for meaningful conversation, leaders can promote group unity and care by encouraging disciples to share, report, and pray briefly and thoughtfully. “Short and simple” means sticking to the point, and avoiding extended theological, personal, or intellectual monologues. This is one way of loving the others in the group so that everyone gets a chance to communicate and be challenged and encouraged.

Helping Others Lead

Participants should be able to use your model to practice leading group meetings. Take time to help others lead in the prayer and Encourage and Celebrate sections by preparing ahead with another person and then debriefing afterwards about what went well and what could be better next time.

① Goals and Commitment Statements

Here's an example of a short “commitment statement” for the facilitator and participants to sign.

I commit myself during the course of this study to:

- Read and reflect on God's Word daily using the Daily Reading Guide;
- Rejoice in the gospel as I humbly submit myself to Him in obedience to His Word;
- Memorize His Word weekly;

- Fulfill the weekly activities with God's help (approximately 2–3 hours/week in addition to Daily Reading and Reflecting);
- Pray daily for myself, this group, and the unreached around me;
- Meet weekly with an accountability partner, seeking the spiritual good of each other;
- Arrive at the weekly meeting prepared, ready to contribute and to receive and give encouraging, constructive feedback.

i Facilitator's Checklist

Before the meeting

- Before your group begins Day 1 of Deepen Discipleship, your participants need to complete the reading explained in "[Before You Begin.](#)"
- Choose a good meeting location?
- Review weekly readings and activities?
- Encourage and pray for group members?
- Prepare guiding ideas for next week's activities?
- Prepare a short summary of prayer items for unreached people groups?

During the meeting

- Pray?
- ACTS?
- Unreached People Group?
- Celebrate what's working? Encourage participants?
- What are we learning? (Remember: Stop, Start, and Continue.)

- Practice sharing the gospel?
- Review the past week's activities?
- Notable Read and Learns?
- Notable Reflect and Changes?
- Notable Go and Dos? Stops, Starts, and Continues?
- Plan Go & Do and Discipleship Activities? Learn and do together in pairs or groups?
- Set up accountability?

After the meeting

- Pray for God to produce fruit?
- Pray for God to raise up leaders?
- Identify potential people to lead different areas of the weekly meetings?

Section

Table of Contents

Navigating Deepen Discipleship

Deepen Discipleship is designed as a 24-week experience. Like any relationship, being a faithful follower of Jesus requires time and focused attention. Make sure to **create some space** in your schedule for this process.

Each time you start a New Testament book, there will be a brief guide to understanding that type of literature: a) narrative including parables (the Gospels), b) narrative without parables (Acts), c) Letters, or d) apocalyptic. Take time to look at those, and feel free to refer to them often as you read.

Use the Table of Contents [here](#)

Section

Luke (Part 1)

Introduction to Luke-Acts

NOTE: This introduction is much longer than the other introductions since it introduces two books that comprise nearly one-fourth of the New Testament.

Luke's Gospel presents an "orderly account" of Jesus' birth, life, teachings, miracles, death, and resurrection. Fundamentally, it answers these questions: **Who is Jesus? What has He done? How should a follower of Jesus live the life of faith?**

It's all about Jesus, and He is the hero of both Luke and Acts! In Luke's Gospel, Luke explains to Theophilus what's involved for those who trust in Jesus Christ and seek to continue the journey of faithful discipleship through both its joys and trials.

Acts continues the rescue story that Luke began.

Luke and Acts were meant to be read together. Originally, they were one book, two volumes of a single history. Probably writing from Rome around 60 A.D., Luke explains to Theophilus and others how it is that God has worked out His plan through Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Luke also explains how God continues that plan after Jesus' crucifixion through the person of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus has sent to live among His followers.

In Acts, we pick up the story of these followers as they gather into local churches that reflect the character of God through their love for each other and their proclamation of the gospel to all people.

Luke-Acts is about how God the Father fulfilled His promise to bring salvation through Jesus Christ to rebellious, needy people. It's also about God's plan that Jesus' followers announce this good news to everyone, both Jew and Gentile.

Luke also seems to emphasize the work of the Holy Spirit in enabling ordinary disciples—not just apostles—to live as Jesus' ambassadors, evangelizing with boldness and expectation for God to act. As you read, pay close attention to how God intervenes miraculously at crucial junctures, especially when the gospel enters a new territory or people group.

As the Holy Spirit accompanies the showing and telling of the gospel, it is as though Jesus is present, demanding a response and even insisting that all people turn from their sin to gladly embrace His righteous rule and reign.

Jesus is the Rescuer Israel was anticipating!

In the Gospel of Luke, we quickly discover Jesus as the promised Savior King sent by God to rescue His people. But Luke also helps us see Jesus as a divisive person whose teachings and Lordship were refused by men; as a result, they would be judged by God and excluded from eternal life.

Old Testament Background for Luke-Acts and the New Testament

The Old Testament is important for understanding Luke-Acts. The Bible says that from the foundations of the world, God planned to both rescue His people for something greater than Eden's peaceful existence and to establish His Son, Jesus, as King over His people (Ephesians 1:3-10). We read in the Bible how God implements this plan in His own way, in His own time, for His own chosen people, and for His own glory.

Luke begins his Gospel by describing the events surrounding Jesus' conception and birth. God had not spoken to Israel for nearly 500 years; in other words, it had been 500 years since the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, had been written.

In Luke's first chapters, we read that God is about to rescue His people from their enemies, just like he'd promised in the Old Testament. At both the beginning (Luke 1-4, esp. 1:17, 32, 55, 69-73, 3:4-6, 4:18-21) and the end (Luke 24:44-49) of his Gospel, Luke writes that Jesus' life, teaching, miracles, death, and resurrection are the fulfillment of what God had promised in the Old Testament.

From the beginning, God sought to rescue His people so they would lovingly serve Him in holiness and happiness. As God's eternal Son, it is Jesus who was God's appointed Savior, the One who rescued God's people and sent the Holy Spirit to transform them into faithful followers who gladly live with God as King.

At the thematic center of both Luke and Acts is both the rescue of God's people through the person and work of Jesus and the creation of God's multi-ethnic church through the preaching of the gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit. As you read, it's important to keep in mind the Old Testament promises of salvation and rescue. Luke has these promises in mind but alludes to them only briefly, most likely because they would have been so well known in that day, even to Theophilus.

Understanding the Gospels

The four Gospels are the authoritative testimony of the apostles to the life of Jesus. They were written, according to John, in order that we might believe in Him and be saved (John 20:21). They were also written so we might know what Jesus was like and how He lived, because we are to be imitators of Christ (1 Cor. 11:1; Eph. 5:1). The Gospels are a kind of specialized biography written to explain the most important periods of Jesus' life. You'll notice very little is said of Jesus' childhood or life prior to His public ministry that began around age 30. The Gospels are mostly a "biography" of Jesus' final three years. They don't answer every question we have

about Jesus, but they do tell us all we need to know!

Each Gospel presents a portrait of Jesus that complements the other three. The Holy Spirit inspired Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John to include or omit features of Jesus' life, ministry, and teaching to give us a fuller picture of the Savior. Matthew, Mark, and Luke gradually show us who Jesus is as the Son of God, the Messiah sent from God to be the Savior of the world.

John's Gospel starts differently by describing Jesus as the eternal Word and then showing us through various signs and "I AM" statements that Jesus is the innocent God-Man who dies in the place of sinners and then rises again to appear to His disciples.

All four Gospels assume and teach that Jesus has come to fulfill the Old Testament promises and that Jesus is the promised Messiah sent from God come to earth, the One who will also come again at a future date at the end of history.

In interpreting and applying the four Gospels:

Let Jesus be the Hero. Remember that the main point of the four Gospels is to create and strengthen faith in Jesus. Interpret everything in that light.

Keep it in context. Always interpret everything in context. What comes before and after a given passage is important. So is the overall flow of the book. It's also important to remember that Jesus comes to fulfill God's promises to Israel. This is the historical context in which we must read the Gospels: God sends Jesus to fulfill God's promises to Israel by rescuing ruined and rebellious people and to create something new: a worldwide, multi-ethnic people of God, His church.

Parables usually have a punch line. Parables were Jesus' most frequent form of teaching. They are stories that work a little bit like jokes or stories with a moral.

Usually, a parable's punch line comes at the end. Some of Jesus' hearers get the parable; some don't. Jesus was a master teacher, and it seems He chose parables for that reason.

Parables, by and large, aren't allegories, and we should never read anything into the parables of Jesus that is not evident in the text. In many cases, Jesus Himself interprets the parables, and when He does, His interpretation is what the parable means—no more and no less. On occasion, He turns the parable into an allegory, with a point of meaning assigned to each element in the story; when He does, that's what the parable means. Usually, however, we should look for the point or points that Jesus is making in the context of the larger story of the Gospel.

We should not impose anything on the parable that's not found in the context, and we should not press the details of the story that fall outside the main point or points being made.

In the Gospels, most people around Jesus got it all wrong. There are occasional exceptions—like Mary in the story of Mary and Martha—but these exceptions are rare. Don't assume we're meant to follow the examples of those around Jesus, unless they match a clear point of teaching.

He is risen! Read everything in light of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The end of the story casts its light back on everything that comes before.

Two questions to ask: When you read the Gospels, you probably won't go wrong if you focus on asking these two questions:

1. What does this passage teach me about Jesus?
2. What does this passage teach me about becoming and being a disciple of Jesus? (And what kind of people Jesus saves!)

Luke 2:28-32

28 Simeon took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,29 “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word;30 for my eyes have seen your salvation 31 that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.

Section

Luke 1-3**Pray**

“Lord, work in my heart that I may be quick to submit to Your will and say, like Mary, “I am the Lord’s servant.” Help me always to be eager to spread the word about You as the shepherds did. I exalt and magnify You, Lord, for You have done great things, and You have come and redeemed your people! In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

Read & Learn**Read Luke 1-3**

The events of Luke 1 are not the beginning of God’s preparation for Jesus. The entire Old Testament prepared the way. He is the long-awaited Messiah through whom God fulfilled all the promises He made to Abraham and David (Luke 1:69–73). Even John the Baptist’s ministry was predicted in the Old Testament (Luke 1:17, 3:4–6).

Luke starts with two birth stories: John the Baptist and Jesus the Christ. John the Baptist is the last of the Old Testament prophets whose God-given job it is to announce the coming of the Savior of the world. It’s important to remember that at this point, God hadn’t spoken to Israel in 500 years. But now, John the Baptist arrives as God’s prophet and spokesman, calling people to turn from their sins and be washed in baptism.

Then Jesus arrives on the scene. As you read Luke, pay attention to who Jesus is by observing what He says and what He does. Also note how different kinds of people

respond to Jesus. Finally, Luke wanted Theophilus to understand what Jesus said about being a follower of Christ, so watch for teaching about following Jesus, as well as the kingdom of God.

Luke 1-2

As you read Luke's two opening chapters, observe that both men and women are prominent in Luke's Gospel. In Jesus Christ, God is acting to reverse the expectations of many, just as He had promised through the prophets of the Old Testament. Luke reports extended birthday celebrations and angels who show up singing for the birthday parties. Jesus is miraculously conceived, and Mary is a virgin when she gives birth to Jesus. Clearly, this is a unique time in history. In fact it's actually the turning point in all of history.

Joyful celebrations by the angels mark the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus the Christ. Read the four songs that appear in the first two chapters, paying careful attention to the words. Luke records them so that we may understand who Jesus is, what He will do, and how He will be received. These songs point to Jesus as God's promised fulfillment of Old Testament promises! They also show us that all peoples everywhere need the Savior whom God has sent.

Luke's Gospel explains to Theophilus and other readers the identity of this Jesus of Nazareth. See the angel Gabriel's words to Mary in 1:30-35, read the angel's declaration in 2:10-11, and, finally, consider also Simeon's praise in 2:29-32.

Interestingly, Jesus the King enters this world in a humble and ordinary way. It must have been a surprise to many that the promised Savior-King, whose birth was attended by angels, would be born in a simple stable. Born to Mary and Joseph, Jesus has an ordinary childhood, growing and becoming strong in wisdom, and Luke tells us God favors Him.

Luke 3

At Jesus' baptism, all three persons of the Trinity are present: God the Father speaks, God the Holy Spirit descends like a dove, and God the Son is baptized.

In Luke 3:22, the Father says, "You are my Beloved Son whom I love; with You I am well pleased." Jesus is the unique Son of God. As a 12-year-old boy, He had amazed the Jewish teachers of the Law in the Jerusalem temple. But here, God affirms Jesus as a grown man.

At the end of the chapter, Luke records Jesus' ancestry—from His earthly father Joseph all the way to Adam. Luke wants to highlight at this point that Jesus is a descendant of both David and Abraham. In other words, Jesus is the Promised King from the line of David (2 Samuel 7:12–13) and Abraham's descendant who will bless all nations by being the Savior of all peoples (Genesis 12:1–7).

Daily Verse for Meditation

Luke 2:10-11

10 And the angel said to them, 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.'

Reflect & Change

1. How we answer the question "Who is Jesus?" is very important. When we recognize Jesus as the long-awaited Savior, the beloved Son of God in whom the Father delights, we should joyfully tell others about Him. Luke wants us to see Jesus as the Promised Messiah sent from God for all peoples, not just the Jews. Since all have rebelled against God, the Savior must come to rescue not just Jews but people from all nations.

While angels celebrate Jesus' birth, Luke also reminds us Jesus will be divisive. Not all will believe the good news. Like Herod, some will reject Him; like Simeon, others will recognize that Jesus is salvation, a light for the Gentiles and the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel.

2. God carefully designed and prepared for Jesus to be born at the exact time and place God had promised in the Old Testament. Jesus' birth was the turning point in history, making clear God's intention that He would bring salvation to all peoples, not just Israel. His birth changed the course of history—and this good news must be announced afresh in every generation, to every people group.

Go & Do

Take some time in prayer to praise God for Jesus. Use some of the language of praise found in the songs in Luke 1–3. Explain how Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament promises.

Discipleship Activities

Set aside time today to evaluate your Spiritual Health using the Spiritual Health Assessment below. Write down answers to the assessment questions and share them with your group leader or accountability partner. [Being a Disciple]

i Spiritual Health Assessment

1. Are you confident that God has transformed your heart, that you have turned from your sin and trusted in Jesus as your Savior?
2. How would you rate your overall spiritual health right now? Over the past year?
3. Make a note of your spiritual discipline habits over the past year: prayer, fasting, reading the word, giving, outreach, worship, etc.

Section

Luke 4-6

Pray

“Lord God, Father of Jesus Christ, thank You that Jesus, the Son of God, resisted every temptation of the Devil, so that in Christ I also can resist temptation, especially as I memorize and meditate on your Word. Give me the desire and power to do what Jesus says and so be a faithful disciple of Christ. As I trust You, remind me that I need not fear the future or any difficult circumstances. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Read & Learn

Read Luke 4-6

As you read these chapters, ask how Luke’s words help us understand who Jesus truly is and who He came to save. Notice the divided response to Jesus’ words and works.

Luke 4:1–13 Like Adam and Israel, Jesus was tested by the Devil. Unlike Adam and Israel, Jesus resisted temptation and defeated him! Remember that at Jesus’ baptism, God the Father affirmed Jesus as His beloved Son. Immediately afterward, Satan challenges Jesus, prefacing every temptation with “If you are the Son of God...” The Devil twists the Old Testament, but Jesus answers him with true statements from God’s Word.

[Read more on the Kingdom of God from the Baptist Faith & Message \(BFM\)](#)

Luke 4:16–4:44 Who is Jesus? Jesus reads from Isaiah the prophet and then identifies Himself as the Savior-Messiah-Lord, full of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the

fulfillment of God's promise to come and preach the good news of deliverance, the year of the Lord's favor. In 4:21, the Jews reject Jesus in his hometown of Nazareth. The same thing happened to Old Testament prophets. Jesus' neighbors will not accept Him for who He is, but in Capernaum even the demons recognize Him as the Son of God (4:41).

Luke 5:1–16 Jesus then calls his first followers. Simon Peter recognizes Jesus as the LORD and says, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man" (5:8). When Jesus calls His followers, they leave everything, even a miraculous catch of fish, to follow him (5:11). Though He was not a trained fisherman, the Son of God knows how to catch fish! He is Wisdom itself, so He can be trusted with your business, studies, and situations.

Luke 5:17–39 Jesus begins eating with sinners and outcasts, the "bad people" of His day. Jesus is the Great Physician who has come to heal the sick and to call sinners to repentance. Power is flowing out of Him to heal all kinds of people and to cast out demons, even healing people from Tyre and Sidon—outside of Israel (6:7–19). Jesus has shown the good news through his actions, which fulfill Old Testament prophecies like Isaiah 61:1–2. He also teaches good news about the kingdom of God with parables and instructions about kingdom values.

Luke 6 Who is Jesus? He is the Lord of the Sabbath, and He alone brings true rest.

As He teaches on the plain, notice the four blessings and four warnings or woes. Jesus announces the radical values of the coming kingdom of God, a way of living very different from the world's, a way of living that requires God's help through the Holy Spirit. Life as Jesus' follower requires living as if God were our King and Ruler, rather than remaining controlled by our sinful selves.

Luke 6:46–49 Jesus expects His followers to live according to these new values; just as there are two houses on two kinds of foundations, there are only two ways to

live. The disciple who lives by God's Word—doing what God says—needs not fear the future or circumstances. Psalm 1 talks about this, too.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Luke 6:46-49

46 Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you? 47 Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: 48 he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. 49 But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.

Reflect & Change

1. Unlike Adam in the garden and Israel in the wilderness, Jesus triumphed over the Devil. He is the Lord and Ruler over all, the faithful One who keeps His Father's commands. He showed His power over Satan, demons, and sickness, and He preached the good news of the kingdom of God. He demonstrated and proclaimed that God has come to rescue the world. Because of all this and more, we should pay careful attention to Jesus' life and words; we should do what He says. Beware of those who twist God's Word and tempt you to disobey God. Resist the Devil and temptations to sin by knowing and speaking God's Word, even to yourself sometimes.
2. In these chapters, we see Jesus' followers recognize they were sinners in need of forgiveness. Recall Simon Peter's words to Jesus in the boat. Remember Levi the tax collector, and also what Jesus said about God the Father being gracious to those who are ungrateful and evil. And

yet, Jesus expects His followers to live differently than the world as they look ahead to a future, heavenly reward.

3. Today, prayerfully ask forgiveness for your sins and ask God to help you do what Jesus asks; ask God for the help to live according to the values of the kingdom.

Go & Do

- Take some extra time to read Psalm 1 today. Read it aloud to yourself and then read it with someone else and talk about the two kinds of people described.
- Prayerfully read through this definition of a [disciple and disciple-making](#), asking the Lord to continue to transform you.

Discipleship Activities

- Begin or continue meeting with one or two others regularly for accountability. Begin using a tool like One Hour Accountability, which is provided below. Or you could use [this list](#) or [this list](#) of questions to guide your discussion time. [[Being a Disciple](#)]

i One Hour Accountability Tool

THE 60 MINUTE WEEKLY CHECK-UP

Quality Spiritual Life:

1. How have you experienced God this week? Do you sense His presence and peace?
2. Has reading God's Word been meaningful? (Why? Why not? Daily? Plan for next week?) Are you enjoying prayer? Describe your prayers. (praise, confession, gratitude)

3. How is your relationship with Christ changing?
4. How have you been tempted this week? How did you respond? (If Satan were to try to invalidate you as a servant of the Lord, how might he do it?)
5. Do you have any unconfessed sin in your life?
6. Are you walking in the Spirit? (What is one specific example?)
7. How was your worship and service in the local church this week?
8. How have you spent time with non-Christians this week? (Have you shared your faith? In what ways? How can you improve?)

Faithful Household Life:

1. What would your spouse/best friend/roommate say about you the past week? (state of mind, state of spirit, energy level)
2. Where are you financially right now? (debts, sharing, saving, stewardship)
3. How is it going with your wife or others in your household? (attitudes, time irritations, disappointments, progress)
4. How is it going with the kids? (quantity/quality of time, values, education, spiritual warfare)
5. What have you done for someone else this week? (service, encouragement, the poor, etc.)

Faithful Work Life:

1. How are things going on the job? (career progress, relationships, work load, stress, problems)
2. What have you done to play or relax?
3. Are you spending the right amount of time with work? (too much? too little? adjustments needed?)

Healthy Character and Personal Life:

1. Are your priorities in the right order?
2. Are you honest in all your acts and words, trustworthy, and keeping confidences?
3. Are you taking good care of your physical body? (exercising? eating right?)
4. Are you sleeping well?
5. Are you defeated in any part of your life? What are you wrestling with in your thought life? Do you have any fears at this present time?
6. Is your moral and ethical behavior what it should be?
7. What is the state of your sexual perspective? (temptation, fantasies, entertainment)
8. Have you demonstrated a good attitude this week? (Have you been critical, irritable, grumbling, self-pitying, self-justifying?)
9. Is the “visible” you and the “real” you consistent?

Prayer:

- Close the accountability check-up with ten to fifteen minutes of prayer.
- Focus on one concern of the week. Thank God for something special this week.

Section

Luke 7-9

Pray

Father God, You are the Lord of all creation, worthy of all worship and obedience. Today I ask You to give me ears to hear Your Word, as well as the grace and desire to listen and obey it. I want my heart to be like the seed on good soil that endures to the end and bears much fruit. Help me to value what You value and never to be ashamed of Jesus or His words. Take away all my excuses for not following Jesus wherever He leads me. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read & Learn

Read Luke 7-9

In chapters 7–9, notice the variety of reactions and responses to Jesus. Who is believing? Who is rejecting? Though we may be surprised by who accepts Jesus and who does not, the gospel is for all, including the poor, the needy, and the socially outcast.

Luke 7:1–38 A Roman centurion, recognizes Jesus' authority over sickness, and Jesus heals his son, saying, "I have not found such faith, even in Israel." Jesus has compassion on a widow and raises her dead son to life. The people were filled with awe and praised God.

Jesus healed many people of diseases and demons and gave sight to the blind. Some people, including the despised tax collectors, were responding rightly to Jesus, but the Pharisees and experts in Jewish Law rejected God's plan.

Luke 7:39–50 A woman with a sinful reputation kisses and washes Jesus' feet

during a dinner party at a Pharisee's house. The Pharisee host is astonished that Jesus would allow this sinner to touch Him. No prophet would allow that, the man reasons. But Jesus understands the woman's actions to be a grateful, loving response of a person whose many sins have been forgiven. Consider these two very different responses to Jesus!

Luke 8:1–3 Notice that Jesus' traveling followers included some women who had been healed of sickness and evil spirits. Prominent women are also among Jesus' supporters.

Luke 8:4–18 The parable of the soils illustrates four responses to Jesus, and how the Devil, the difficulties of life, and the pleasures or riches of this world may affect people's response to the Word. The same seed is sown in the four soils, but the harvest or crop differs according to the soil. Notice the emphasis on **hearing and listening well** to the teaching of the kingdom Word of God. In particular, focus on Luke 8:8, "Anyone who has ears to hear should **listen**," and Luke 8:18, "Therefore, take care how you listen. For whoever has, more will be given to him; and whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken away from him." We might believe our hearts and ears are closely connected, and they are. Jesus wants His followers to hear and listen well with a good and honest heart, holding on to the Word, enduring and bearing fruit.

Luke 8:19–53 Jesus shows His authority as Lord in various ways. Observe that He has the right to redefine true relationships as well as to command the wind and the waves, because He is Lord over the wind and waves. Jesus is Lord, and demons have no choice but to submit to His authority. Many people respond to Jesus' power and authority with fear.

Jesus then heals a woman from a shameful condition and publicly restores her honor, saying, "Daughter ... your faith has made you well. Go in peace." For Jesus, raising the dead is no more difficult than waking a sleeping person. He is a powerful

King!

Luke 9 As we read, we discover exactly who Jesus is. Jesus demonstrates the coming of the kingdom of God by showing His authority over sickness and evil. He does so by sending out the twelve apostles to heal and preach. By miraculously feeding 5,000 people and then rebuking an unclean spirit, Jesus astonishes the crowds with the greatness of God and shows He does what only the Lord God can do.

Peter truly recognizes and confesses Jesus as God's Messiah. Then He further clarifies His mission as the suffering Messiah and the Son of Man, going so far as to twice predict His coming death. God also speaks from heaven, saying of Jesus, "This is my Son, the Chosen One; **listen** to Him!"

Daily Verse for Meditation

Luke 7:47

47 Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.

Reflect & Change

1. Being a follower of Jesus requires endurance. The parable of the soils reminds us not everyone who hears the gospel responds to it rightly. How have you seen these various responses to Jesus and the gospel among people you know? Listening well to God's Son and God's Word is very important. Determine to be a listener who endures and bears much fruit.
2. Jesus shows His power over all creation. If Jesus has such authority, His followers can trust Him with their lives.

Go & Do

- Think of someone who seems unlikely to become a follower of Jesus. Remembering the surprising responses in Luke 9, pray for that person and ask God to show you a way to talk about the gospel with them.
- Consider again Jesus' words. He says we should listen and put into practice what He says, and that this response will cause us to bear much fruit. Talk with another follower of Jesus about how you might listen better to Jesus and do what He says. Plan together how you might transfer what you learn from the Word to others and so make disciples. Discuss together specific steps of obedience you will take in those areas, and pray for one another to be good soil that yields much fruit.

Discipleship Activities

- Use an internet tool like [this one](#) to find out what peoples of a different ethnicity or culture live in your area. Here is one for [Muslim peoples](#); there are certainly other kinds of tools like this. [[All Peoples](#)]

*Section***Luke 10-12****Pray**

Father, help me pray as Jesus prayed, and give me persistence in prayer. Remind me again and again that You are a kind Father who knows how to give good gifts to His children. I pray today that You, the Lord of the harvest, will send out more workers into the world's harvest fields. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read & Learn**Read Luke 10-12**

Luke 10 Jesus sends out 70 followers as His representatives, authorizing them to preach and bear witness to the kingdom of God. Notice that even though the kingdom has arrived in Jesus Christ, the response remains divided. Some see and understand Jesus, but to others, the kingdom is hidden. As God's Son, Jesus has been entrusted to reveal God the Father to some people and not to others.

Sometimes, Jesus answers questions with questions, surprising answers, or even perplexing parables. For example, the parable of the Good Samaritan (10:25–37) shows Jesus' followers should show mercy even to those of despised ethnic or religious groups.

Martha and Mary both welcome Jesus as a guest, but Mary chooses to sit at Jesus' feet rather than stay busy trying to serve Jesus like Martha. Mary's response to Jesus is the right one.

Luke 11:1–28 Jesus teaches His followers how to pray with a model prayer. He also

tells a parable about persistence which points to God's fatherly kindness and care for His children. Finally, Jesus teaches His followers to pray that God's kingdom would come. In the very next scene, we see that in some sense, Jesus' kingdom rule has already come in Christ, though the full kingdom remains in the future.

Even as people witness Jesus' authority over the demonic realm and the visible coming of God's kingdom, the response is divided. Some are amazed, and some reject Jesus, claiming He works for Beelzebub, the ruler of demons. Jesus states clearly that in His person and work the rule and reign of God has arrived. After this, many more people begin following Him.

Notice Jesus says true blessing is not based on family relationships but on the obedient **hearing** of the Word of God (v. 28).

11:29–53 Jesus' popularity increased among the Jews. Larger crowds followed him, but Jesus reminded them of the times in the Old Testament when those outside of Israel truly turned from sin and pagan idols to believe in the God of Israel, the God who was now present in Jesus. God has always had His eye on the nations, not just Israel. Adam's sin affected all, so all peoples needed rescuing from the power and penalty of sin.

Dinner at a Pharisee's house provides an occasion for rebuking religious hypocrisy. Jesus pronounces woes and warnings (see also Luke 6) on the religious leaders who do not live according to the values of God's reign and rule. Instead, they focus on religious externals while ignoring the needs of the poor; what a horrible example of how God's people are to live out kingdom values. From now on, Jesus will be in constant conflict with the Jewish scribes and Pharisees who are setting traps for him.

Luke 12:1–12 Following Jesus will be dangerous, but His followers should fear God, not people. Under the threat of suffering, they should remain faithful

representatives of Jesus, the Son of Man, trusting the Holy Spirit to give them words to say when they are persecuted for being Jesus' disciples.

12:13–48 This section contains various teachings about how to live as followers of Jesus under God's reign:

- Greediness has no place in the kingdom of God because the good life does not consist in having or owning many things.
- Seek first the kingdom of God, which is in heaven and is eternal, rather than things that wear out and perish. Sell what you own and give generously to show that your heart and desires are set on heaven and not the things of the earth. (We see the followers of Jesus doing exactly this in Acts 2–5.)
- Be ready for Jesus to return a second time, because He will come unexpectedly, and because His second coming will bring judgment upon unbelievers (verses 35–48).

12:49–59 Followers of Jesus should expect a varied response to Him. Many crowds are following Jesus. Some recognize Him as Lord and Savior; others like to see miracles but don't want to repent and follow Him. The religious experts are rejecting Jesus, so Jesus invites the crowds to make a right judgment about Him before it's too late (12:54–59). In Luke 13, Jesus will state very clearly: Judgment is coming and "unless you repent, you will all perish as well."



David Platt - Why People Don't Make Disciples (7 min)

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Daily Verse for Meditation

Luke 10:2

2 And he said to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.'

Reflect & Change

In Acts 20:33-35, Paul says,

"I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" (Acts 20:33-35, ESV)

1. Since the good life doesn't consist of possessions, Christ-followers

should hold those things lightly and be generous, willing to share. It is far better to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).

2. Jesus has always been divisive, and so, as we identify with Jesus, some people will be attracted to Him and some will want nothing to do with either Him or us. So we identify with Jesus not to win friends and influence people but to be faithful followers, living in glad obedience to Him through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Go & Do

- Spend some time with a fellow disciple and talk about how you might be more generous to those in need. Then plan some specific steps to get in the habit of giving generously.
- Talk to a fellow disciple about how you might more effectively explain to people that God's judgment is certain and that postponing repentance is a very bad idea. How can you clearly, directly, and kindly help people understand that ignoring warnings to turn from sin and believe in Jesus doesn't make sense if Jesus is who He says He is? Who could you talk to this week?

Discipleship Activities

- Write out a prayer of praise to lead your weekly group or family. If you've never written out a prayer before, read the thoughts below about prepared prayers. Then watch this 5-minute video on [Praying the Bible](#) to help you think about how to turn Scripture into prayer. [[Spiritual Disciplines, Teaching Simply](#)]

i Prepared Prayers

GENERALLY SPEAKING, TAKING TIME TO WRITE DOWN, OUTLINE, OR OTHERWISE PREPARE FOR PUBLIC PRAYERS IS A GOOD IDEA FOR THESE REASONS:

- Spontaneity does not guarantee sincerity just as preparation does not mean hypocrisy or a lack of genuine desire or godly motivation.
- Free (or spontaneous) prayers aren't necessarily better. Instead, they often end up being a kind of "form prayer" that sounds the same every time. Perhaps time to prepare would prevent the repetition of such spontaneous form prayers.
- When we take time to prepare in advance, we can give careful, concentrated, prayerful, reverent, worshipful, and hopeful attention to who God is in His character and His goodness to us. We can consider our sins and also our real needs, not just those that are immediately urgent. We can jot down items for thanksgiving, and we can consider gospel work in other places. We can include Scripture as we find the disciples doing when they pray in Acts.
- We always want our prayers to remain tethered to God's Word, especially when leading others in public prayer.
- When we prepare our prayers, we should prepare them prayerfully, so that we aim to communicate with God for others. That communication should be meaningful, heartfelt, sincere, clear, and full of faith.
- Preparing our prayers beforehand shouldn't mean then reading those prayers to others. Reading isn't the same as praying.
- When we lead in prayer, we're speaking to God on behalf of others, so it seems wise to give extra attention to those prayers.
- When we lead others in prayer, we want them all to say "Amen" at the end of our prayers. This is their way to say, "May God make it happen!" We honor others by preparing thoughtful prayers.

- Leading in prayer functions as an informal lesson that teaches others how to pray. People listen and they learn how to pray from our example.
- Corporate singing is also a kind of prayer, as many hymns and songs are addressed to God. These songs are all prepared songs and hymns—and yet we sing them with joy, reverence, enthusiasm, and even sincerity. If singing prayers (songs) in corporate worship can be sincere and meaningful, it's hard to see why prepared prayers cannot also be sincere.
- Preparing and even writing down our prayers ahead of time doesn't have to be insincere. On the contrary, it may make them more edifying to us and others and thus more honoring to God.

*Section***Luke 13-15****Pray**

Father in heaven, help me respond to Jesus with humility, always embracing by faith the values of the kingdom. Give me grace to be willing to pay the price for following You, to live out your values as I live for the eternal reward that is coming when Jesus returns. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Read & Learn**Read Luke 13-15**

Luke 13 In these chapters, observe how Jesus corrects many misunderstandings of who He is. Some people suggested to Jesus that tragedies are proof of God's judgment upon people who are more sinful than others. But Jesus warns that all people are in danger of judgment unless they repent.

The parable of the fig tree recalls Isaiah 5, where Israel is a barren vineyard. God has done everything for His people, but they reject Him and have no fruit.

Jesus heals a woman, a descendant of Abraham, on the Sabbath Day in the synagogue. Some are rejoicing, but Jesus' enemies are humiliated. Notice again: Jesus' life and words are divisive.

God's rule and reign doesn't always fit our expectations or the world's value system. The kingdom of God may start small—like a mustard seed or yeast in dough—but it always grows and spreads. Also, when it comes to God's kingdom, things are not always as they first appear. Some people acquainted with Jesus are actually workers

of unrighteousness who will be shut out from the kingdom. Some of the last will be first, and the first will be last. At this notion, Jesus is saddened because even the holy city of Jerusalem and most of its people are rejecting Him, though He is the Savior of Israel sent from God and promised in the Old Testament.

Luke 14 Notice how conflict continued between Jesus and the religious authorities. The Pharisees knew God's Law allowed rescuing animals on the Sabbath, so certainly it would be lawful for Jesus to heal people!

As you read the banquet parables, watch as Jesus teaches and shows how life under God's rule is radically different. Seeking honor and status for oneself isn't Jesus' way to live. In fact, in God's kingdom, we're called to humble ourselves, taking the position of least honor. Furthermore, kingdom-minded hosts invite the needy and desperate to dine with them—and kingdom rewards for kingdom choices often come in heaven, not on earth.

Finally, Jesus explains Israel's rejection of the Messiah and the kingdom with a parable about people invited to a great banquet who make excuses for refusing the invitation. Instead, many Gentiles who were not originally invited will attend and enjoy the banquet. Notice again: God's eye was on the nations all along! Strangely and sadly, God's kingdom party was a low-priority for many of the religious in Israel.

Following Jesus will be costly. Before following Jesus, we should consider whether we are willing to pay the price it requires—which, at the very least, means a fully-devoted life.

Luke 15 Notice the consecutive three parables about lost things and how they relate to our understanding of God's kingdom. Like God, followers of Jesus are concerned to go and find the lost. Like the angels, we celebrate when sinners turn from sin and are found to return to God. Recall Jesus' earlier words, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick." (Luke 5:31, ESV).



Ka'ala Souza - "Have You Counted the Costs of Following Jesus" (3 min)

Video posted under Standard YouTube License

Daily Verse for Meditation

Luke 14:27

27 Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

Reflect & Change

1. The gospel of Jesus Christ [transforms our purposes](#). Jesus' followers have new desires that align with Jesus' desires. He wants to bless the lowly and the outcasts; He wants the lost to be found.
2. The gospel changes our relationships. Disciples are humble and sacrificially loving. They serve humbly and lovingly, just like Jesus. They seek to bless others, especially those in need.

Go & Do

- How can you humble yourself to serve and love someone? Go and find opportunities to serve and love humbly today. Review results with another believer.

- Who do you know who is lost and needs to be found by God? What about others who are lost whom you don't know but still need to be found? Start a list and begin praying for five lost people. You may choose to pray daily or once a week, but be consistent.

Discipleship Activities

- Go online and find [Operation World](#), [The Joshua Project](#), or the [IMB](#) virtual prayer walk for unreached people groups. Begin to incorporate praying for an unreached people group into your prayer times this week. [[All Peoples](#)]

Section

Luke (Part 2) & Acts (Part 1)

Introduction to Luke-Acts (Part 2)

Luke-Acts is not the beginning of a story; it continues one that God began a long, long time ago.

Yes, the story of Luke-Acts actually began centuries before when God first promised rescue to Adam in Genesis 3. This promise appeared again and again throughout the Old Testament—to Abraham, Moses, David, and the prophets.

These promises were made over a period of about 1,500 years, and by the time Luke begins they've become deeply ingrained in Israel's thinking. Repeatedly, through prophets and priests and kings, God promised to rescue His people from their enemies and from the curse of sin.

This is why Luke begins his story reminding us that Israel is ruled by a foreign nation, Rome, and has been ruled by foreigners for 600 years. In Jesus' day, many expected God's rescue to include an earthly king like David, complete with a political and religious kingdom.

Back in Genesis 12, God called Abraham when he was an ordinary individual and promised him He would perform this rescue, blessing every nation of the world through his descendants ([Genesis 12:2-7](#)). God kept this promise when He rescued the nation of Israel out of slavery (e.g., [Deuteronomy 26:5-9](#)) and freed her to worship Him. He then made a covenant with her (e.g., Deuteronomy 28).

As the years passed, Israel and her kings and priests repeatedly disobeyed God and

thus forfeited His blessings. Despite this, Israel remained a key part of God's plan to reveal Himself, as those who received "the very words of God" (e.g., [Romans 3:1-2](#)). In particular, God chose David to be king over Israel—although he was a young and obscure shepherd-boy—and made great promises to him about blessing the world through his descendants, just like he promised to Abraham (2 [Samuel 7:8-16](#)).

As we see in Luke, at just the right time, God sent His Son Jesus to fulfill these promises to Adam, Abraham, and David. This is why the genealogy in Luke shouldn't be skipped, because it shows us right off the bat who Jesus is; he's the descendant of David, the fulfillment of God's promise, the second Adam! These roles are not incidental to Jesus' identity. In fact, they help present-day Jewish readers to see that Jesus hasn't come out of nowhere. He is the one whom God has sent to rescue His people and the one whom God will send a second time to judge all the inhabitants of this world, to bring it to an end, to inaugurate the new heavens and new earth, and to be acknowledged by all as Lord over all (e.g., [Luke 17:24-35](#), 2 [Peter 3:10-13](#), [Philippians 2:8-11](#)).

Luke-Acts teaches us that all people, not just Israel, need to be saved and rescued!

God has always taken the initiative in rescuing people from sin and its consequences, including the final judgment. This initiative is made plain in His promises to Abraham, David, and the prophets. God also makes clear in these promises that the Savior was not sent just to save Israel but the **people among nations** who respond with genuine repentance and faith in Jesus as Lord.

The Old Testament clearly teaches that all people everywhere are sinful and in need of salvation; the Old Testament also indicates how God will act to accomplish this salvation. Even the sacrificial system reminds us there must be a better and perfect sacrifice to take away sin once and for all ([Hebrews 9:25-28](#)). But who could make such a sacrifice? The prophet Isaiah tells us that God will exercise His rule through a

chosen king ([Isaiah 9:6-7](#)) who will also be the suffering servant and the final perfect substitutionary sacrifice for sin ([Isaiah 52:13-53:12](#)). But this King would also be a warrior or conqueror who rescues His people by destroying God's enemies ([Isaiah 59:16-20](#)).

Jesus' contemporaries, Theophilus included, would have been expecting all this. But Jesus turns out to be a different kind of Rescuer.

As Luke's Gospel begins, all these Old Testament promises remain unfulfilled. Simeon, the old man, represents how Israel should have received Jesus as God's foretold Messiah. The Jews understood that the promised king from David's family tree was the key, that when the Davidic king arrived every promise would be realized. This was why people like Simeon were so eagerly awaiting the promised Davidic king (usually referred to as Messiah or Christ). In Luke, God is revealing that Jesus is the Messiah through whom His promises will be fulfilled.

What a surprise to discover that God's promised Savior fulfilled all of these in one person, Jesus, His only Son.

Here's the trajectory of Acts: Old Testament promises to missionary rescuer and Messiah to a newly created community of the King.

In Acts, everything began in Jerusalem—"the city of the great king" ([Psalm 48:2](#)), the site of the Temple, the center of Israel's worship of the living God. When Acts ends, however, Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, has reached Rome—the city of Caesar and the center of Gentile world power.

In Acts, Luke explains to Theophilus how the gospel made progress in such a short amount of time, and his explanation is surprising. It wasn't because of an especially creative strategy that Jesus' followers were effective in spreading the good news and establishing new churches. Rather, it was because of the living and active presence

of the risen Jesus that brought new life as the Holy Spirit worked in and through the lives of faithful disciples—all to the glory of the Father.

Luke wants the reader—and us—to realize that the key to powerful gospel witness isn't cleverness or relevance, or even a brilliant strategy or cultural awareness. Instead, for any gospel growth, we should look for the active presence of the Holy Spirit made visible through the lives of obedient and loving disciples.

But Luke-Acts is also a story—and an unfinished story!

If Luke's Gospel gives us an organized historical account of who Jesus is, what He has done, and what the lives of faithful Christ-followers should look like, then Acts is the continuation of that history. In Acts, Luke presents the story of Jesus' followers as they are commissioned into the world to both live out the good news and to announce it to all peoples, just as the Old Testament promises had foretold. Like Jesus, his followers in Acts show the gospel and they tell the gospel. Also like Jesus, they suffer for the gospel, but God's plan still succeeds.

Luke and Acts is a story that began in the first century, but is not yet finished—and the story's hero is Jesus. When Jesus ascended to the Father in heaven, He left the Holy Spirit who gives life to God's people and sanctifies the lives of Jesus' true followers. The Holy Spirit shines the spotlight on Jesus even as He empowers the church for its mission.

In Luke, Jesus lives the holy life that Jesus' followers seek to live in Acts. As we read both books, let us prayerfully seek to discover our role in this continuing story.

Understanding the Acts of the Apostles

Luke wrote both the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. Originally, they were a single two-volume work. It will help you interpret Acts if you've read carefully Luke's Gospel. In particular, notice what Jesus began to do and the way in which He

commissioned His followers in Luke 24.

The Acts of the Apostles records the story of what Jesus, after His resurrection, continued to do through the person of His Holy Spirit, the apostles, and other ordinary disciples (Acts 1:1). Luke guides our reading by providing section markers in the book:

1. Acts 1:8 — Jesus commissions His followers.
2. Acts 1–2 — The apostles and others wait in Jerusalem and then experience the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
3. Acts 3–7 — The apostles witness in Jerusalem.
4. Acts 8–12 — Jesus' followers witness in Judea and Samaria.
5. Acts 9–28 — Jesus' followers witness to Jesus to the ends of the earth.

The Holy Spirit is the Hero of Acts as He works through ordinary people as well as the apostles to make disciples and start churches among different kinds of people in difficult situations and places. The disciples and churches are a praying people, often praying Old Testament psalms to God. God's people pray God's Word back to Him in Acts. Often they respond to difficulty or opportunity by gathering to pray.

Acts gives us encouragement in our mission to the ends of the earth and examples for our church ministry and mission. Luke writes history in Acts, and this doesn't permit him to teach or instruct directly on many important matters. He just accurately tells us the story. Paul's letters, however, teach and instruct directly on many matters which are merely recounted in Luke's narrative of Acts. So, it is good to compare Acts with other letters in the New Testament as we seek to witness to Christ, live as disciples, start churches, and equip leaders.

To correctly interpret and apply these examples Luke describes in Acts, ask these questions:

Is this a good or bad example? Evaluate from the text whether the example is positive or negative.

Are these good patterns? Look for repeated patterns in Acts and for indications these patterns were approved by Luke, who writes under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Where a pattern is repeated many times, it's worth noting!

Unless the positive examples or patterns match a specific command found elsewhere in the New Testament, we may choose to follow that example or pattern where it is consistent with biblical principles. The patterns or examples do not constitute a command to follow.

When we see the Acts pattern affirmed in other New Testament writings, we can be reasonably sure this is a pattern to follow!

Jesus is still the Hero. Remember, the apostles and early disciples are still just men and women, and they are not perfect. Not everything recorded about them is intended to be a positive example for us.

Acts 1:8

8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Section

Luke 16-19:9

Pray

Lord, help me remember there is nothing I can do to earn forgiveness or merit salvation; it is all a gift of your mercy, purchased at the cost of my Savior's life. Help me to cry out daily for your mercy and to trust in the work of Christ that alone can save. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read & Learn

Read Luke 16-19:9

As you read prayerfully today, observe both the contrasting responses to Jesus and the values of the kingdom. Recall that parables usually have one main point often stated near the end of the parable. Don't forget that Jesus usually invites His hearers to identify with one or more characters in the parable.

Luke 16 Here Luke includes more parables about how things are in God's kingdom.

TREASURE IN HEAVEN

To think more about how to store up treasure in heaven, read and reflect on the below

[6 Treasure Principle Keys](#)

16:1–31 Managing money and possessions in God's kingdom. Jesus does not encourage dishonesty in this parable. Instead, He encourages acting cleverly in our present-day to bless others and so receive a future reward. He urges His

followers to be faithful in the little matters of life, and not to be lovers of money like the Pharisees. The point of the parable of the dishonest manager is that followers of Jesus should be faithful in using God's present gifts, including money, to bless others.

God is interested in our hearts and intentions; He knows if we are living to please Him or living for money. Notice Jesus' point in 16:19–31. A day is coming when those who have rejected God's purposes and salvation will regret their decision. Before it's too late, the rich man wanted to warn his family of the coming judgment. For those with ears to hear what Moses and the prophets were saying, the good news of Jesus could be found in the Old Testament. Abraham tells the rich man that people who refuse to believe God's Word won't listen to warnings or turn from their sins even if they see God raising Jesus from death to life. In Acts, we will see Abraham was right.

Luke 17:1–18 Jesus explains that sin is a seriously destructive force but also that we must never stop forgiving those who turn from their sin. Because sin and rebellion against God are so evil and destructive, we must be careful never to cause new followers of Jesus to stumble and turn from God's ways. Perhaps Jesus has in mind those who are opposing God's kingdom. To be sure, we should be on guard and rebuke other followers of Jesus when they sin. But also, we should always forgive those who repent.

If we're living under God's rule, it requires only a little faith to do great things. Even when we live and act rightly, serving well in His kingdom, we have no claims upon the King! Again, we see non-Jews, foreign peoples, and even a Samaritan respond with thanksgiving to Jesus' healing power.

[Read more about the Last Things from the BFM](#)

17:20–18:8 The kingdom of God is already being realized in Jesus' first coming. The second coming of Jesus will be sudden and unexpected. At a time when people are

going about their ordinary business, Jesus, the Son of Man, will be revealed and the end will come.

In the parable of the unjust judge, notice Jesus does not say God is like an unjust judge. Instead, the point of the parable is that God listens to prayer, and, like the widow, His followers should pray in faith with persistence.

18:9–43 Entering and living under God’s rule and kingdom requires a complete transformation of our hearts, minds, wills, and values. In short, followers of Jesus live changed lives! See again, the point of the parable comes at the end (18:14). Being right with God requires the humility to pray like the tax collector, “God, turn your wrath from me—a sinner!”

Children were of very low status in Jesus’s day, and so the disciples have a culturally appropriate—but anti-kingdom of God—response. Jesus rightly corrects them. Being a follower of Jesus requires humility and dependence, acknowledging our weakness and need for God’s rescuing help through Jesus.

Riches and possessions can be a barrier to entering the kingdom of God and following Jesus. This is important to remember as Jesus meets a rich, morally upright person with social status who loves money more than God and His kingdom. It’s clear this rich young ruler has to change; he cannot follow Jesus until he first sells everything and gives to the poor, showing he values heaven more than this life and its wealth. According to Jesus, it’s impossible for the rich to enter the kingdom of God without His help.

18:31–19:9 Jesus explains for the third time that His death will happen as the Old Testament predicted. Notice the poor, blind, and socially outcast man’s response. Unlike so many with so much more, this man sees Jesus as the Son of David and asks for mercy.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Luke 18:29-30

29 And he said to them, 'Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, 30 who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.'

Reflect & Change

1. Like the Pharisee, we can be tempted to compare ourselves with others and seek to justify ourselves by our good deeds. This never works. Following Jesus requires humility and a recognition we deserve His righteous anger due to our sin and rebellion. Think of some ways you seek to make yourself right with God rather than trusting in Jesus' perfect sacrifice and relying on God's mercy.
2. We live in a world among many people who don't value what God values. All day long we're encouraged to embrace anti-kingdom values that don't please Jesus. But followers of Jesus find that God transforms their minds as they read the Word of God and turn from sin. In prayer, ask God to show you any specific ways your values regarding money, possessions, status, or humility need to change.

Go & Do

- Ask God to give you the courage to warn others about the coming judgment and to point them to Jesus, the only One who can save people from God's wrath.
- Spend time in prayer asking God to show you if there's any unforgiveness in your heart. If there is, confess it, forgive the person from your heart, and then determine to bless and love them. Watch this 3-minute video that answers the question, "Should we forgive the unrepentant?"

Discipleship Activities

1. Married couples: Use the Family Life assessment below to evaluate your Family Life Health. If you want, here are other marriage evaluation questions to add. Discuss any concerns with a trusted mentor or pastor. Are there any growth areas? [Healthy Relationships]
2. Singles: Use the Singles Health assessment below to evaluate your health as a single person. Watch or read Singleness and the Next Generation. Do you agree with the 4 Foundations for Biblical Singleness and 4 Reasons to Delight in Singleness? Write down feedback to share with your accountability partner. Pray with him or her about ways to best use the gift of singleness God has given to you. [Healthy Relationships]

Family Life Health Assessment

Married Couples- please answer the following with your spouse.

1. How is the husband's leadership?
2. How is the wife's support?
3. How can I improve in fulfilling my respective role?
4. How is confession of sin in our marriage?
5. How is our concern for each other's godliness?
6. How are we at guarding meaningful time together?
 - In prayer?
 - In conversation?
 - In date nights?
7. How is our sex life?
8. How is our selfless love for one another?

9. How is our respect for one another?
10. How is our service of one another?
11. How is our prayer for one another?
12. How is our encouragement of one another?
13. Are there mentors in your life to help you grow in marriage?

Parents

1. What areas of parenting are you encouraged by?
2. What areas of parenting do you need to grow in?
3. How is each child doing?
 - Spiritually?
 - Physically?
 - Emotionally?
 - Relationally with parents?
 - Relationally with siblings?

i Singles Health Assessment

1. How is your relationship with members of your same sex?
2. How is your relationship with members of your opposite sex?
3. How often are you alone?
4. How often are you in relationship and community with other people?
5. In what ways are you stewarding your gift of singleness for God's purposes?
6. In what ways can you better steward your gift of singleness for God's purposes?
7. Journal about the typical times in a week you are by yourself, and how you spend that time.

Section

Luke 19-21

Pray

Lord, help me desire what you desire. Change my heart and wean me from desires not glorifying to you. Help me be a faithful steward, holding loosely to all the gifts you've entrusted to me and using them to advance your kingdom. You always provide all we need. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read & Learn

Read Luke 19-21

Luke 19 Jesus continues His journey to Jerusalem where He will suffer and die. When Zacchaeus repents and receives salvation, it's as though a camel goes through the eye of a needle: a rich man has entered the kingdom of God—another lost sinner has been found by Jesus!

Here's the underlying point of the parable of the minas: In the kingdom of God, the more we put into practice what we learn, the more opportunities we'll be given.

Jesus, the Messiah-King-Savior, enters Jerusalem just as the prophets predicted He would—as the anointed Ruler-King. He is welcomed gladly and with praise to God by some, and is rejected by others, namely, the Pharisees.

Luke 19:41–48 Jesus is saddened that Jerusalem and many of its people do not recognize Him as the long-awaited Savior. This, too, was predicted in the Old Testament. Jesus returns to the temple where as a 12-year-old boy He had surprised the priests with His understanding. Now, after cleansing the temple of

profit-making merchants, He was teaching daily in the temple area, but the Jewish leaders rejected what He taught, even though many found Jesus and His teaching interesting.

Luke 20:1–40 When quizzed by the religious leaders in the temple, Jesus communicates indirectly, answering their questions with questions of His own. Three consecutive times, they try to trap Him with complicated religious and legal questions—and three consecutive times, they fail.

Luke 20:41 Jesus then gives the religious leaders a theological quiz about Psalm 110, which speaks of the coming Messiah-Savior as David’s Son and Lord, that is, as God. Here, Jesus hints at His identity as a descendant of David and as the Son of God.

According to Jesus, Psalm 110 points to the Messiah-Savior as both human and divine, as the risen Savior ruling from God’s right hand. This Messiah will be so great that even King David said of Him, “My Lord!” If David in Psalm 110 so honored the Messiah, why didn’t these Jewish religious leaders honor Jesus? In short, Jesus is both the descendant of David and also his Lord and Savior.

Psalm 110: This Psalm speaks of the Messiah-Savior being the Davidic King who perfectly rules at God’s right hand. The early church often described this passage as prophetic about Jesus as Lord. See Acts 2:30–36, 7:55–56, 13:33–39; 1 Corinthians 15:22–28; Ephesians 1:19–23; Hebrews 1:3–14; and Hebrews 5–7.

Jesus also suggests here that all of this accords with the eternal plan of God the Father. He established the coming Messiah to rule as God’s chosen Son of David. But the religious leaders rejected Jesus as sent from God; they do not recognize Him as the promised and expected King of God’s kingdom!

Luke 21:1–3 Jesus sees things differently than the world. Sacrificial, devoted giving of a small amount is worth more in His kingdom than a large amount that requires

little or no sacrifice.

Luke 21:4–38 By predicting the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, which occurred in 70 A.D., Jesus invites questions about the future and how history will end. As the end approaches, Jesus' followers will face much suffering and trials as God brings judgment on the world. But God will grant them endurance, and they will be rescued from coming judgment.

Followers of Jesus are not to fear the future. They're to be on guard, remaining alert and praying for strength to persevere amidst future trials. In the Old Testament, Israel did not remain alert, and instead of recognizing God's salvation in Jesus, they rejected Him and even had Him put to death. Jesus' disciples remember that God is in control of all the events of history, even future events that will unfold before the end.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Luke 21:3-4

*3 And he said, 'Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them.
4 For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.'*

Reflect & Change

1. God transforms people as they meet Jesus and believe the gospel. Jesus forgives Zacchaeus' sins and also satisfies his soul. As a new follower of Jesus, Zacchaeus gives generously and welcomes Jesus into his life and home. Zacchaeus now desires what Jesus desires. How has Jesus changed your desires?
2. Disciples recognize Jesus in the Old Testament and, having put confidence in Him as their King and the Ruler over all history, they're not afraid to suffer and are able to persevere to the end. Knowing Jesus

is in control changes how we face the future, including trials.

Go & Do

Read Psalm 22 and Psalm 110 and consider how they point to Jesus, the coming King from David's line. To learn more about the different kinds of psalms, here is an 8-minute video that gives an overview of the [different types of psalms](#) and how they can be used as the prayer book of the church. Or, read this article on [praying the Psalms](#).

Discipleship Activities

- Read about the different cultural and religious groups living in your area in [Operation World](#). Are any from [unreached people groups](#)? Begin praying for them. [[All Peoples](#)]

Section

Luke 22-24

Pray

Father, open my eyes again that I might see Jesus in all of the Bible. What an amazing and wonderful Savior You have provided in Christ. Give me grace to understand the cross and resurrection in a fresh way that is life-changing and will propel me to announce the good news to all peoples. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read & Learn

Read Luke 22-24

Luke recorded for us the last days of Jesus' life in Luke 22–24. In these moments, Jesus makes it plain who He is and why He has come.

Luke 22:1–23 Notice that fear of people led the religious leaders to seek to kill Jesus during Passover. Satan entered Judas, one of the twelve apostles, and he betrayed Jesus for money. Jesus celebrates Passover with His twelve apostles and explains—with a cup, with bread, and with words—how His death will establish a new covenant between God and people.

Luke 22:24–30 Jesus explains that leadership and greatness in the kingdom of God is not about dominating others or being served by others. Under God's rule, leading with greatness means serving and showing humility. That's how Jesus' followers are to lead.

Luke 22:31–46 Jesus prepares His followers for the coming troubles and the temptations they'll face to turn away from God and His plans. In great anguish, Jesus

determines to do God's will even if it means facing death and experiencing God's judgment against sinners.

Luke 22:66–71 Who is Jesus? The religious leaders refuse to recognize Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, so they bring Him before Pilate, the Roman ruler, on false charges. Pilate then sends Him to Herod who mocks Jesus and then sends Him back to Pilate.

Ultimately, it's not Pilate but the citizens of Jerusalem, the people of Israel, who call for Jesus' death by crucifixion; they ask for a convicted murderer, Barabbas, to be released in Jesus' place. On the way to be crucified, Jesus speaks as a prophet and condemns Jerusalem for failing to recognize the Messiah when He was in their midst. On the cross, we see Jesus' compassion as He talks with His heavenly Father, pleading for the same people who called for His crucifixion.

In these moments, notice the ironic words spoken against Jesus. It is precisely because Jesus was the Messiah who came to save others that He did not save himself. Instead, He suffered and died to bear the punishment for sins He had not committed.

The thieves on the cross remind us yet again that Jesus is divisive. One rejected Jesus and mocked him; the other recognized Jesus as the Savior-King and asked for mercy.

As Jesus died and committed himself to His Father, the temple curtain was torn in two, symbolizing that access to God is now possible through Jesus Christ, who was once and for all the perfect sacrifice for sin. Interestingly, a Gentile soldier realized this as well and stated the truth about Jesus: "This man really was righteous."

Not every Jewish leader rejected Jesus. Joseph from Judea, a member of the Jewish council, offered a family tomb for Jesus' burial place.

Luke 24:1–12 Notice Luke highlights women as the first ones to discover Jesus' empty tomb. They reported the news to Peter who then ran and confirmed Jesus had risen from the dead.

Luke 24:13–35 Two other followers were walking to Emmaus, a nearby village, and Jesus Himself came and walked with them. Cleopas and the other follower had failed to recognize Jesus as the Redeemer of Israel, the Promised Messiah. Jesus explained how Moses and the prophets had all spoken of Jesus and predicted His sufferings, His resurrection, and even His ascension to glory with the Father. Jesus also ate with them, and when He broke bread and blessed it, they recognized Jesus had died and was now alive again. He repeated that everything in the Old Testament written about Jesus had to be fulfilled, including the parts about God's blessings flowing to all peoples and nations.

In the Old Testament, it is written that the good news about the Messiah is to be announced to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem. Announcing this good news requires the Holy Spirit to activate His people, so followers of Jesus were to wait in the city of Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to empower them. As Jesus was lifted through the clouds to heaven, notice the disciples worshipped Him as Lord.

① What is the purpose of the Old Testament for New Testament believers?

The Bible has two parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. How do these relate to each other, and specifically how does the Old Testament function for New Testament believers?

1. The Old Testament establishes a basic worldview from God's

perspective. Consider what we learn simply from the first three chapters of Genesis. We learn that God is separate from creation and existed eternally before time began. We learn that God is infinite in power and created everything simply by speaking it into being. We learn that the created world is real, that it is good, and that it is not its own—it belongs to God. We learn that time and history are linear, with a beginning and a destination. We learn that humanity was created in the image of God, was blessed by God, and was given a job to do. We learn that the human race rebelled against God and that the evil we experience in this world is a consequence of that rebellion. We learn that death was not our intended destiny but rather a result of sin. We learn that God is a righteous God who punished evil and that He is also a gracious God who pursues sinners to draw them back to Himself. That is a hugely significant foundation for a worldview, and without it, the rest of the Bible makes no sense. The rest of the Old Testament fleshes out those themes, especially in regard to our sin, God's judgment, and God's redemptive pursuit of sinners.

2. The Old Testament establishes the basic themes of biblical truth. In the Old Testament, we learn about who God is, what He has done, and what He requires. We also learn about who we are from God's perspective. The Old Testament defines for us such crucial biblical themes as redemption, grace, election, covenant, the people of God, and the necessity of sacrifice for sin. Without this Old Testament understanding, the New Testament cannot be understood accurately.
3. In the Old Testament, God reveals for us His plans and His promises. Over and over again we see God intervening in history to accomplish His purpose to bless all people through the offspring of Abraham. God's promises are revealed in the Old Testament. We read about the fulfillment of those promises through Jesus Christ in the New Testament.
4. The Old Testament is a tutor to lead us to Christ. It does this by both

showing us our need for a Savior and by providing the backstory for the coming of Christ. The New Testament writers, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, clearly regarded the Old Testament as a book about Christ, and they mined it frequently for references to Him as they explained and proclaimed Him to the world.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Luke 22:19-20

19 And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' 20 And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.'

Reflect & Change

1. Jesus expected the disciples to be His witnesses, proclaiming the gospel of His life, death, and resurrection to all peoples and nations. We also are His disciples and His witnesses, and the same is expected of us.
2. Luke's Gospel makes clear that Jesus is God's chosen King, planned for and predicted in the Old Testament. Jesus made the extraordinary claim that the Law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms—that is, the entire Old Testament—pointed to Him as God's anointed King. When we read the Old Testament, we should be looking for how each book points to Jesus, the coming Lord.

Go & Do

Compelled by God's grace, disciples are captivated by the Great Commission. Jesus not only transformed His followers' way of life; He revolutionized their reason for living. Disciples live—and die—to share the gospel of Christ, to reproduce the life of Christ, to teach the Word of Christ, and to serve the world for Christ by praying for, giving to, and going to people around them and around the world for the sake of

God's fame. Summarize the [Definition of a Disciple](#).

Discipleship Activities

- Read a [Gospel Definition](#) and then watch [The Bridge](#) Gospel presentation (3 min), [Two Ways to Live](#) (6 min), or [The Story](#) (5 min). You could also read the [Romans Road](#). Think about how you would explain the gospel, specifically what [conversion](#) is. Remember that we always want to set forth the truth plainly (2 Cor 4:1–5), not using deception or distorting the Word in any way. Are there parts presented here you tend to leave out? Watch this video by [Propaganda](#) for an interesting and contextualized gospel presentation. [[Making Disciples](#)]

Section

Acts 1-4**Pray**

Father in heaven, in order to live and work in the power of the Holy Spirit, we desperately need Jesus. Fill us with your Spirit who provides fellowship with You and gives us power to live as Jesus' followers. As we read Acts, show us again how much we need the Spirit's help. We ask that we might know the fellowship with You as you grant us the boldness to declare Christ, today and every day. In Jesus' name, amen.

Introduction

The Church at Brook Hills - Acts in 3 Minutes

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Read & Learn**Read Acts 1-4**

In Acts, we repeatedly see followers of Jesus as they meet together and pray

together. Filled with the Holy Spirit, they boldly evangelize—again and again. The Holy Spirit guided Luke to write a second volume to follow his self-titled Gospel. In this follow-up, we get the book of Acts, as Luke describes the steady progress of the gospel from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria—all the way to the capitol of the Roman Empire.

In these first few chapters of Acts, followers of Jesus multiply in spite of persecution. Acts 1 begins where the Gospel of Luke ended: Jesus is teaching His disciples during the 40-day period between His resurrection and ascension to heaven. Jesus stressed the critical importance of the Holy Spirit, commanding His disciples not to attempt the mission without the Spirit (1:4). Acts emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit in the task of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth, as well as the spiritual lives of Christians (1:8; 4:8, 31; 6:3; 7:55; 13:1–4, 52). In short, Jesus warned his followers: Don't try to do anything without the Holy Spirit's help!

Consider how much of Peter's Pentecost message (2:14–36) is right from the Old Testament, specifically texts about Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. This fits perfectly with what He said in Luke 24, when He explained how the Old Testament "testifies about me."

What's more, examine the description of the church in Acts 2:41–47. Notice how the disciples devote themselves to five things: the ministry of the Word, fellowship, worship, service, and evangelism. Luke is careful to outline these features of the early church. Throughout the book of Acts, Luke describes eight more church plants and most of these characteristics are found in them. Acts 4 in particular closes with a powerful description of service ministries in the church as believers meet the needs of others in the body.

In Acts 2, conversion to Christ brings people into God's Story and into His community

[What is a church?](#)

Don't miss the persecution that occurred in response to the miracles of Acts 3 and 4. Peter heals in Jesus' name and receives the same mixed response Jesus received when He healed the sick and lame. Ultimately, Jesus' opponents toss some believers in jail.

At this point, it's clear the world opposed both Jesus and His followers, especially when they act in His name. In more than half of the chapters of Acts, we find disciples in prison. If we're reading Scripture rightly, then we see it's often costly to follow Jesus.



David Platt - Why The Holy Spirit Is Crucial (3 min)

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Phillip Jensen - Can Those Who've Never Heard be Saved?

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Reflect & Change

1. Observe how the disciples pray as they both wait for the Holy Spirit and respond to persecution. In Acts, we regularly read of the Holy Spirit empowering disciples and the church with evangelistic boldness. He enables Jesus' disciples to overcome fear of man and opposition. Do you see how these early Christians asked the Lord to work among them? Do you see how they prayed in Jesus' name? The church's mission will only be effective as Christians depend on Jesus and pray for the life-giving and empowering work of the Holy Spirit.
2. Throughout history, the people of God have been in conflict with the cultures around them. As we go about our lives and speak with our "oikos"—family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers—we must declare the name of Jesus in spite of opposition and hostility. That's not always easy, and it wasn't easy for Peter and the early church. But that's why they prayed in community and asked for God's help, that they might be bold and continue in faithfulness.
3. Don't miss how Peter spoke to his surrounding culture, a culture that didn't want to hear Jesus' name. Peter states, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men

by which we must be saved” (4:12, ESV). The good news of Jesus Christ must be announced for people to be saved. This news is good because it contains the “name” given to all peoples. It’s not exclusive to Israel or the Jews but is for all who turn from their sin and believe. But who must turn and believe? All of us, because all have sinned; all are in need of salvation. There is no other way. This is how God’s story works.

① What is Oikos?

(Summary of Tom Wolff’s ideas on Oikos Evangelism and Outreach)

An **oikos** is a social system composed of those who relate to each other through common ties and tasks. The New Testament *oikos* included members of the nuclear family, but extended to dependents, slaves, and employees. Oikos members often lived together, but always sensed a close association with each other. And note this carefully, the *oikos* constituted the basic social unity by which the early church grew. Sometimes people today also talk about **tribes** as any group connected to one another through an idea or a leader—kind of a voluntary *oikos*, if you will.

As Michael Green reminds us, an *oikos* for the New Testament church consisted of “blood relations, slaves, clients, and friends. Christian missionaries made a deliberate point of gaining whatever (*oikos*) households they could as lighthouses, so to speak, from which the gospel could illuminate the surrounding darkness.”

OIKOS EVANGELISM, then, is one God-given and God-ordained means for naturally sharing our supernatural message. The early church spread

through *oikos* evangelism. It's about evangelizing family members who saw the old sinner become the new saint; it's about sharing with the neighbor who questioned how such a difference had come over his old friend or reaching the guys in the local trade union or the *oikos* that played tennis together.

OIKOS

[Another resource here.](#)

An *oikos* corresponds to what contemporary anthropologists define as the three universal social systems of **common kinship** (extended family, though in urban settings the extended family might live far away); **common community** (might be neighborhoods, not in urban settings); and **common interests** (also referred to as a “clan” below, these are affinity groups with mutual interests and usually networks of relationships where trust is expressed).

These three natural social groupings include:

1. Family
2. Community
3. Clan

The (urban) clan has developed into social units which are basically extensions of the local group—voluntary associations based on common interests ranging from trade unions and medical associations to bridge clubs and parent-teacher associations. Each of these groupings is held together by a common interest, an interest arising from mutual participation in the same trades, the mutual enjoyment of a game, or mutual problems in relation to a set of children.

ADJUSTING OUR TACTICS FOR THE URBAN SETTING

If you expect neighborliness or extended family in urban settings, you'll probably be disappointed. In looking for persons or households (oikos/oikoi) or peace, in urban settings you will want to aim for clans or affinity groups or clubs or societies rather than your apartment neighbors. You will need to "insert" yourself into some clans or urban social groupings. Urban outreach is different.

MEETUP.COM

Check out Meetup.com below to find ways to find oikos groups in urban and not-so-urban areas.

[Meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com)

Consider these questions:

1. What am I doing to learn about the variety of urban social groupings in my city? (Examples: Cooking club, hiking, kite flying, poetry reciting, soccer, sewing, walking, exercise, yoga, retirees, urban tea houses, false religion groups, etc.)
2. When do these groups get together? Where? Are they mostly men, women, young, old, mixed?
3. Are they free, or is there a charge? Is there an orientation? How does one "enter" the club/group? Do I need a sponsor?
4. How can I learn more about them?
5. How can I (and my family) get involved in one or more of these clans (urban social groupings)?
6. What can I do to intentionally approach one or more of these groupings and try to get involved?
7. How can being a part of a clan help me find a person/oikos of peace?

Go & Do

- Thank God for the Holy Spirit who, if you're a Christian, lives inside of you (Acts 2:38). God's purpose at Pentecost was to equip His church with the power of the Holy Spirit so that we would be His witnesses to the nations, all to the eternal glory of God. As you think about this, discuss these questions with a fellow Christian:
 - As I live my life as Jesus' follower, am I focused on God's glory?
 - Do I have a passion for the nations to glorify God by believing the gospel?
 - How is my daily life a demonstration of my dependence on the Holy Spirit?
 - How could I do better at leaning on the Holy Spirit rather than leaning on my own understanding?
 - How can I develop the desire to bear witness daily to Christ to those who are lost and perishing?
 - Followers of Jesus pray alone and with others. In addition to praying alone (Luke 5:16), pray with one or two others this week (Matt 18:20).

Daily Verse for Meditation

Acts 1:8

8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Discipleship Activities

- In conversations this week, listen to what's being said and note what topics, concerns, and needs could easily transition to spiritual topics (Acts 2:14; 3:12). This article can help you think about [How to Turn a Conversation to Spiritual Things](#). Notice this approach treats others with respect and makes vulnerability a part of ordinary conversations. [[Making Disciples](#)]

*Section***Acts 5-8****Pray**

Father, give us the boldness, courage, and wisdom of Stephen. Give us the faithfulness of Philip to make Jesus' name known. May we always be peacemakers in the church. Remind us that You are in control and You are good! In Jesus' name, amen.

Read & Learn**Read Acts 5-8**

As churches grow numerically, they often face new challenges. It's not painless. Observe the various challenges of growth in Acts 5–8 and how the Holy Spirit provides what's needed to meet those challenges.

Acts 5 The early church was characterized by generous and sacrificial giving in order to meet real needs. Ananias and Sapphira, however, tried to deceive the church and lied to God the Holy Spirit. Peter confronted Ananias and then Sapphira, and the church's purity was maintained. As Luke records, "More than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women" (Acts 5:14, ESV).

Next, notice persecution seems to have been a normal part of church life. The apostles were imprisoned again for acting and speaking in Jesus' name. But rather than keep quiet, they asserted, "We must obey God rather than men" (5:29).

Acts 6–7 The church also took care of its widows. However, as numbers increased, there were complaints of neglect by Greek-speaking Jewish believers against Aramaic speakers; they were worried their widows were being overlooked in the

daily distribution of food.

So the apostles responded by expanding the ministry team (the seven) to include servants who restored unity and peace by specifically focusing on the ministry to both groups of widows (6:1). Luke reflects on this resolution: “The number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7, ESV).

After this, Stephen, one of the seven added to the ministry team, boldly evangelized in Jerusalem. He was seized and brought before the authorities who accused him of speaking against the temple and the Law (6:12–13). Stephen surveyed the Old Testament to refute these charges and to call to repentance his accusers. Among them was Saul, who became the Apostle Paul (6:58). While being stoned to death, Stephen saw “the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God” (7:56, ESV).

Acts 8 Sometimes, apparent followers of Jesus will be envious and bitter, coveting the spiritual gifts of others. Simon thinks that spiritual power and influence may be bought with money, but observe how Peter rebukes Simon for his evil heart, urging him to repent.

Notice how Philip—not an apostle or one of the seven, simply an ordinary follower of Christ—obediently explains the gospel to an Ethiopian official whom God has prepared to believe the good news. See how the Spirit used Philip’s obedient witness to make disciples in a distant place. This is a great picture of how God uses ordinary people to both spread the gospel and have a part in planting churches wherever they find themselves!

Lastly, notice the next great move of God was not initiated by the disciples but was the result of great persecution.



The Church at Brook Hills - Common Disciples Advance the Gospel
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Daily Verse for Meditation

Acts 5:29

29 But Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than men.'

Reflect & Change

- Jesus' followers must always be prepared to announce the gospel of Christ, which means they cannot be silenced by outside authority. When told to stop, Peter chose to obey the words of God rather than the words of men (Acts 5:29).
- As the church grew, conflict arose between ethnic groups. Yet God did not leave His church without help. He provided men filled with the Spirit to restore unity by serving the tables for groups who were at odds.
- God's strategy is sometimes unconventional. He uses something as strange as persecution to jump-start the preaching of the Word in new places (8:1). As His followers, we should walk humbly with God who is in control of all the world's events.

Go & Do

- Notice the storyline of Scripture recounted in Acts 7. Summarize the major topics of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration to use when sharing the gospel. For more information, read the brief summary below of the overall story or the Grand Narrative of the Bible.
- We see the early believers taking the opportunity to share the gospel wherever they were (Acts 8). Pray God would give you the opportunities, the boldness, and the ability to share the gospel.
 1. Ask for the Holy Spirit's help.
 2. Ask for eyes to see where He is providing opportunities around you.
 3. Pray for boldness to share the gospel in the Spirit's power.

i The Grand Narrative of Scripture

The Bible is not a random collection of theological facts and inspirational statements. It's a unified story. Ultimately, the Bible tells the story of God, and He is its author, its main character, its primary hero, and its purpose. This story has four main parts: creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. In creation, God made the world out of nothing simply by speaking it into being. Everything He made is good. As the crown of creation, He made the first man and woman in His image, gave them dominion over the rest of creation, and commanded them to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and take care of it.

In the Fall, the first man and woman rebelled against God and disobeyed Him. As a result, their relationships with God, each other, and the rest of creation were all shattered. Hardship, painful labor, disease, natural disasters, crime, war, broken relationships, death—all of these entered the

world along with sin, and these things have characterized life on earth ever since.

Most of the rest of the Bible tells the story of redemption. Even though the human race deserved condemnation from God, He had mercy on us and unfolded His plan for our salvation through the course of biblical history. That history included choosing Abraham and his family to be His people, rescuing the Israelites from slavery in Egypt through Moses, giving them His Law, setting up the tabernacle and the Old Testament priesthood, bringing them into the Promised Land, establishing them as a nation, giving them a king in the person of David, and both confronting and comforting them through a succession of prophets.

He established His relationship with His people through a series of covenant agreements, which He made with Abraham, with Israel through Moses, and with David. All of these things pointed forward—and prepared the way—for Jesus, the Anointed One (Messiah), God Himself in human flesh. Jesus is the ultimate Prophet, the Word of God made flesh, who reveals and proclaims God's truth perfectly. Jesus is the ultimate priest and the ultimate sacrifice, whose death and resurrection provide the substitutionary sacrifice for sinners that was anticipated by sacrificing bulls and goats in the Old Testament.

Jesus is the ultimate King, David's eternal Son, who will defeat all His enemies and rule perfectly forever as King of kings and Lord of lords. At the perfect time in history, Jesus was born of a virgin, lived a perfect life (the life we should have lived), taught the way of God clearly and perfectly, demonstrated the in-breaking of the rule of God through His miracles, died the death in our place that we deserved to die, and then rose from the dead. He is the infinite and eternal conqueror of sin, death, and hell. He ascended into heaven and sent His Holy Spirit on His followers for the

purpose of empowering their gospel witness to the ends of the earth. He established His church and sent it on a mission to make disciples of Jesus from all people groups on earth.

The Bible closes with the story of restoration. At the end of history, Jesus will come back. All the dead will be raised, and everyone who has ever lived will face judgment. Those who have turned from their rebellion against God and trusted in Christ will be acquitted because of His righteousness, and they will enjoy perfect fellowship with God in infinite joy and glory forever. Those who have not trusted in Christ will be justly condemned for their sins and cast into hell forever. God will bring in a new heaven and a new earth, in which all the consequences of our rebellion against Him are wiped away, and we will enjoy Him forever.

Discipleship Activities

- Yesterday, you read the definition of a church and church guidelines. It says, “They are committed to one another and to God—associated by covenant—in pursuing all that Scripture requires of a church.” Read your church’s covenant and reflect on the ways it helps you and your fellow church members pursue God’s purposes of a church. [[Local Church](#)]

Section

Acts (Part 2)

Introduction to Luke-Acts (Part 2)

Luke-Acts is not the beginning of a story; it continues one that God began a long, long time ago.

Yes, the story of Luke-Acts actually began centuries before when God first promised rescue to Adam in Genesis 3. This promise appeared again and again throughout the Old Testament—to Abraham, Moses, David, and the prophets.

These promises were made over a period of about 1,500 years, and by the time Luke begins they've become deeply ingrained in Israel's thinking. Repeatedly, through prophets and priests and kings, God promised to rescue His people from their enemies and from the curse of sin.

This is why Luke begins his story reminding us that Israel is ruled by a foreign nation, Rome, and has been ruled by foreigners for 600 years. In Jesus' day, many expected God's rescue to include an earthly king like David, complete with a political and religious kingdom.

Back in Genesis 12, God called Abraham when he was an ordinary individual and promised him He would perform this rescue, blessing every nation of the world through his descendants ([Genesis 12:2-7](#)). God kept this promise when He rescued the nation of Israel out of slavery (e.g., [Deuteronomy 26:5-9](#)) and freed her to worship Him. He then made a covenant with her (e.g., Deuteronomy 28).

As the years passed, Israel and her kings and priests repeatedly disobeyed God and

thus forfeited His blessings. Despite this, Israel remained a key part of God's plan to reveal Himself, as those who received "the very words of God" (e.g., [Romans 3:1-2](#)). In particular, God chose David to be king over Israel—although he was a young and obscure shepherd-boy—and made great promises to him about blessing the world through his descendants, just like he promised to Abraham (2 [Samuel 7:8-16](#)).

As we see in Luke, at just the right time, God sent His Son Jesus to fulfill these promises to Adam, Abraham, and David. This is why the genealogy in Luke shouldn't be skipped, because it shows us right off the bat who Jesus is; he's the descendant of David, the fulfillment of God's promise, the second Adam! These roles are not incidental to Jesus' identity. In fact, they help present-day Jewish readers to see that Jesus hasn't come out of nowhere. He is the one whom God has sent to rescue His people and the one whom God will send a second time to judge all the inhabitants of this world, to bring it to an end, to inaugurate the new heavens and new earth, and to be acknowledged by all as Lord over all (e.g., [Luke 17:24-35](#), 2 [Peter 3:10-13](#), [Philippians 2:8-11](#)).

Luke-Acts teaches us that all people, not just Israel, need to be saved and rescued!

God has always taken the initiative in rescuing people from sin and its consequences, including the final judgment. This initiative is made plain in His promises to Abraham, David, and the prophets. God also makes clear in these promises that the Savior was not sent just to save Israel but the **people among nations** who respond with genuine repentance and faith in Jesus as Lord.

The Old Testament clearly teaches that all people everywhere are sinful and in need of salvation; the Old Testament also indicates how God will act to accomplish this salvation. Even the sacrificial system reminds us there must be a better and perfect sacrifice to take away sin once and for all ([Hebrews 9:25-28](#)). But who could make such a sacrifice? The prophet Isaiah tells us that God will exercise His rule through a

chosen king ([Isaiah 9:6-7](#)) who will also be the suffering servant and the final perfect substitutionary sacrifice for sin ([Isaiah 52:13-53:12](#)). But this King would also be a warrior or conqueror who rescues His people by destroying God's enemies ([Isaiah 59:16-20](#)).

Jesus' contemporaries, Theophilus included, would have been expecting all this. But Jesus turns out to be a different kind of Rescuer.

As Luke's Gospel begins, all these Old Testament promises remain unfulfilled. Simeon, the old man, represents how Israel should have received Jesus as God's foretold Messiah. The Jews understood that the promised king from David's family tree was the key, that when the Davidic king arrived every promise would be realized. This was why people like Simeon were so eagerly awaiting the promised Davidic king (usually referred to as Messiah or Christ). In Luke, God is revealing that Jesus is the Messiah through whom His promises will be fulfilled.

What a surprise to discover that God's promised Savior fulfilled all of these in one person, Jesus, His only Son.

Here's the trajectory of Acts: Old Testament promises to missionary rescuer and Messiah to a newly created community of the King.

In Acts, everything began in Jerusalem—"the city of the great king" ([Psalm 48:2](#)), the site of the Temple, the center of Israel's worship of the living God. When Acts ends, however, Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, has reached Rome—the city of Caesar and the center of Gentile world power.

In Acts, Luke explains to Theophilus how the gospel made progress in such a short amount of time, and his explanation is surprising. It wasn't because of an especially creative strategy that Jesus' followers were effective in spreading the good news and establishing new churches. Rather, it was because of the living and active presence

of the risen Jesus that brought new life as the Holy Spirit worked in and through the lives of faithful disciples—all to the glory of the Father.

Luke wants the reader—and us—to realize that the key to powerful gospel witness isn't cleverness or relevance, or even a brilliant strategy or cultural awareness. Instead, for any gospel growth, we should look for the active presence of the Holy Spirit made visible through the lives of obedient and loving disciples.

But Luke-Acts is also a story—and an unfinished story!

If Luke's Gospel gives us an organized historical account of who Jesus is, what He has done, and what the lives of faithful Christ-followers should look like, then Acts is the continuation of that history. In Acts, Luke presents the story of Jesus' followers as they are commissioned into the world to both live out the good news and to announce it to all peoples, just as the Old Testament promises had foretold. Like Jesus, his followers in Acts show the gospel and they tell the gospel. Also like Jesus, they suffer for the gospel, but God's plan still succeeds.

Luke and Acts is a story that began in the first century, but is not yet finished—and the story's hero is Jesus. When Jesus ascended to the Father in heaven, He left the Holy Spirit who gives life to God's people and sanctifies the lives of Jesus' true followers. The Holy Spirit shines the spotlight on Jesus even as He empowers the church for its mission.

In Luke, Jesus lives the holy life that Jesus' followers seek to live in Acts. As we read both books, let us prayerfully seek to discover our role in this continuing story.

Romans 1:16-17

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'

Section

Acts 9-11**Pray**

God, we praise You for being able to transform persecutors into preachers. We praise You for preparing both those who share the gospel and those who hear the gospel. Help me to trust You more as I see you exalted in these chapters today. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read & Learn**Read Acts 9-11**

In these chapters, we discover how God uses all kinds of people to make disciples and grow churches! Watch and marvel as God uses a stubborn apostle, a foreign soldier, a violent antagonist, and a group of nameless believers as His witnesses.

God's plan enters a new stage as the good news will now be announced far and wide to all peoples. But it took visions and dreams to convince Peter of this. Jesus' words in Luke 24 are being realized and God's promises to Abraham are finding wider fulfillment. The promise of Isaiah 45:14 is coming to pass, and Gentiles are coming into the kingdom. The door of salvation has swung wide open.

Acts 9:1–31 Notice here the miraculous appearance of Jesus Christ to Saul and the transformation of Saul from persecutor to preacher. But also, don't miss Ananias' bold obedience in approaching a chief persecutor of the church. Jesus appointed Saul as "a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings" (9:15, ESV).

Acts 9:32–43 Jesus Christ uses Peter to heal a paralyzed man in Lydda, and the residents of that area turn to the Lord! Then Peter heals a disciple named Dorcas in Joppa, a nearby town, and many more people believe in the Lord. Clearly, God enabled Peter to work miracles of healing in Jesus' name.

Acts 10 In another nearby city, a centurion and an honorable man named Cornelius is praying. Then, this uncircumcised Gentile has a vision or dream in which an angel tells him to invite Peter to come to Caesarea and explain the good news. At the same time, while still in Joppa, Peter also has a vision while praying on the rooftop of Simon the tanner. A voice tells him to take and eat animals that were considered unclean in the Old Testament. Peter is confused.

Meanwhile, Cornelius' messengers arrived to Peter, and the Spirit convinces him to go with these men. When Peter gets there, he explained to Cornelius that God told him not to consider any people unclean or off limits because Christ came to save all kinds of people. The Old Testament dietary, calendar, and clothing restrictions that kept the Jews distinct from Gentiles were no longer valid. What's more, God wanted Peter, himself a Jewish Christian, to eat with Cornelius as a symbol of a new covenant that included all peoples, not just the Jews.

Cornelius invited Peter to explain the good news to his household relatives and servants. When they hear the gospel, the Holy Spirit fills the people and the place; they speak in tongues and are then baptized, just like the Jewish believers at Pentecost in Acts 2. Keep in mind how revolutionary this is: a group of uncircumcised Gentiles have now believed the gospel, received the Holy Spirit, and been baptized!

Acts 11 When the Jewish Christians hear of this, they begin to rebuke Peter. But Peter explains his vision of the animals and what happened at Cornelius' house. The Jewish Christians believed and said, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."

A few observations to note: Cornelius' dream is not the gospel but rather a vehicle God used to motivate Cornelius to send for Peter. What, then, did Peter do? He explained the gospel to Cornelius and his household, and the dream was the means to a specific end: Peter's articulated gospel. As Cornelius' household believed, the Holy Spirit came down upon these new Gentile believers, and Peter and his companions were surprised that Gentiles, too, could be a part of God's chosen people. Luke's point is clear: he wants us to see that the gospel is God's good news for all people!

Pay attention as well to God's surprising strategy to start a church in Antioch. As persecution scattered believers who could only speak with Jews, some Jewish believers ended up in Antioch. Crossing a cultural barrier, these ordinary followers proclaimed the Lord Jesus in a manner understandable to Greeks—and a large number grew strong in faith. Eventually, Barnabas and Saul landed in Antioch, and they met and taught many people in that church. Still later, the Gentile believers in Antioch sent famine relief to the Jewish church in Judea. Again, Luke's point is clear: as the gospel is proclaimed, God's multi-cultural church is strengthened.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Acts 10:42-43

42 And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. 43 To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

Reflect & Change

1. We shouldn't be surprised if God gives dreams and visions to Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists that direct them to a Christian or local church where they'll hear the gospel clearly explained. Cornelius' vision was

not the gospel, and he was not saved by the dream, but God used the dream to direct him to a person and place where he could hear the gospel and be saved! (Acts 11:13–14)

2. Food laws, which had long created a barrier between God's people and the Gentiles, are fulfilled. God does not show favoritism, but to those who do repent and believe in Jesus' name, He grants forgiveness and eternal life (11:18, 43).
3. If Jesus can take his chief persecutor and turn him into a gospel preacher, Jesus can save anyone. Pray expectantly for those most opposed to Christ and His people. Ask God to take terrorists and make them church planters!
4. God used all kinds of people to make followers and help start churches, not just professional pastors and ministers. What roles might you play?

Go & Do

Choose one of the following:

- Boldly speak to someone the Holy Spirit seems to have brought to mind (Acts 9:10–17). Express any fears and reservations to God in prayer (9:13).
- Give an offering to someone in need (11:29).
- Encourage a new Christian and help them find opportunities to serve (9:26–28; 11:25–26).

Discipleship Activities

- Discuss results of Spiritual Health and Singleness/Family Life Health evaluations with your accountability partner this week. Identify any activities you want to start, stop or continue, or any areas of concern. [[Being a Disciple](#)]
- Use the **Outreach** Assessment below to evaluate your current practices for outreach, evangelism, and discipleship. Take notes to share with your Deepen Discipleship group and accountability partner. [[Making Disciples](#)]

i Outreach, Evangelism and Discipleship Assessment

1. How much do you interact with unbelievers? In what contexts? (ie. work, school, social clubs, recreation, neighbors?)
2. Do you have any cross-cultural relationships?
3. Do you have a particular plan for outreach and evangelism?
4. Are you currently involved in discipleship relationships? In accountability relationships?

*Section***Acts 12-15****Pray**

God, thank You that You have purposes for each of our lives. Please guide us and give us grace to obey You. Help us walk in step with Your Spirit and to have boldness in sharing Your truth. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read & Learn**Read Acts 12-15**

Acts 12 Sometimes government rulers like Herod attack the church. Following Jesus doesn't always end well in this life, and there are no guarantees God will rescue Jesus' followers from danger. James and Peter are both arrested in Acts 12. James is beheaded, and Peter is miraculously rescued by an angel. Sometimes God judges evil rulers like Herod by removing them from power.

WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

[The Role of the Spirit in a Believer's Life](#)

Acts 13 What does the work of a pioneer church-planting missionary look like? Acts 13 to 15 begins to answer as we read about Paul's first missionary journey. Notice the emphasis on prayer and the role of the Holy Spirit in the sending of Barnabas and Saul, some of the most fruitful disciple-makers in Antioch.

Barnabas and Saul first preached in Cyprus, Barnabas' hometown (4:36), and again there is opposition to Christ and the gospel. But Paul, filled with the Spirit, confronts the evil magician.

Paul is asked to preach in the synagogue. Read carefully Paul's summary of the gospel message as a fulfillment of Old Testament Scripture. Notice, too, the similarities with Stephen's message to a Jewish audience in Acts 6.

In Cyprus, the gospel of Jesus proves divisive. Even in the places where Gentiles believe and the message of the Lord spreads, there are still some who respond by stirring up persecution and opposition. The disciples are joyful and filled with the Spirit, but Paul and Barnabas move on to Iconium, shaking the dust off their feet as Jesus had instructed in Luke 10.

Acts 14 In Iconium, a great number of Jews and Gentiles believe but the response is again divided. However, despite the persecution, the Lord enables Paul and Barnabas to speak boldly and to perform miraculous signs that confirm the gospel.

In Lystra, Luke shows us that gospel communication can be misunderstood even when there is not a common language. The crowd spoke in the Lyconian language (14:11), but Paul and Barnabas didn't understand until later (14:14). Some apparently believed the gospel, but the crowds stoned Paul and he left the city with Barnabas.

They then return to strengthen and encourage the disciples in at least three cities where churches had recently been started (14:21–23). They urged the Christians there to persevere in the midst of troubles. They also “appointed elders for them in every church” (14:23). Finally, they returned and reported to the sending church in Antioch (14:26–28).

Persecution could not hinder disciple-making or church planting. Remember, God used persecution to scatter the believers who eventually started the church in Antioch, the very same church that later sent out Paul and Barnabas to make disciples and start churches.

Acts 15 Luke describes a situation in which believers from both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds reach an agreement over a very important issue. Then, interestingly, he describes how Paul and Barnabas have a sharp disagreement, resulting in their going separate ways.

It seems to have taken a long time for Jewish Christians to understand God's intentions to include non-Jews in the church. This shouldn't be too surprising; after all, it took a divine vision to convince Peter.

Paul ultimately confronted these Jewish false teachers in the Antioch church (15:2) before he went to Jerusalem to settle the matter. In this chapter, pay close attention to how the Jerusalem church resolved the question. James listened to Peter and Paul's stories, summarized what they said, compared it to Scripture, and then suggested a solution. Notice, too, the details Luke records and the humble and brotherly tone expressed in the letter sent from the church in Jerusalem to the Gentile churches.

Later, Paul and Barnabas sharply disagree about John Mark. This is the disagreement that results in their separation (15:39), just as their second missionary journey began. Providentially, this unfortunate outcome results in two sets of workers, functionally multiplying the work. At some point, Paul asks for Mark to come join him "because he is profitable to me for the ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11).



John Piper - You Will Suffer

By John Piper. © Desiring God Foundation. Source: desiringGod.org. Used by permission.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Acts 13:46b-48

46 Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. 47 For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.' 48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

Reflect & Change

1. The Lord guided Peter as he prayed (Acts 9:6). The Antioch church prays as well, expecting their prayers to result in participation in the Spirit's work (13:2–3). Perhaps you should prayerfully consider the question: Has the Holy Spirit [called](#) you (13:2) to go and make disciples in another place? If so, with which church leaders could you share this?
2. In these chapters, we see Jesus' followers endure hardship with joy. They have embraced the values of Christ's kingdom and are looking forward to their heavenly reward. Re-read Luke 6:17–26 and reflect on how these ordinary, early followers of Jesus lived. Reflect also on how

they were like the houses built on the solid rock (Luke 6:46–48).

3. Consider both the amazing agreement and the sharp disagreement described in Acts 15. Godly Christians from different backgrounds can find ways to agree and work together. At the same time, mature, godly believers like Paul and Barnabas may provoke one another and choose not to work closely together. In any case, God’s mission still goes forward—and in this case in particular, Paul and Barnabas did eventually reach agreement about John Mark (Colossians 4:10).

Go & Do

- Prayer and fasting seems to have been practiced by early followers of Jesus. Set aside a day for prayer and fasting. Here is a short article on [godly reasons to fast](#), and here are some practical instructions on [fasting for beginners](#).

Discipleship Activities

- Read the brief explanation below of a Person of Peace, and then watch this teaching on a Person of Peace (3:38). When introducing yourself, take an opportunity to include something that identifies you as a follower of Jesus. Watch for people’s responses and for those who seem interested in spiritual discussions. Those with spiritual interest won’t be put off. [Making Disciples]

i Persons of Peace

AS WE LIVE OUR LIVES, BE ALERT TO DISCOVER “PERSONS OF PEACE.”

READ AND LEARN

Missionaries and church planters talk about finding “persons of peace” in a neighborhood, city, or marketplace. Often the person of peace will have friends and relatives who are open to gospel witness and are welcoming to followers of Jesus. Finding them is but one “tool of the trade” that assists us in locating those in whom God may be at work in a community. Often, these people or “households of peace” are like a gateway relationship into a family, neighborhood, or community. Consider prayerfully seeking them out as you go about living more intentionally.

While we’re not required by Scripture to use this approach, we can see this pattern or principle in the New Testament:

- Luke 7:1–10 (The Centurion)
- John 4:1–30 (The Samaritan Woman)
- Acts 8:26–40 (The Ethiopian Eunuch)
- Acts 10:9–11:1 (Cornelius)
- Acts 16:13–15 (Lydia)
- Acts 16:22–38 (The Philippian Jailer)

We can often recognize the person of peace because they will:

- welcome you
- receive you
- be open to you and your friendship
- be open to what you have to say about Jesus

- be interested in and open to the life you live as a follower of Jesus
- assist or serve you in some ways

Review the passages above and look for these six characteristics.

GO AND DO

As you go about your daily life, learn to pray and be alert to these people of peace. Be intentional; look for them. Calibrate your spiritual radar so you can “catch” the opportunities God provides as you simply pray and look around.

Be intentional about seeking out people of peace, and expect that God will be at work in some. Only the Holy Spirit can open blind eyes and change hearts and grant repentance and faith in Christ. Pray to encounter people of peace, listen to and learn their stories, and then be ready to tell your own story (testimony). Finally, though, be sure to tell them the gospel.

As you meet these potential people of peace, remember to let Jesus be the filter. We go in Jesus’ name, with His authority to be and make disciples, so we need not fear if we meet some people who are NOT people of peace. It’s true that some won’t welcome us or want our friendship. As we identify with Jesus, they may reject us. They may not be open to friendship with us. That’s okay—Jesus is a divisive person. Let Jesus be the filter.

Consider the following ideas for finding persons of peace and plan some of these with your group:

- **Bold prayer:** Pray and ask for Persons of Peace to be brought across your daily paths.

- **Prayer walking:** Prayer walk in different kinds of neighborhoods and communities.
- **Meet people:** Get out and be with people. Spend time in strategic places and areas the Spirit has laid on your heart as you have prayed and talked with others.
- **Intentionally sow broadly:** Actively go to a number of places and people—as the old adage goes, don't just fish in one pond.
- **Tell them the gospel:** In your conversations, use Jesus and the gospel as your filter.
- **Use honest questions:** Ask questions about their passions, difficulties, and things that are important to them. Ask if they are interested in learning about Jesus. Ask them if they know others who may be interested.
- **Urge a response:** Invite them to respond to the gospel, and invite them to learn more about Jesus in the Word.
- **Reconnecting:** Ask for their contact information so you can reconnect and continue the conversation.
- **Remember the Spirit:** Regardless of how you think it went, expect that God the Spirit is at work bringing conviction and opening hearts—expect the unexpected.

RESOURCE

Check out the below resource for some practical ways to find People of Peace.

[People of Peace Resource](#)

*Section***Acts 16-18****Pray**

Father, as I read today, help me remember You are in control and that the Holy Spirit may lead your people in unexpected ways. God, give us patience and persistence in the face of closed doors. Give us grace that we may respond to challenging situations with joyful prayer and praise. Help me multiply disciples for your glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Read & Learn**Read Acts 16-18**

These chapters describe Paul's second missionary journey. This time, Paul and his fellow disciples focus on major cities: Philippi, Athens, and Corinth. Let's read and learn more about how Paul and his co-laborers understood church planting.

Acts 16 Paul began his second journey by returning yet again (14:21) to the churches he started on his first trip. As a result, these "churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily" (16:5). Observe that Paul then attempted to go into the province of Asia (probably Ephesus) and Bithynia, but was forbidden by the Holy Spirit. This time, the Holy Spirit adjusted the Apostle Paul's church planting strategy. Clearly, closed doors and waiting on God's guidance was normal for missionaries, even in the first century.

Don't miss the diverse groups of people described in Philippi (16:11–40) and how disciples are made and multiplied. For example, Lydia, a businesswoman (16:14), received the gospel and was baptized along with her household. The girl from

whom the spirit was cast out was a slave (16:16). The jailer who listened to Paul and Silas singing at midnight was a working-man.

Acts 17 Note the timing concerning Paul's work in Thessalonica (17:1–9). Paul didn't plan to leave as quickly as he did, but he was forced out of the city. While the exact length of Paul's stay isn't mentioned, an exemplary church was planted (1 Thessalonians 1:7) in a short period of time.

After a brief stay in Berea, Paul waited for his teammates in Athens (17:15–16). While waiting, he spoke of Jesus in the synagogue and the marketplace. Notice Paul's presentation to a group of Gentiles is different, but the fundamental gospel elements remain.

Acts 18 Luke describes missionary tent-making (working a job while taking the gospel to new places) in Acts 18. Consider Paul's investment in Aquila and Priscilla, a couple who eventually hosted house churches in Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:19) and Rome (Romans 16:5). In the New Testament, disciples multiply and gather into other local churches. Paul then returned to his sending church in Antioch (18:22–23).

Daily Verse for Meditation

Acts 17:30-31a

30 The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, 31 because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed.

Reflect & Change

1. Timothy became the Apostle Paul's beloved son in the faith and closest co-worker (2 Tim 1:2; Phil 2:20). This should encourage you to find faithful fellow disciples who will help you show and tell the gospel to others. If you already have Timothys in your life, pray for them to find

- other Timothys themselves.
2. Paul's plans to stay in Thessalonica are interrupted, and he leaves abruptly. The gospel reaches Greece because the Holy Spirit redirects Paul and company away from Asia. We may have plans and strategies, but we must always remember God is the event coordinator of the universe, and He reserves the right to adjust our plans. The book of Acts helps us see the gospel as it makes progress under God's sovereign control, sometimes quite contrary to human plans and strategy.
 3. Followers of Jesus invested in other disciples who shared with other disciples. As a result, both believers and churches multiplied as the gospel was shared.

Go & Do

- Magistrates threw Paul and Silas in prison for helping a slave girl. Paul and Silas responded by "praying and singing hymns to God" (Acts 16:25). Choose a challenging situation this week and respond by "praying and singing hymns to God."
- Discuss what you are learning about following Jesus with someone you are discipling. As you invest in making disciples, prepare them to make disciples and expect them to train others.

Discipleship Activities

- Write out a 5-minute gospel presentation to share with your Word on Life group. Make sure to get their feedback. If you want assistance, review last week's videos from Day 3. The form below can also help you evaluate your presentation to see if it includes these elements: God, Man, Christ, Response, and life change. Try to use clear and simple language, avoiding Christian phrases that non-believers may not understand. [[Making Disciples](#)]

i Gospel Sharing Assessment

1. After you share the Gospel presentation with a friend, ask him/her to give you feedback on how clear and complete your Gospel presentation was.
2. What are some strengths of your Gospel presentation?
3. What are some growth areas of your Gospel presentation?
4. Did you address any Honor/Shame or Fear/Power issues in your presentation? You learn about these in Module 2. Read about Honor/Shame Fear/Power below.
5. Are there parts of the Gospel presentation that you tend to leave out?
 - God
 - Man
 - Christ
 - Response
 - Life Change

GOSPEL NARRATIVE

1. After you share the Gospel narrative, God's story of redemption, with a friend, ask him/her to give you feedback on how clear and complete your Gospel narrative was.
2. What are some strengths of your Gospel narrative?
3. What are some growth areas of your Gospel narrative?
4. Are there parts of the Gospel narrative that you tend to leave out?
 - Creation
 - Fall
 - Redemption
 - Consummation

① Three Aspects of Culture: Honor/Shame, Fear/Power, Guilt/Innocence

Each culture has its own personality. Some people even call it a culturality! That said, cultures are usually a mixture of these three types:

1. Guilt/Innocence
2. Shame/Honor
3. Fear/Power

Each of these somewhat determines the different ways a person will initially hear the gospel.

It's important to be aware that people from **honor/shame** or **fear/power** cultures may initially hear the gospel differently than those from **guilt/innocence** ones.

Of course, the gospel is good news to all, to those overwhelmed by shame or fear as well as though who feel guilty. In Genesis 2 and 3, we read that sin affects societies in all three ways, not just one. Likewise, Christ's life, sacrificial death, and resurrection addresses all three of these aspects—not just one. Once aware of this, we begin to see how God's gospel is beautifully designed to address all the effects and problems of sin.

The gospel addresses the effects of sin in animistic or folk religious communities (usually **fear/power** cultures) as well as shame/honor societies. It's good to pay attention to these three dimensions of sin's effects so that when we read Scripture we don't miss how the gospel speaks to each of them. Similarly, as we share the gospel, we should be alert to proclaim the good news as it applies to every result of sin and not just one.

Warning: A gospel presentation that ONLY addresses guilt, shame, or fear is missing something. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection solves the sin problem and addresses the effects of sin for anyone who turns from sin and believes.

3 ASPECTS OF CULTURES, 3 RESULTS OF SIN

Guilt – Innocence: This is present in more individualistic societies (mostly Western) where people who break the law are guilty and seek justice or forgiveness to rectify a wrong.

Shame – Honor: This is present in more collectivistic societies (common in the East) where people are shamed for not fulfilling group expectations and then seek to restore their honor before their community. In these cultures, the loss of identity and being cast out brings shame. Conversely, inclusion restores honor.

Fear – Power: This is present in more animistic societies (typically tribal or folk religious) where people who are afraid of evil pursue power over the spirit world through magical rituals, superstition, and magic.

We can see how the gospel addresses all three of these in the book of Ephesians.

- “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins . . .” (1:7). “God made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in our transgressions . . .” (2:5) Our **guilt** is forgiven!
- “In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ . . .” (1:5). “You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household” (2:19).

You have **honor** in God's household! In Christ, your shame is covered.

- "That power is like the working of His mighty strength, which He exerted in Christ when He raised him from the dead and seated Him at his right hand in the heavenly realms . . ." (1:19-20) Christ has **power** over **fear** and death!

Can you think of other examples in the Word?

See also: [Wu, Jackson \(2016\)](#). Does the "Plan of Salvation" make disciples? Why honor and shame are essential for Christian ministry. *Asian Missions Advance*, pp. 11-17.

*Section***Acts 19-23****Pray**

Father in heaven, show me today how important it is to include others as I seek to follow Jesus. Help me notice the people You have placed around me who will make me a bolder witness for You. God, we praise You for your wisdom and power! You are sovereign over every threatening situation and are able to provide protection whenever You choose. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read & Learn**Read Acts 19-23**

During Paul's third missionary journey (Acts 18:23–21:16), he planted a church in Ephesus and remained there more than two years, teaching and training others who would go, make disciples, and start churches. As he was preparing to leave, he announced his plans to go to Jerusalem and then to Rome (Acts 19:21). Acts 19–23 describes the church plant and training center in Ephesus, Paul's trip to Jerusalem, and his eventual departure for Rome.

Acts 19 In Ephesus, Paul shared the gospel with a group of John's disciples who believed and received the Spirit. After three months sharing in the synagogue, he withdrew to a school and taught daily for two more years (19:10).

Don't miss how the gospel spreads from Ephesus. Epaphras probably heard the gospel and was trained in Ephesus; he was then trained from Colossae (Col 4:12) and took the gospel back home (Col 1:7) and to Laodicea. In Ephesus, Paul and his co-workers trained others who in turn planted churches and trained others.

At the beginning of his third journey (18:23), Paul revisits churches from his first journey. He then returns to churches planted during the second journey (20:1-6). But even in this, Paul never worked alone; he mentored or disciplined men from all three journeys as they traveled and worked with him (20:4). He and Barnabas left Antioch years before and made disciples and planted churches “as they went,” inviting others to join them along the way.

THE LORD’S DAY

They met on the first day of the week. Read more about what we believe below.

[The Lord’s Day from the BFM](#)

Acts 20 Consider what Paul said to the Ephesian elders/overseers/pastors (20:17, 28). He had taught them “in public and from house to house . . . anything that was profitable” (20:20). He had warned them, “from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them” (20:30). He commended them “to God and to the word of his grace” (20:32). Whenever possible, Paul taught, warned, and trained indigenous, local overseers so they could faithfully build up and protect believers.

Acts 21–23 During the journey to Jerusalem, believers repeatedly warned Paul about impending danger (20:23; 21:11). Soon after his arrival, he’s arrested in the temple. This begins an imprisonment that continues throughout the remainder of Acts and is the means by which Paul goes to Rome. Notice the reaction to their heart language as Paul gives a defense to the crowd in Acts 22. God protects Paul from a mob as he leaves Jerusalem.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Acts 20:28

28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

Reflect & Change

4. Paul's personal ministry was incredibly fruitful, so it's easy to overlook his commitment to train and teach others to be faithful disciple-makers themselves. In other words, Paul has a spiritual commitment to people he will never even meet! This appears to be God's strategy. Let's follow Paul's example and train faithful people who will be able to teach and train others also (2 Timothy 2:2).
5. In Acts 20:4, we read about Paul traveling with people from his first, second, and third journeys. Often the best training is on-the-job training, life-on-life discipleship.
6. "From among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them" (20:30). Discipleship and pastoral oversight is necessary for new believers and new churches who are easy prey for false teaching. Paul and his co-workers seem to have faced violent opposition everywhere they went. Sometimes, God protected them; other times, they suffered much. But either way, they wouldn't give up their work of taking the gospel to the nations.

Go & Do

- Invite a new Christian to spend time with you, perhaps while you're traveling somewhere or running errands. Use the time to talk about following Jesus and growing in Christ. Share a passage from God's Word that is currently helping you.
- Think about the [unreached people group](#) you've chosen to pray for. What trade language or government language would be useful to enter their country

(Acts 21:37–39)? What heart language would allow them to best hear and understand the gospel (Acts 22:2)?

Discipleship Activities

- Find a way to encourage your pastor or elders. Pray for them today—and tell them you did. Consider praying systematically for your fellow church members. If your church has a membership directory, use it for this purpose. [[Local Church](#)]

Section

Acts 24-28**Pray**

God, give me discernment to recognize opportunities this week to turn conversations toward spiritual topics, as well as boldness to clearly share the gospel and call for response. I praise You for being the God who will never leave or forsake His people. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read & Learn**Read Acts 24-28**

Acts 24 Jesus promised His disciples would “be brought before kings and governors for my name’s sake. This will be your opportunity to bear witness” (Luke 21:12–13). Now, Paul is brought before Felix the governor and King Agrippa.

Don’t miss how Paul framed his defense before Felix the governor: “For the resurrection of the dead I am on trial before you today” (24:21).

Acts 25–26 In chapters 25 and 26, Paul defended himself before the new governor Felix and then shared his testimony before King Agrippa. When the king accused him, saying, “Paul, you are out of your mind!” (26:24), Paul was not distracted. Instead, he pressed the king to respond to the gospel (26:27). The king sensed this desire to bring him to faith (26:28–29), and the chapter ends with a Roman authority—for the third time—declaring Paul innocent of the charges against him (26:31; 25:25; 23:29).

Acts 27–28 Acts 27 and the beginning of Acts 28 relate the details of Paul’s voyage

to Rome, a trip that included a shipwreck and time on Malta. During challenging days adrift in the Mediterranean Sea, an angel of God stood before Paul and delivered an encouraging message: God was with him and his traveling companions would not drown.

The book of Acts ends with Paul safely in Rome just like the Holy Spirit indicated would happen (19:21). However, Paul's under house arrest! At this point in Acts, we shouldn't be too surprised at God's strategy for advancing the gospel: putting His best preacher in prison. Yet even in this difficult circumstance, Paul "welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance" (28:30–31). Followers of Jesus should seize every opportunity to make much of Jesus, relying on the power of the Holy Spirit. That's what Paul does.

Throughout the whole of Acts it's clear that in spite of much opposition and suffering, God has worked out His plan with power. After Jesus' ascension, the church started with but a few disciples and apostles in Jerusalem, and mostly ordinary people everywhere else. Then came Saul, the former terrorist, who became Paul—and all the while, the gospel has advanced and churches have been started.

After Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to the church, the gospel advanced from Jerusalem to Rome in roughly 30 years. This happened not because of great strategic planning or rich and powerful people or worldly wisdom or human striving. Instead, the gospel spreads as people filled with the Holy Spirit obey what Jesus commanded, live out the values of God's kingdom, and multiply disciples, despite opposition and suffering. Unsurprisingly, Jesus taught this in the Gospel of Luke.

And so the story pauses with Acts 28. It pauses—but doesn't end. With its sudden stop and unfinished business, Acts encourages us to find our place in God's plan and to bless the nations by bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ in all

its transformative power. The Bible has been written, but the “Big Story of God’s Mission” continues today.

As joyful Christians depend on the Holy Spirit in their daily lives, the gospel will go out, and people who are currently far from Jesus will repent and believe. They will then be gathered into churches that will reflect the character of God and proclaim the gospel to others. All of this will continue—in spite of hardship, persecution, and opposition—until the Lord Jesus returns.

From the 120 people gathered in Jerusalem who prayed and waited for the Holy Spirit, the gospel has made much progress. In fact, you and your church are here today because of God’s faithfulness to empower His people to be on mission, making disciples and planting churches among all the nations.

And it’s your turn now. Why not find your place in this story?

Daily Verse for Meditation

Acts 26:22b-23

22 I (Paul) stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: 23 that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.

Reflect & Change

1. In Acts 24, Paul defends himself before a government authority, yet he frames the discussion in spiritual terms. How did Paul’s initial comments (24:21) provide him an opportunity to share further (24:24-25)? What topics could be woven into conversations to provide the possibility of more in-depth spiritual discussions?
2. When Paul shared his testimony with a Jewish crowd in Jerusalem, he

mentioned “Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there” (22:12). Several verses relate Ananias’ role in Paul’s conversion. Why would Paul not mention Ananias when he shared his testimony with King Agrippa? What impact does this insight have for your testimony?

Go & Do

- Recount in your own words the story of how the gospel advanced from Jerusalem to Rome. Then tell someone else this story emphasizing the main turning points and main people God used along the way. Explain that this story continues today and that followers of Jesus are to participate in advancing the gospel to all peoples.

Discipleship Activities

Read the [My Opportunities Report](#) (MOR) and begin to use this with your accountability partner. Pray for evangelism opportunities and the boldness to take advantage of them. [Spiritual Disciplines, [Making Disciples](#)]

Romans

Introduction to Romans

Paul wrote the letter to the church in Rome around 57 A.D., after Nero became emperor but before his severe persecution of Christians began. Paul had never personally visited this church, but he had friends there and mentions several people by name. Paul was a militant Jewish Rabbi who became a follower of Jesus Christ and was convinced that the gospel was for all peoples, not just the people of Israel. Because Christ's perfect life and substitutionary death had atoned for sins, salvation could be had by grace through faith in Christ. It was no longer dependent upon having Jewish roots and keeping Old Testament laws.

Fittingly, then, the church in Rome includes both Jews and Gentiles, and there was some tension between them. Paul illustrates to them how both Jews and Gentiles are debtors to God because of their sin, without hope apart from the grace and mercy God offers in the accomplished work of Christ. Therefore, the only way any person—Jew or Gentile—can be made right with God is through faith in Jesus, the One who suffered the punishment for all those who would believe.

Paul longed to preach the gospel as far West as Spain. He was committed to this because Paul knew from the beginning God's plan to create a multi-ethnic family of those who have faith in His promises. This family would extend God's blessings all over the world, as a fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12.

In other words, the gospel is for everyone because sin has affected everyone. This is why, in the first five chapters of Romans, Paul clearly illustrated how all are sinful and therefore under God's wrath. Because of this, the only way to be made right

with God is to receive the righteousness we need from God, through faith in Jesus Christ. In Romans 6-8, then, we see how those who have been made right with God will lead lives of righteousness and obedience because sin is no longer their master. In Romans 9-11, Paul turns the focus onto his own people, the Jews, and considers the reasons for their stumbling over God's promised Messiah. And yet, Paul says, because of this stubbornness, salvation had come to the Gentiles. Paul praised God for His amazing plan.

Romans 12 begins Paul's long section on how Christian faith affects all areas of life. Those who truly understand the love, mercy, and grace of God will be motivated by thankfulness to respond in loving obedience as "living sacrifices," using the gifts they've been given to the glory of God.

Understanding the Letters of the New Testament

In interpreting and applying the New Testament letters, we must remember they are not abstract essays. In each letter, there were needs or situations the apostles felt they needed to address. Reading the letters is like listening to one side of a phone conversation. We have only clues in the letters as to the pressing situation or needs.

Sometimes, we can read through the book of Acts and find the situation the epistle is addressing. Other times, careful attention to the letter itself helps us reconstruct the other side of the conversation, but we should do so humbly and cautiously.

Leaves, Branches, Trees, Forest. Always read the entire letter before interpreting any part of it. Remember that the letters usually address particular situations or problems in a first-century church. Outline the themes, main ideas, and flow of the letter to see where the writer is going and how each part fits into the whole.

Get in the flow. Never try to interpret anything less than a paragraph. For each paragraph, ask yourself: "What point is the writer trying to make?" and "How does

this point fit into the flow of his argument?"

Others first! Always ask, "What did this mean to the original hearers of the letter?" before you ask, "What does this mean to me?"

Build bridges carefully. Before attempting to apply the teaching to our current situation, ask what's similar and what's different between the original hearers' situation and ours. There are some real cultural differences like dress, communication media, customs, greeting habits, languages, etc.

Lastly, remember what hasn't changed at all in 2000 years! All people are still sinful and rebellious. All cultures need correcting and confronting by Jesus and His gospel. All churches contain forgiven sinners needing God's grace and simple reminders from Scripture about every aspect of following Jesus. God's Word both challenges and encourages His people, and as we read, let's look for both the challenge and the encouragement.

Romans 12:1-2

1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Introduction

Bridge from Acts to Romans

In the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, Luke has helped us see Jesus as the One God has sent to both announce the good news and to show the kingdom of God through His teaching and miracles. At the appointed time, Jesus died and was risen by God from the dead. After this, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit who would make His followers alive to God and enable them to live this life in Christ.

At the end of Acts, the gospel has been announced, disciples have been made, and churches have been formed—from Jerusalem to Greece to as far away as Rome. In fact, the book ends with Paul in a Roman prison, showing and telling the good news to his guards and other officials.

Which brings us to the book of Romans. The book was probably written from Corinth during Paul's third missionary journey, just a few years before he ended up under house arrest in Rome.

Without question, Paul explains the gospel more systematically in Romans than in any of his other letters. This seems to be motivated by a desire to clarify misunderstandings about the gospel, particularly how God's plan and purpose from the beginning had been to bless all peoples through Christ—not only the people of Israel. Yet when we get to the end of Romans, we'll see the book is actually a missions letter—and in pursuing this missions partnership, Paul is at pains to outline his theology. In fact, he starts with theological and missiological doctrine before getting to the practical aspects of partnerships. Read how he begins the letter:

“Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle and singled out for God’s good news— 2 which He promised long ago through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures— 3 concerning His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who was a descendant of David according to the flesh 4 and who has been declared to be the powerful Son of God by the resurrection from the dead according to the Spirit of holiness. 5 We have received grace and apostleship through Him to bring about the obedience of faith among all the nations, on behalf of His name, 6 including yourselves who also belong to Jesus Christ by calling.” (Romans 1:1–6)

Now notice how Paul ends his letter to these Roman Christians:

“Now to Him who has power to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation about Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept silent for long ages 26 but now revealed and made known through the prophetic Scriptures, according to the command of the eternal God to advance the obedience of faith among all nations— 27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ—to Him be the glory forever! Amen.” (Romans 16:25–27)

As we read Romans, let’s remember to look for the places Paul writes about trusting in Jesus’ death and resurrection. These verses in Romans 10 provide a good example: “Now the Scripture says, everyone who believes on Him will not be put to shame, for there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, since the same Lord of all is rich to all who call on Him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (10:11–12).

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. So it’s clear now that this good news is not only for Jews but for all peoples, and as such it must be announced to all peoples.

This is why Paul emphasizes the role of those who are sent to tell this good news, something that was expected even in the Old Testament! His emphasis comes through in a series of rhetorical questions: “But how can they call on Him they have not believed in? And how can they believe without hearing about Him? And how can they hear without a preacher? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As

it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who announce the gospel of good things!'" (10:14–15)

Paul's letter to the church at Rome invites them to support this mission—in particular, his desire to take the gospel to the people of Spain. Paul also wanted to establish a clear foundation for an eventual partnership with the churches in Rome. Perhaps he even wished to recruit some Roman Christians to go with him. The Apostle Paul greets a host of close acquaintances at the end of the letter, giving a shout-out to 27 ordinary people, not missionary "rock stars."

In Acts, Christ-followers showed and told the good news of Jesus, calling people to repent and believe. Though the response wasn't always positive, in many places churches were organized. Over time, these first Christians sought to go and make disciples themselves, beginning churches wherever they went.

Suffering and sacrifice seemed to go hand in hand with this work, just like Jesus predicted in Luke's Gospel. But through it all, God remained in control, accomplishing His good purposes and fulfilling His plan. Remember the end of Acts? Though Paul is suffering under house arrest, the gospel is still making good and unhindered progress in Rome ([Acts 28:31](#)).

*Section***Romans 1-2****Pray**

Heavenly Father, You are the God who made me, and You deserve my worship and obedience. Yet too often, I make You out to be less than You are, and I put my trust in created things rather than You. This is idolatry. Forgive me, oh God. Help me see You rightly, in both your holiness and your grace through the gospel. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Read & Learn**Read Romans 1-2**

Romans 1:1–17 Paul is writing to Christians in Rome sometime around 57 AD. Paul is an apostle, given authority by God to announce the gospel and start churches. But he is also a servant of Jesus Christ.

The most immediate occasion for the letter is that Paul is on his way to Rome, in the hopes that he might minister among them. But he also hopes for their support in his eventual ministry to other unreached places (15:23–24). However, before they can partner together in this work, Paul wants to make sure they're on the same page regarding "the gospel, the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (1:16). This is what he spends the rest of the letter unpacking.

Romans 1:18–32 The fundamental problem humanity faces is the coming wrath of God against sinful man. Paul offers two reasons why God's wrath is justly earned by sinful people. First, sinful people all suppress the truth of God (1:18–20). Though God has revealed Himself in His created world, people continue to live as if He

doesn't exist. Every sin exists in the face of overwhelming evidence of God's eternal power and divine nature.

Second, the wrath of God is just because of sinful man's idolatry (1:21–23). Because we are made in God's image, we cannot help but worship someone or something. When we choose not to worship the Creator, we inevitably worship created things: false gods, people, ideas, stuff, feelings. Idolatry is the tragic exchange (1:23) of the glory of God for something far less.

As a result of these two sins—suppressing the truth and idolatry—God has revealed His wrath against mankind in our present day, giving sinners over to their sin. The same world is under God's present wrath, a fact evidenced by the rampant sinfulness of our day.

Clearly, things in first-century Rome weren't all that different. Paul highlights sexual immorality in 1:26–27 since the idolatry of the first-century people was uniquely pictured there. That said, God's judgment is not limited to sexual sin. In fact, according to Romans 1:29–31, it reaches into every area of life that's closed off from the redeeming work of God—from our relationships, to our words, to our hearts, to our actions. Rebellion against God characterizes all people apart from Christ.

What's perhaps most unexpected in this first chapter of Romans is just how unremarkable some of the sins are that Paul lists in Romans 1: envy, greed, deceit, strife, gossip, disobeying parents, boasting. Do we really think of these sins as "evil," warranting the righteous wrath of God? Yet the next verse says these things deserve death! God's righteous requirements are far more exacting than we often realize. So here's the question: is there anything in this list that you see as acceptable because our culture says it is?

Romans 2 Paul now turns from the unbelieving Gentile world to the Jewish world. Do they fare any better? Not at all, he says. Though the Jews received God's law,

they too are under God's judgment because of their failure to obey. We see in verses 2:5–11 that God will not play favorites when it comes to sin. The Jewish people do not receive an exemption. When Judgment Day comes, Paul says, God will judge "each person according to what he has done" (2:5). How we live in this world, whether in obedience or disobedience, will reveal what kind of people we truly are. Jewish people had often judged the unbelieving world for their sin, but Paul pointed out their many failures to keep God's law themselves (2:17–24). Rather than obeying all of the Law, the Jewish people have relied on outward markers of religion like circumcision, the observance calendar feasts, and abstaining from certain foods. And yet, Paul is clear that such markers cannot bring salvation to anyone, not even Israel (2:25–29).

HOW TO HELP

See the helpful resource below for those struggling with same-sex attraction or for churches wishing to minister lovingly and wisely.

[Same-Sex Attraction Resources](#)

In short, the first two chapters of Romans makes two simple, yet connected points: Gentiles have rejected the true God, and Israel has always failed to keep God's law. This bad news has resulted in God's righteous wrath. However, in Romans 3 and 4, Paul has some good news to announce to both Jews and Gentiles.

Watch

Have you thought about what an appropriate Christian response is to homosexuality? If not, you might want to watch the short trailer and interview for the book *Is God Anti-Gay?*

Sam Allbery - Is God Anti-Gay Trailer



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Sam Allbery - Interview



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Daily Verse for Meditation

Romans 1:16-17

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the

righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'

Reflect & Change

1. Do you really believe the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who will believe? For all kinds of people? For bad people as well as "good" people?
2. As people made in God's image, we are intended to find satisfaction in our Creator. Yet too often, we look for ultimate satisfaction in created things rather than in the Creator. The Bible condemns this as idolatry, and we should root out idolatry in our hearts.
3. Is there anything in Romans 1:29–31 that you wrongly consider acceptable even though according to God's Word it is wrong? As you continue to read the New Testament, take note of where God's Word confronts values that are culturally accepted and celebrated.

Go & Do

Choose one of the following:

- Take time this week to journal and reflect on your own sin before God.
- Think through the various spheres of your life (relationships, work, church, etc.) and ask God to reveal pride, selfishness, and idolatry. Talk to a trusted Christian friend about your reflections, and then talk about the difference the gospel makes.

Choose one of the following:

- The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe. Who are the people you've begun to doubt are "save-able"? Pray that God might be so gracious as to use you to bring the gospel to this person.

- Pray God will raise up workers to go to the [unreached](#) people group you are praying for and that many will hear the gospel and believe.

Discipleship Activities

- Evaluate your church's current practices for outreach and discipleship, and then discuss your evaluations with your accountability partner. Where would you like to see growth? [[Making Disciples](#)]
- Use the Use of Time assessment below to evaluate your use of time. Make notes to discuss with your accountability partner. [[Being a Disciple](#)]

i Use of Time Assessment

- Think about where you spend your free time. Reading, ministry, outreach, studying, sleeping, shopping, social media, entertainment, recreation, other reading etc? Make general notes of what you do, when and for how long.

*Section***Romans 3-5****Pray**

Heavenly Father, You are the great and loving God. Thank You for Your great love, which has been poured out through Jesus Christ. Help me grasp this love even more through Your Word. Use me to speak of this love to others. Amen.

Read & Learn

Read Romans 3-5

Outline of Romans 3-5

1. The whole world is under sin and accountable to God through His law (3:1–20)
2. Through faith in Christ, God freely gives sinners His righteousness (3:21–4:25)
 1. Through Christ's sacrifice, God's righteousness is upheld and freely given to sinners as a gift (3:21–31)
 2. Abraham is the proof that justification comes to us by faith (4:1–25)
3. Two images of what the belief in the gospel produces (5:1–21)
 1. Peace with God (5:1–11)
 2. Life through Christ (5:12–21)

Romans 3:1–20 Paul sums up what we see in Romans 1–2, namely, that all humanity is under the wrath of God. According to Paul, the human condition is one in which every part is corrupted by sin. This means the whole world is accountable and guilty before God due to His law (3:9–20).

Romans 3:21–31 But . . . the good news of the gospel is that now, apart from the law, God has provided a different righteousness—one that comes as a gift “through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe” (3:22). How can God give such a gift to sinners and still be righteous? Because at the cross, Jesus was offered as a sacrifice; He made atonement for our sins and therefore upheld the justice of God in justifying those who believe. This good news, once promised in the Old Testament, has now been revealed in Jesus Christ’s life, death, and resurrection.

GENESIS 15:6

Abram believed the Lord, and He credited it to him as righteousness.

Romans 4 Paul here is at pains to defend the point that justification must come from faith alone, so he uses the Old Testament example of Abraham. In Romans 4:3, Paul quotes Genesis 15:6: “Abram believed the Lord, and He credited it to him as righteousness.” Paul then quotes Psalm 32, where King David speaks of the blessing and gift of forgiveness. If God is to demonstrate this kindness to anyone, it must be in a way that eliminates all boasting. In other words, salvation cannot be earned by works, but is granted by God to those who believe.

In 4:9–17, Paul makes the case that this kind of faith is a possibility not only for Jewish people, but for the world. When Abram believed God, he was a Gentile who was not yet circumcised, yet God justified him. In the same way, anyone with the faith of Abraham—Jew or Gentile—can be included in Abraham’s faith family. Notice in 4:18–25 that this faith rests particularly on God’s promises. Faith is the means by which we accept and receive God’s promises, especially the gospel promises given in His Word.

READ MORE BELOW FROM THE BFM.

[– Justification, Sanctification and Glorification; The Purpose of Grace](#)

Romans 5 Having laid out this argument for justification by faith, Paul now unpacks the wonderful results of this salvation. In 5:1–11, Paul outlines what it means for Christians to be reconciled to God. We have “gained access . . . into this grace in which we now stand,” and “we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God” (5:2). In spite of our suffering, God is at work producing hope in us, and we know this hope is real because He has given us His Spirit.

Specifically, notice the logic of 5:6–11: If God has shown us so much grace and love while we were His enemies, then how much more grace and love will He show to us now that we’ve been reconciled to Him through Jesus Christ? Followers of Jesus were once God’s enemies, but now we’re God’s friends.

Observe in 5:12–20 the contrast between the first Adam’s failure and the second Adam’s success. Just as Adam brought death into this world through his sinful disobedience, so by His perfect obedience, Christ now brings life to all who are united to Him by faith. In Adam’s disobedience, we’re all condemned, but through Christ’s obedience, we’re made righteous, which results in our eternal life.



Thabiti Anyabwile - What is the Gospel?

Daily Verse for Meditation

Romans 5:3-5

3 Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Reflect & Change

1. Consider some ways you're tempted to place your trust in your own performance, rather than Christ's. How does your union with Christ make a difference?
2. Sometimes, we may be tempted to doubt God's love for us, particularly in times of trial or difficulty. How does Romans 5 help you with this?
3. What do you see here in Romans 3–5 that helps you see the glory of God's love in the gospel?

Go & Do

Choose one of the following:

- Find a younger Christian to read through a portion of Romans 3–5 and practice sharing the gospel to one another from this passage.
- Schedule time to spend with a non-Christian friend for the purpose of building that relationship.

Discipleship Activities

- Use one of these articles or worksheets—[20 Idol Crushing Questions](#), [Identifying Personal Idols](#), or [Identifying Idols](#)—to prayerfully evaluate your heart and its idols. Discuss with your accountability partner, and think about a plan for growth. See this [example](#), or this [one](#) for help with growth plans. [[Being a Disciple](#)]
- Take your family or a friend on a [prayer walk](#) around your neighborhood, noting who you don't know. Be intentional to meet two or three neighbors you don't know. Continue to look for people with spiritual interest. [[Making Disciples](#)]

Section

Romans 6-8

Pray

Heavenly Father, You have accomplished so much more for us in Christ than simply providing a ticket to heaven. Help us see how our salvation transforms us as disciples of Jesus. As we grasp the gospel, may Your Holy Spirit free us to live holy lives and grant us boldness as we share the gospel. Amen.

Read & Learn

Read Romans 6-8

In these three chapters, notice the theme of freedom through union with Christ. Paul writes about freedom from the tyranny of sin in Romans 6, freedom from life under the Old Testament law in Romans 7, and freedom through the Spirit of God in Romans 8.

Romans 6 After spending Romans 3–5 explaining how the righteousness of God can be accounted to sinners as a free gift through faith in Jesus Christ, Paul now feels a burden to deal with an important objection: “If forgiveness and righteousness come entirely by grace, then shouldn’t we keep on sinning, since that just means we get more grace?”

Paul answers this question by pointing to our union with Christ. “By no means!” he says. When we place our faith in Christ, we’re united to Him in His death and resurrection. Just as Christ has died to sin and been raised to new life, so we in Christ are now to count ourselves dead to sin and alive to God. As a result, the truth of what God has already accomplished in Christ changes us and causes us to live

new lives unto God, freed from slavery to sin.

Romans 7 Because we've been united to Christ in His death, we've also been set free from the law. Paul uses the illustration of a marriage, where death releases one from the law of marriage (7:2–3). We now live not according to the law, but by the Spirit. However, Paul is very clear that the problem here is not that God's law is bad. The law itself, he says, is good. It reveals what sin is.

However, our flesh responds to the law sinfully, which results in death. The problem, then, isn't the law, but the sin that dwells in us, making us a prisoner. And yet, it's precisely this slavery from which Christ has set us free.

[Read more on God the Father from the BFM](#)

Romans 8 And so we come to this wonderful declaration: "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (8:1). God has set us free from our bondage to sin and placed us under a new "law" where we live by the Spirit, not the flesh. Something supernatural has taken place in us, such that God now dwells in us by His Spirit (8:9–11), changing us into people who put sin to death and live in the confidence that we are God's children.

As children of God, then, we await the day when God will restore creation and bring His children to glory. But until that day, we remain confident that in spite of suffering, in spite of accusations, in spite of death, nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. The gospel transforms disciples so they can live as beloved children of God no matter the circumstances.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Romans 8:1-4

1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.2

For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Reflect & Change

1. Reflect on the logic Paul uses for why we shouldn't live for sin but should live for God. Learn to repeat these truths to yourself so that you cry out to God for help in times of temptation.
2. In light of this passage, how do we respond to the reality of ongoing sin in our lives?
3. Prayerfully consider all that is yours through union with Christ by means of the Spirit. Worship God by sharing these truths with another Christian today or tomorrow.
4. Consider practical ways we can hold on to God's promises in Romans 6–8, especially as we seek to announce the gospel to those who are lost.

Go & Do

- Confess your fears to God in light of His promises in Romans 8, and ask Him to give you boldness in sharing the gospel.
- In light of all that God has accomplished for you in Christ, in light of His promises for your future, pray and talk to your community group leader about a difficult step that you need to take.

Discipleship Activities

Rework your five-minute gospel presentation based on the feedback you got from your group. Share it this week with a friend outside of your group and get their feedback. [[Making Disciples](#)]

*Section***Romans 9-11****Pray**

Heavenly Father, You are the sovereign God. Yours is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory forever! We pray You will cause us to find our confidence in Your righteous rule over this world, remembering that nothing happens apart from Your sovereign will. May that confidence give us boldness to give our lives for the advance of your gospel. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read & Learn**Read Romans 9-11**

In Romans 9–11, Paul addresses questions about God's relationship to His old covenant people, Israel. Specifically, he addresses what has changed and what remains the same now that Christ, the promised Messiah, has come and accomplished what Israel was unable to do. It's always been about God and His mercy toward people. All of salvation history exists to magnify the mercy of God.

Romans 9 Having laid out God's wonderful plan of salvation in the first half of Romans, Paul now addresses some apparent confusion and objections related to God's plan for Israel. If salvation is through Christ alone, then what was the point of the nation of Israel, the temple, the covenants, and all the rest? Has God somehow failed in His promises to Israel?

To answer these difficult questions, Paul points to God's sovereignty in salvation. Even for the patriarchs, family relationship alone is not sufficient for God's grace; rather, it depends on God's merciful choice in election. This was true with Isaac, and

this was also true with Jacob.

At this point Paul asks: does this not make God unjust? Far from it! Paul explains this is the very definition of what it means for God to be God. And so, in Paul's day and in ours, the words of the prophets are being fulfilled when ethnic Israel rejects the Messiah promised in the prophets. But even in the face of this, we know God has graciously saved for Himself a people from among all nations.

Romans 10 Notice that God's sovereignty over the hardening of Israel doesn't mean Paul no longer cares about them or their salvation. By all means, Paul desires the salvation of His fellow countrymen because he knows the free gift of righteousness is available to them if they would only believe.

Moses himself declared this good news of righteousness by faith, the very same message Paul has devoted himself to preaching. He knows preaching is necessary because apart from the proclamation of the gospel, people won't call upon the Lord. And yet, Paul is grieved as he saw what Isaiah had seen: Israel's rejection of the Word of God.

Romans 11 But even now, God hasn't rejected ethnic Israel. There remains a remnant within ethnic Israel who is faithful. Throughout the Old Testament, God has always preserved for Himself a remnant, even while the rest of Israel hardens themselves by rejecting God.

God may choose to restore the Jewish people if He wishes, just as a gardener is able to graft natural branches into a vine. In part, Paul's ministry to the Gentiles is motivated by the desire that Jews will see the salvation of the Gentiles and repent.

In the meantime, Gentiles ought to be humbled, not proud, by the hardening of the Jews, because this is all part of God's plan in bringing about the salvation of His people. God still has great compassion on the Jewish people and is ready to save

them, in spite of their rejection.

In the end, both Jews and Gentiles will be saved in a way that highlights God's incredible mercy. Paul writes, "For the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him" (10:12). He concludes this portion of the letter by praising God for His unsearchable judgments, ascribing to Him all glory forever.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Romans 10:13-15

13 For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' 14 How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? 15 And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!'

Reflect & Change

1. God's plans in salvation history are both glorious and difficult for us to understand. After all, God has not revealed everything to us, only what He's chosen to record in the Bible. This is no reason to doubt God, and Paul still praises God for what He has revealed.
2. Romans 10 is clear that the reality of God's sovereignty doesn't cancel the reality of human responsibility. How have you seen the Lord use you in helping others come to know Jesus? What would it look like for you to be a part of taking the gospel to those who have never heard? For more on this, read what the BFM says about [Evangelism and Missions](#).
3. Reflect on the fact that you're a follower of Jesus only because God has been merciful to you. Recount the ways you have received God's mercy, blessing, and kindness.

Go & Do

Choose one of the following:

- If God is sovereign over salvation, then one of our most basic responses should be to join Paul in praying for the lost. Find a group of brothers and sisters this week and pray for the lost, beginning with your existing relationships (your “oikos”) but also broadening to those who are lost in your community, your city, and even around the world.
- In Romans 10, we see the unbreakable chain of how God brings about salvation in this world. How are you and your church playing a role in sending people to evangelize those who are nearby or far away, either culturally or geographically?
- What role might the Lord want you to play in announcing the gospel to the lost? Who are the lost around you right now?

Oikos

(Summary of Tom Wolff’s ideas on Oikos Evangelism and Outreach)

An **oikos** is a social system composed of those who relate to each other through common ties and tasks. The New Testament oikos included members of the nuclear family, but extended to dependents, slaves, and employees. Oikos members often lived together, but always sensed a close association with each other. And note this carefully, the oikos constituted the basic social unity by which the early church grew.

Sometimes people today also talk about **tribes** as any group connected to one another through an idea or a leader—kind of a voluntary oikos, if you will.

As Michael Green reminds us, an oikos for the New Testament church consisted of “blood relations, slaves, clients, and friends. Christian missionaries made a deliberate point of gaining whatever (oikos) households they could as lighthouses, so to speak, from which the gospel could illuminate the surrounding darkness.”

OIKOS EVANGELISM, then, is one God-given and God-ordained means for naturally sharing our supernatural message. The early church spread through oikos evangelism. It's about evangelizing family members who saw the old sinner become the new saint; it's about sharing with the neighbor who questioned how such a difference had come over his old friend or reaching the guys in the local trade union or the oikos that played tennis together.

OIKOS

[Another resource here.](#)

An oikos corresponds to what contemporary anthropologists define as the three universal social systems of **common kinship** (extended family, though in urban settings the extended family might live far away); **common community** (might be neighborhoods, not in urban settings); and **common interests** (also referred to as a “clan” below, these are affinity groups with mutual interests and usually networks of relationships where trust is expressed).

These three natural social groupings include:

1. Family
2. Community
3. Clan

The (urban) clan has developed into social units which are basically extensions of the local group—voluntary associations based on common interests ranging from trade unions and medical associations to bridge clubs and parent-teacher associations. Each of these groupings is held together by a common interest, an interest arising from mutual participation in the same trades, the mutual enjoyment of a game, or mutual problems in relation to a set of children.

ADJUSTING OUR TACTICS FOR THE URBAN SETTING

If you expect neighborliness or extended family in urban settings, you'll probably be disappointed. In looking for persons or households (oikos/oikoi) or peace, in urban settings you will want to aim for clans or affinity groups or clubs or societies rather than your apartment neighbors. You will need to “insert” yourself into some clans or urban social groupings. Urban outreach is different.

MEETUP.COM

Check out Meetup.com below to find ways to find oikos groups in urban and not-so-urban areas.

[Meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com)

Consider these questions:

1. What am I doing to learn about the variety of urban social groupings in my city? (Examples: Cooking club, hiking, kite flying, poetry reciting, soccer, sewing, walking, exercise, yoga, retirees, urban tea houses, false religion groups, etc.)
2. When do these groups get together? Where? Are they mostly men, women, young, old, mixed?

3. Are they free, or is there a charge? Is there an orientation? How does one “enter” the club/group? Do I need a sponsor?
 4. How can I learn more about them?
 5. How can I (and my family) get involved in one or more of these clans (urban social groupings)?
 6. What can I do to intentionally approach one or more of these groupings and try to get involved?
- How can being a part of a clan help me find a person/oikos of peace?

Discipleship Activities

- Schedule a regular “date night” with your spouse and follow through. Continue discussing some questions from the evaluation. [[Healthy Relationships](#)]
- Singles, schedule time with another believer—maybe a younger disciple—and make a point of encouraging them spiritually. [[Healthy Relationships](#)]

*Section***Romans 12-16****Pray**

Heavenly Father, having believed the gospel, I pray I would not live after the patterns and values of this world. Help me to know what it looks like to live in light of Your mercy. By your Spirit, transform my mind so I no longer think as I once did; give me the strength to live for you and be about your mission in the world. Amen.

Read & Learn**Read Romans 12-16**

In the first eleven chapters, Paul has described the gospel in detail. From now until the end of the book, he explains the ways in which the power of the gospel should transform followers of Jesus. Other New Testament letters also follow this pattern: first the theological, then the practical. Scholars often put it like this: the indicative (statement) always comes before and grounds the imperative (command). Finally, just before greeting a host of his gospel partners, Paul returns to the indicative, once again showing how Christ fulfills God's Old Testament promises.

Romans 12 This section begins with a very important "therefore." Therefore, in light of the mercy we've received, we live entirely for God. This is the only appropriate response of worship, and it can happen only as we are transformed by the Spirit who dwells in us.

In Romans 12, Paul considers the way these truths should transform how Christians love one another in the church. If the church is indeed the body of Christ, then it should function according to the various gifts God has given to each of us. However,

even more important than our various gifts is our mutual task to love one another. But love is more than an ethereal idea; Paul describes it practically and specifically, such that our love is demonstrated in the ways we forgive one another and pray for one another and honor one another and practice hospitality and share with those in need and so on.

Romans 13 The transforming work of the Spirit also affects how we live in the world. Paul highlights three areas in particular. First, Christians should live in recognition and submission to the authorities God has instituted in the world. Though human governments are never perfect, Christians are nonetheless called to submit to them insofar as that submission doesn't contradict God's commands.

Second, Christians should love their neighbors. Paul sums up all the Mosaic Law in one command: we ought to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Finally, Christians ought to live holy and distinct lives because the day of the Lord is drawing near. No longer do we give ourselves to the immorality and selfishness of this world; instead, we live as soldiers of light, putting aside deeds of darkness, clothing ourselves with the faith of the gospel and living in a manner worthy of the calling we've received.

Romans 14:1—15:7 Paul now turns to a particular challenge the Roman church is facing, namely, Jewish and Gentile Christians learning to love one another. Paul commands believers to accept one another, whether a fellow Christian has a weak or strong faith.

At the same time, Paul exhorts, Christians must be careful to place no stumbling block in front of their brothers or sisters. Instead, every Christian should be willing to sacrifice his or her preferences for the sake of others. Those who are strong should use their strength to care for the weak rather than to serve themselves. In all this, Paul highlights the perspective of the gospel, reminding his readers Christ laid

down His rights in order that the nations might glorify God for His mercy.

Romans 15:7–16:27 Paul concludes his letter by focusing again on how God’s mission through Christ confirms God’s Old Testament promises to create a multi-ethnic people of faith who worship Him. The promise given to Abraham—that through him God would bless the nations—was the gospel announced in advance, and through Paul’s proclamation of Christ to the Gentiles, it’s already being fulfilled.

This is how Paul explains his mission to the Gentiles elsewhere in Romans (1:1–6, 9:24–29), as well as in Ephesians 3:1–6. Paul isn’t satisfied with preaching the gospel where he’s already been. In fact, the gospel compels him to go where it had never been preached, so he plans to press on into Spain, hoping the Roman church would join and support him.

Toward the very end of Romans, Paul greets 27 people by name. Most of these are “ordinary” followers of Jesus who have evangelized non-Christians and helped start a number of churches in Rome.

Finally, observe how the letter ends—with Paul praising God for all He has done and is now doing “to advance the obedience of faith among all nations” (16:27b).

In summary, the book of Romans reminds us God’s mission to save sinners from every tribe and nation is the climax of the Bible. When you or your church see people among the nations come to Christ, you’re witnessing the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham, Moses, David, and all the prophets. The Holy Spirit is bringing the story to its appropriate end as we participate in God’s mission.

So far, in Luke, Acts, and Romans, we’ve seen the unfolding of God’s plan to reach the nations. Today, nearly 2000 years later, Jesus is at work through His followers as they cross cultures to share the gospel, train new believers, gather them into churches, and send out others to repeat the process. In prayer, ask God to clarify

the role you and your church are to play in this plan and process.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Romans 14:7-8

7 For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. 8 For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.

Reflect & Change

1. According to Paul, worship includes all of life, not just the time spent singing songs. If worship is all of life, then we should offer all of ourselves to God in thankful worship. Does this change the way you work, play, rest, and think? If so, how?
2. The world doesn't always have the best impression of Christians. What if Christians were more faithful in living out what Paul describes in Romans 13?
3. Followers of Jesus are transformed as they work together in gospel unity, loving one another. How can you make this a priority in your Christian life?
4. Most of the people Paul greets in Romans 16 are not "rock stars" like Paul, Peter, or Timothy. In fact, few are mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. Paul knows, loves, and commends these gospel partners—his brothers, sisters, and coworkers—as well as those who have suffered with him as the gospel has advanced. God's mission is accomplished through pioneer church planters like Paul working together with many different people doing many different things. Does your understanding of the local church and God's mission include different kinds of people partnering together? What role might you play in this work?

Go & Do

Choose one of the following:

- Paul's driving concern was for the spread of the gospel among those who have never heard. Pray for yourself and your church to share Paul's concern and then act upon it.
- Look for opportunities to build relationships with people from other nations. Ask God to help you be alert to people with a different ethnicity or culture than your own.
- Meet with your church leaders to discuss how you can promote the unity and witness of your local church.

Discipleship Activities

- Rework your five-minute gospel presentation based on the feedback you got from your group. Share it this week with a friend outside of your group and get their feedback. [[Making Disciples](#)]

Section

1 and 2 Thessalonians

Introduction to 1 Thessalonians

The Apostle Paul and his co-laborers Silas and Timothy wrote this letter to the believers in Thessalonica between A.D. 50 and A.D. 53, making it one of Paul's earliest epistles. Acts 17:1-9 recalls Paul's ministry in Thessalonica during his second missionary journey. He had preached and some of the city's Jews and God-fearing Gentiles believed in Jesus the Messiah. But trouble followed when another group of Jews accused these new Christians of sedition. Paul and Silas were forced out of the city, but wrote back to the Thessalonian believers from Corinth to encourage them as they endured persecution.

The first two chapters of 1 Thessalonians are intensely autobiographical, as Paul tells of the joy, motivation, method, suffering, and affection behind his ministry to the Thessalonian believers. Paul, Silas, and Timothy celebrate the faith of these believers, reminding them of their journey to Jesus and encouraging them in their ministry.

Despite opposition and persecution, the apostolic trio shared the gospel boldly when they came to Thessalonica. Careful to present the simple, clear truth, they had taken pains to live as servants among the Thessalonians by working overtime to support themselves. They treated the Thessalonians like their own family members, teaching them to obey God's words and coaching them to live God's way.

Paul, Silas, and Timothy also taught believers to see opposition as a way of joining the ranks of God's people; in this way, they simply reflected the life of their Savior who also endured much suffering. When persecution finally came to the

Thessalonian church, Paul, Silas, and Timothy had already moved on to another city. They were deeply concerned they couldn't care for the new believers. When Timothy was finally able to visit, he saw that these believers had grown in their obedience. Paul and Silas expressed great relief and joy, praying for a chance to further their discipleship and unity.

In 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5, Paul teaches the believers how to obey God in their daily lives, stay sexually pure, love each other, and live quietly and responsibly. Some Christians had died as a result of the persecution in Thessalonica, so Paul explains the resurrection of believers that will occur when Jesus returns. He helps the believers understand that because God chose them to live in light they can have hope in suffering even to death.

As the epistle draws to a close, Paul gives these believers more guidance about living their daily lives God's way. They should respect and serve their leaders and teachers and lovingly relate to each other. They also should expect the Holy Spirit to teach them, enabling them to test every teaching they hear and share Paul's letter with all believers in their city.

Introduction to 2 Thessalonians

The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the church in Thessalonica in late A.D. 51 or early A.D. 52, a few months after his first letter. (See the Introduction to 1 Thessalonians for more details on Paul's ministry in Thessalonica.)

After the first letter, persecution and pressure against the young church increased, and Paul wrote a short follow-up letter to encourage believers to persevere despite the difficulties. In addition, he wrote to correct false teaching about the Lord's return that had frightened the believers, and to confront those who were undisciplined and disobedient within the church family.

The primary theme of the book deals with future events, particularly the Lord's

return, and stresses that certain events must take place before the end comes. Paul viewed the inevitable return of Christ as an event to celebrate—a future hope for believers, rather than an future event to fear.

1 Thessalonians 2:8

8 So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

Section

1 Thessalonians 1-2

Pray

God, we pray we would love others so much that we would be delighted to share with them not only the gospel but our lives as well. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read & Learn

Read 1 Thessalonians 1-2

How should an ambassador of the gospel interact with the people he evangelizes? 1 Thessalonians is a beautiful picture of the apostle Paul and his life with the Thessalonians.

It helps first to understand the context of this letter by reading Acts 16:11–17:9. Acts 16:11–40 explains what happened in Philippi, which is relevant because Paul refers to the events in Philippi at the beginning of 1 Thessalonians 2. Then, Acts 17:1–9 describe Paul's time with the Thessalonians. As you read, try to determine how Paul may have felt as he left Philippi and went to Thessalonica, as well as how long Paul might have been in Thessalonica.

1 Thessalonians 1–2 is intensely autobiographical, so we learn about Paul's ministry to the Thessalonians in a number of ways:

1. Joys of true ministry (1:1–10)
2. Motivations of true ministry (2:1–6a)
3. Way of true ministry (2:6b–12)
4. Suffering of true ministry (2:13–16)

5. Affections of true ministry (2:17–20)

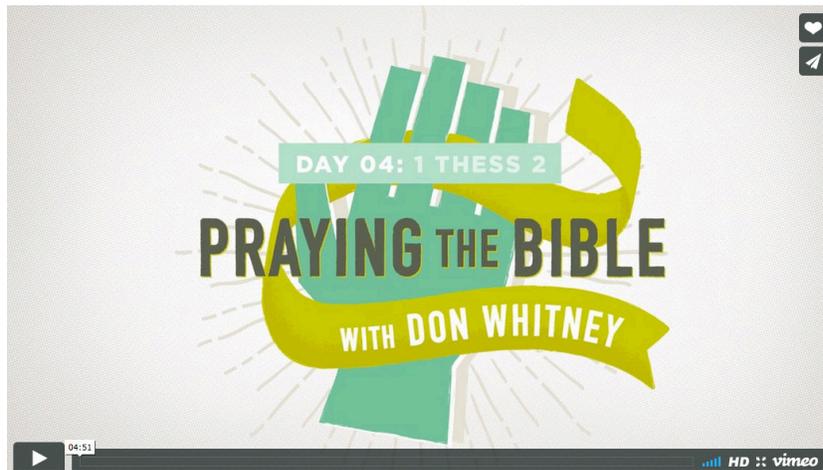
Consider how Paul's joys are linked to the Thessalonians' true discipleship. He's not happy because they're living comfortable lives or being prosperous. Instead, he gives thanks for them because they show progress as believers and followers of Jesus.

Paul's ministry in making disciples is marked by a desire to please God and not man. See how this shows itself in how he relates to the Thessalonians and also in how he gives himself to serve them.

Note: Although Paul worked when he lived with the Thessalonians, this doesn't mean his work provided his full living expenses. From Philippians 4:16, it appears the young Philippian church had already supported him during these first few days of his ministry in Thessalonica.

We see also how Paul's affections are tethered to the well-being of the Thessalonians. Paul has a very intense love for them, which offers a wonderful model of Christ's love for His church.

Finally, note how Paul calls both the Thessalonians and God as witnesses to what he has written. Only someone who models transparency in his relationships and has tried to live a blameless life would write this way.



Don Whitney - Praying the Bible (1 Thessalonians 2)

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Daily Verse for Meditation

1 Thessalonians 2:4-6

4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. 5 For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed— God is witness. 6 Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ.

Reflect & Change

1. Paul thanks God for the Thessalonians' work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope. How can your prayers become more biblical as you thank God for believers around you?
2. Paul states he's not looking to please men but God who tests his heart. What might ministry that's driven by a desire to please men look like for you? How would it look if you were looking to please God instead?
3. Paul worked day and night in order not to be a burden to others. How might you inconvenience yourself for the sake of others?
4. Paul had deep joy from knowing how the Thessalonians were doing spiritually. What would it look like for you to derive joy from the spiritual

well-being of others? What can you do to help others grow spiritually and so increase not only their joy but also yours?

Go & Do

Choose one of the following:

- Thank God that He has loved us and chosen us (1 Thessalonians 1:4). He has done this by giving us faith, love, and hope in our Lord Jesus Christ (1:3). We are those who have turned to God and now wait for His Son's return (1:10). Rejoice!
- Dare to tell someone the gospel in spite of strong opposition (1 Thessalonians 2:2). Pray God will help you. Know you are not doing so to please men but God who tests your heart.
- Encourage someone's spirit and build them up. If you don't already intentionally disciple someone, pray about finding someone whom you can invest in and encourage. Share with them not only the gospel of God but your life as well.

DISCIPLESHIP IS

Being purposeful and intentional about doing someone spiritual good.

Discipleship Activities

- Use the Physical Health Assessment below to help you evaluate your physical health. Do you have a plan for exercise? Are there any issues that need addressing? Make notes to discuss with your accountability partner. [[Being a Disciple](#)]
- Discuss your evaluation of your use of time with your accountability partner. In light of the new time commitments with this course, do you need to adjust time spent on other entertainment or social media? [[Being a Disciple](#)]

① Physical Health Assessment

1. How would you describe your general health?
2. Do you exercise regularly? Eat well?

Section

1 Thessalonians 3-4

Pray

God, please use us to encourage others so they will live lives that please You. Thank You for the joy we can have when we see others following You. Give us more and more joy! In Jesus' name, amen.

Read & Learn

Read 1 Thessalonians 3-4

How should an ambassador of the gospel care for the spiritual well-being of others? Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 3–4.

We also learn in this section why Paul is writing this letter. Though he was forced to leave the Thessalonians, he longed to see how they were doing. He missed them. So he sent his fellow worker Timothy to visit them and encourage them. After learning the Thessalonians were doing well, Timothy returned to Paul with a positive report (3:6), and thus, Paul sent this letter to thank and instruct them.

1 Thessalonians 3-4 Paul still writes about his own life and ministry but he also gives particular instructions that he was unable to give in person due to his time in Thessalonica having been cut short.

1. Timothy's journey and report (3:1–6)
2. Paul's response and prayers (3:7–13)
3. Instructions on how to please God (4:1–11)
4. Instructions on Christ's return (4:12–18)

Note again how Paul's emotions are tied to the spiritual well-being of the Thessalonians. He is anxious about them when he doesn't know how they are spiritually. But, when he hears they're standing firm in their faith, he rejoices and is glad.

See also how Paul desires to see them grow up in the faith. He is not content with them only being converts. After all, Paul follows Christ's commands to teach others to obey everything He had commanded them (Matthew 28:20). Paul aimed to see these Thessalonian disciples attain Christian maturity, whether that was in their daily lives, their loves, or their hopes.

Daily Verse for Meditation

1 Thessalonians 3:12-13

12 And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, 13 so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Reflect & Change

1. Notice that Paul and Silas were so concerned about the Thessalonians' welfare they couldn't stand not hearing from them. So they sent Timothy to find out how they were. And the good report lifted their spirits in spite of their immediate difficult circumstances. Similarly, find ways to take joy in other's faithfulness. Your faithful walk might also encourage others. Have you told others how their faithfulness encourages you? You should tell them.
2. Paul thanks God for the joy he has because of the faithfulness of the Thessalonians. He prays and desires to be able to help them grow spiritually. Paul's prayers for them in 3:12-13 are for their love to grow and for their hearts to be strengthened. As you read, notice what Paul

prays for the other churches.

3. Paul encourages them to live in order to please God (4:1–12). Review what he lists there, asking yourself how you are doing in those different areas. How can you help others grow in living that way? **Note:** If we are in Christ, God is finally pleased with us because we have His righteousness. However, the way we live in this world can grieve Him if we disobey (Ephesians 4:30).
4. A proper view of the future (4:13–18) is important, and believers should encourage one other with the truth that they will all be together with the Lord one day. Encouraging others with this truth will help us live lives that please God, especially as we endure hardship.
5. Paul calls the Thessalonian church a “model” to others. What made them a model? Write down what Paul commends them for.

Go & Do

Choose one of the following:

- Thank God for the faith of fellow believers (3:7). Consider how God has saved them, and how He is preserving and sanctifying them.
- Assess your life to see if it’s pleasing to God. Are you living a holy life? Do you love the saints? Are you a faithful worker at work whose life commends the gospel? How can you grow in such a way to please Him?
- Help a fellow believer grow in their faith so they might please God. How can you encourage them? What areas can they grow in? Ask them if they have any thoughts. What might you do to help them? How might you pray for them?

Discipleship Activities

Write out your 5-minute testimony. Use the testimony guide below to help you if you want. Share with your Deepen Discipleship group this week. Ask for feedback from others and learn from one another. [[Making Disciples](#)]

i Testimony Guide

This guide describes elements of sharing your testimony.

The great advantage of giving your testimony is that no one can deny the experience you describe. Also, its personal nature makes Jesus relevant to your daily life. When giving your testimony, you may want to include the following elements:

1. Your life before you became a believer.

- You may want to mention specific elements of your life before becoming a believer, such as: a personal need, emptiness, lack of peace, hopelessness, suicidal thoughts, relational problems, family problems, fear, anxiety, guilt, public failure, shame, etc.

2. How God has spoken to you.

- This may have been in a life crisis, a sermon or scripture passage, a dream or vision, through a friend, or an event.
- Perhaps you became painfully aware of sin. If you can communicate this in relation to a “shameful” event (where your sin or fault became known) this will be very effective, since many international cultures are shame based.

3. What happened when you first believed.

- Which scripture was meaningful?
- What did you do?
- What did you pray?
- What did you come to believe?
- How did you feel?

4. Your life since that time.

- What has it meant to be a follower of Jesus?
- How has God spoken to you since then (through events, other people, scripture)?

- How has God brought you through difficulties?
- How has He solved or changed the problems you had before Christ?
- Be sure to paint an accurate picture of the good and the difficult.

5. **Internal differences.**

- How do you know God has spoken to you?
- Is there a desire to do right that wasn't there before?
- How do you know your prayers are heard?

6. **Where possible, include the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus in your testimony.**

- Also mention how you trusted in Him alone, before you performed any works, for salvation.
- This is a radical thought with Muslims, because Islam is entirely works based.

Section

1 Thessalonians 5

Pray

God, we thank You that we can wait eagerly for Your coming because You did not appoint us to suffer wrath but instead to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Please help us live in light of Your coming. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read & Learn

Read 1 Thessalonians 5

1 Thessalonians 5 helps show how important it is that followers of Jesus think and live in light of the future.

In contrast to many other religions (including atheism), Christianity teaches that there is a definite end to the world. When Jesus comes again, unbelievers will be judged and punished, and believers will be saved to everlasting life. Christians should be those who both look forward to Christ's coming and whose lives show they don't live only for the present but are expectantly waiting for the End.

In Mark 13:32–37, during a long discourse on end times, Jesus pointed out that we don't know when the End will come:

But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when

the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake. (ESV)

In 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul echoes Jesus' emphasis in two main sections:

1. Think rightly about Christ's coming (5:1–11)
2. Live rightly because Christ is coming (5:12–28)

Not only should we have a proper understanding of eternity, but those we teach should also know that Jesus is coming again—and that followers of Jesus should have a future orientation.

Daily Verse for Meditation

1 Thessalonians 5:5-9

5 For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness.6 So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night.8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.9 For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflect & Change

1. Paul says the Thessalonians should be alert and self-controlled as they think about the Lord's return, with faith and love as a breastplate and the hope of salvation as a helmet. How does your faith and love protect followers like a breastplate?
2. Note the repeated emphasis on love in this book (2:8, 3:12, 4:9–10, 5:8, 5:13). Our love for others motivates us to pray, encourage, help, and admonish as well as reach out to the lost. The End will come, so now is

the time to love others.

3. The Thessalonians have hope and should be encouraged because they've been appointed to receive salvation they don't deserve, not to suffer wrath they do deserve. What a wonderfully motivating truth from 5:9–11.
4. The Thessalonians already know the gospel (1:4–10) but Paul mentions it again here. How is this a model for us in reminding other believers (i.e., not just unbelievers) of the good news? Note how Paul phrases the gospel in terms of a community (i.e., “we” and “us”). Paul writes to disciples in a local church community and often uses “we” and “us” language. We should announce the gospel to one another again and again because the gospel refreshes followers in community (i.e., “Community Gospeling”)².
5. Review how Paul encourages the Thessalonians to live in light of Christ's coming (5:12–28). Given Paul's encouragements here, what challenges might they have been facing? How might a proper view of church leaders be important? What should be the role of leaders in a church (5:12–13)? What do we learn about how to disciple other believers (5:14)?
6. Learn to “pray continually”(5:17). If that statement confuses you, here's a [1-minute explanation](#).
7. Paul ends with hope (5:23–24). How does the fact that God will accomplish our sanctification encourage us to obey Him?

WHERE DOES LOVE COME FROM?

‘Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God’ 1 John 4:7 ESV

COMMUNITY GOSPELING

Paul writes to disciples in a local church community and often uses ‘we’ and ‘us’

language. We should announce the gospel to one another again and again because the gospel refreshes followers in community.

Go & Do

Choose one of the following:

- God is coming again, and we must live in anticipation of the good future God has prepared for His people.
- Remind another believer of the gospel. Encourage him or her with verses that focus on how God has called them, is sanctifying them, and will one day present them blameless before Himself (5:23–24).
 - Examine yourself using the below questions to better serve other believers according to their needs (5:12–15).
 - Do you need to respect your leaders in the Lord?
 - Is there someone idle whom you should admonish?
 - Is there someone fainthearted whom you should encourage?
 - Is there someone weak whom you should help?
 - With whom can you be patient?
 - Is there someone whom you should not be repaying evil for evil?

Discipleship Activities

- Learn a new hymn or song that focuses on one or more areas: praising God, repentance, confession, or thanksgiving. Use the words to meet with God in prayer and praise. Here are a few examples: [[Spiritual Disciplines](#)]



Come Behold the Wondrous Mystery



All Creatures Of Our God And King



My Song Is Love Unknown



The King of Love My Shepherd Isv



Dear Refuge of My Weary Soul



Immovable Our Hope Remains

Section

2 Thessalonians 1-3

Pray

God, You are awesome, and all people will marvel at Your majesty when You return in power. We pray You will help us stand firm until the end. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read & Learn

Read 2 Thessalonians 1-3

Christians live in expectation of Christ's return. 2 Thessalonians follows up on Paul's concern first addressed in the previous book: the church's need to have a proper view of the future. We see how the Thessalonian church responded to Paul's earlier letter and also how he continues to care for them. We only hear one side of Paul's conversation but we can re-create the other side sometimes.

Before studying this letter, it will be important to refresh your memory by looking at your notes from 1 Thessalonians. Consider what themes are repeated in this book, and try to determine the areas in which it appears the Thessalonians listened, as well as those in which they still struggle.

We only hear one side of Paul's conversation but we can re-create the other side sometimes.

There are some challenging parts to this letter, particularly the section about the man of lawlessness (2:1–12). This seems to refer to a 1st-century Satanic emperor, but it might also be a reference to a future ruler energized by Satan himself. But as

you read, stay focused on the overall point of the section and the letter as a whole, even as the specifics resist easy explanation.

Here's one way to outline the book:

- Introduction and thanksgiving (1:1–4)
- What's coming: Christ's return and the "man of lawlessness" (1:5–2:12)
- Response #1: Stand firm (2:13–17)
- Response #2: Pray for Paul and persevere (3:1–5)
- Response #3: Don't be idle (3:6–15)
- Benediction (3:16–17)

MAN OF LAWLESSNESS

This seems to refer to a 1st-century Satanic emperor, but it might also be a reference to a future ruler energized by Satan himself.

Perhaps more practically, 2 Thessalonians features several wonderful prayers that you could easily pray for others (1:11–12, 2:16–17, 3:1–2, 3:16).

Daily Verse for Meditation

2 Thessalonians 1:4-7a

4 Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.⁵ This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— 6 since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you,⁷ and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us.

Reflect & Change

1. How do you think the Thessalonians reacted to Paul's previous letter? We can tell by the ways Paul commends them and the ways he still challenges them. Though the Thessalonians still need to grow in their obedience, Paul is generally positive and encourages them (1 Thessalonians 1:3-4). Every disciple needs encouragement, and we should learn to look for areas to encourage in all true believers, as well as true churches.
2. What do we learn about this "man of lawlessness"? What is Paul's point in writing about him? What does he say will happen to him?
3. It's important to remember Paul's words are reminders of what Christ previously told His disciples in Mark 13, especially Mark 13:32-37.
4. Paul usually practiced what he preached. He worked hard himself, so his exhortation to the Thessalonians not to be idle held more authority. Paul also told them not to associate with those who refuse to obey his instruction; warn them as brothers, he said, so they might be ashamed. Talk with someone about what obedience to this command might look like today.

Go & Do

Choose two of the following:

- Praise God for the grace you see in another believer. Analyze the evidences of grace He has produced in them, and make sure to mention it to them, specifically.
- Talk with other believers about the ways you are looking forward to Christ's return. What does it mean for you to stand firm in view of the future? How does this shape your evangelism and your pursuit of sanctification? Are there idle areas in your life?
- As you reflect on 1 and 2 Thessalonians, note how Paul's teaching is corroborated by his personal example. Does your life commend your teaching?

What areas are you encouraged by? What areas are discouraging? Pray God will help you live a life that commends the gospel, and praise Him for his promise to “comfort hearts and establish them in every good work and word” (2:17).

- Paul repeatedly encourages and prays for the Thessalonians. He also asks them to pray for him. Think about how Paul is helping those who are suffering under persecution. Look at what he prays for them. Take time to pray today for Christians around the world who are suffering for their faith—and pray these things for them.

Discipleship Activities

- Use the internet to locate vendors from among the people groups you found in your area; begin praying for them. Perhaps plan a visit to one of their restaurants, grocery stores, etc. [[All Peoples](#)]
- The church in Thessalonica was doing some things right. Write down how you would explain what a church does, and then review the definition of a [church](#) and the guidelines for church planting. [[Local Church](#)]

Section

Review & Catch Up

Use today to catch up on your daily reading or discipleship activities.

If you are caught up, then consider reaching out to someone else in your *Deepen Discipleship* group and assisting them.

Philippians

Introduction to Philippians

Paul wrote the letter to the church in Philippi while he was a prisoner in Rome around 61 A.D. In Acts 16, we learn how the church in Philippi started during Paul's second missionary journey. A vision led Paul and his traveling companions to Macedonia, where both Lydia and a jailer and his family came to faith, creating the core of this small church (Acts 16:1-40; 1 Thess 2:2).

Paul wrote to both members and church leaders in Philippi; he sought to comfort and challenge them. He was about to send Epaphroditis and Timothy their way, so it was a convenient time to send a letter.

He warned them about several enemies of the gospel and encouraged them to pursue unity by remembering the way Christ lived—humbly serving and giving Himself for others. If Christ, the Son of God, lived a life of humility and service, how much more should they live for the good of others, not complaining, arguing, or seeking their own way? Multiple times, Paul calls the Philippians to “conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel,” to “be like-minded,” and to avoid complaining and arguing. He even risked publicly shaming two women by mentioning them by name, calling them to reconcile with each other.

Paul reminded the Philippians of the importance of knowing Christ and trusting only in His righteousness. Christians are not to trust in rituals, as those who taught the necessity of circumcision; nor are they to trust in religious traditions, as Paul easily could have, given his personal history. But Christians, Paul wrote, should trust only in Christ and gain a righteousness that comes through faith, not works.

Paul ends his letter calling the Philippian church to rejoice in the Lord in all circumstances and to follow his example as he followed Christ. He thanked them again for their partnership in the work of the gospel, including the most recent gift they'd sent with Epaphroditus.

Philippians 2:1-5

1 So if there is any **encouragement in Christ**, any **comfort from love**, any **participation in the Spirit**, any **affection and sympathy**,**2** complete my joy by **being of the same mind**, having the **same love**, being in full accord and of one mind.**3** Do **nothing from selfish ambition or conceit**, but in **humility count others more significant than yourselves**.**4** Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the **interests of others**.**5** Have this **mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus**.

Section

Philippians 1

Pray

Lord, help my love to abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so I might discern what is best and be pure and blameless until the day You return. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read & Learn

Read Philippians 1

OVERSEERS AND DEACONS

A church has identifiable leaders, who are scrutinized and set apart according to the qualifications set forth in Scripture. A church recognizes two biblical offices of leadership: pastors/elders/overseers and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor/elder/overseer is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.

[Key Term: Church](#)

Philippians 1:1–11 Notice this early house church had two types of people to serve and guide it: overseers and deacons. As you read through the New Testament, pay attention to the structure of the early church. Do you know the responsibilities and qualifications for elder and deacon? Find them in [Titus 1:5–9](#), [Timothy 3:1–13](#), and [1 Peter 5:1–4](#).

A church has identifiable leaders, who are scrutinized and set apart according to the qualifications set forth in Scripture. A church recognizes two biblical offices of

leadership: pastors/elders/overseers and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor/elder/overseer is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.

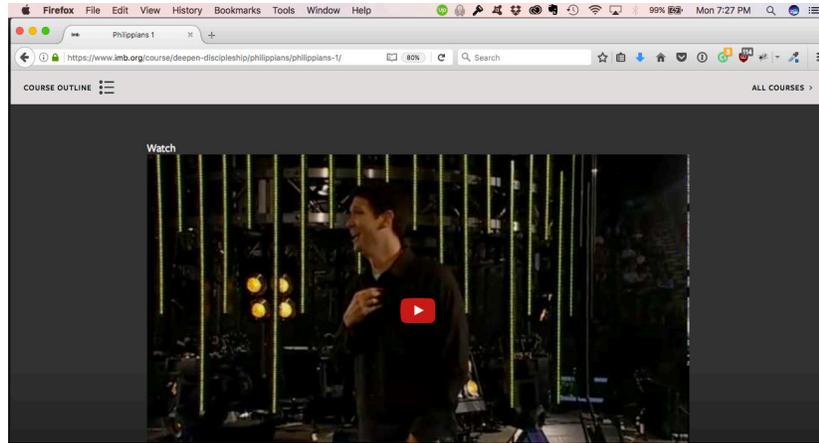
Paul expressed how much joy their gospel partnership brought him, and he reminded them of their sovereign and faithful God who is able to keep all those who are His until the end. He prayed God would cause their love to increase so they would stay pure and blameless, full of the fruit of righteousness.

Philippians 1:12–18 Paul continued to encourage these believers by explaining how during his current imprisonment, the envy and rivalry of others served to advance the gospel. So he rejoiced, even in difficulty, because God's purposes were moving forward.

Philippians 1:19–30 Paul knew the goal and passion of his life was serving Christ alone. He would have rather departed to be with Christ, but for now he must remain to serve Christ and others. Thus, he encouraged the Philippian church to live a life worthy of the gospel. More than anything, he wanted to help the Philippians see progress and joy as they follow Christ. This also sounds like his desire for the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 3:10).

Paul confidently prays for the Philippians' continued growth even in the midst of suffering. Again, he reminds these Christians that his current difficulties are advancing the gospel, and assures them he will continue to work with them for their progress in the faith.

Philippians 1



Matt Chandler - Following God May End Badly

Daily Verse for Meditation

Philippians 1:6

6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Reflect & Change

1. Have you have seen God advance the gospel even in difficult situations? Some of the most responsive peoples in the world suffer under repressive governments.
2. Who has helped you in your “progress and joy in following Christ”? How can you help someone grow in joy? What are some ways you are becoming a [disciple-maker](#)? Pray about this.
3. The path of Christ is one of suffering and then glory. Every Christian must walk this same path—first suffering, then glory. Do you expect to suffer? How do you react when difficulties come your way? The gospel enables Christians to suffer with confident joy. Be transformed by that.

Go & Do

- Jesus’ disciples should encourage fellow Christians. How can you develop the habit of encouragement? Make a plan to encourage three fellow Christians

with specific references to the ways you've seen God use them. Do it this week!

- Select some of the prayers of the New Testament to pray for others today.

Discipleship Activities

Talk with your accountability partner about your physical health assessment from last week. If you already have a plan for exercise or another category, then continue your plan. If you don't, then consider one of the following:

- Set aside time for exercise: 30 minutes, three times a week. If this is new for you, start by walking regularly. (If you're just beginning, consult your doctor.)
- Learn about healthy eating. Ask your doctor for information, or research yourself. [[Being a Disciple](#)]

Philippians 2

Pray

Lord, help me do nothing from selfish ambition or vain conceit but in humility consider others as more significant than myself. Help me look not only to my own interests but also to the interests of others. Open my eyes that I might see wonderful things in your Word today. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read & Learn

Read Philippians 2

Philippians 2:1–11 In the beginning of Philippians 2, Paul reminded the Philippians of the example Christ gave them. This example is the basis for his exhortation that they live lives of humility and self-sacrifice. Those who come to Christ must walk as he walked—on a road of humility and suffering—and they must take up their crosses and follow Him.

Philippians 2:6–11 These verses teach the divine nature of Christ. Do you know other passages that show this? See Titus 2:13, John 1:3, Colossians 1:15–20, and Hebrews 1:8.

11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, 13 waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

(Titus 2:11-14 ESV)

In these six beautiful verses, Paul makes several significant statements about who Christ is and what He did. Jesus is the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity; He is equal with God. And yet, He saw fit to humble himself and take on human likeness, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

Jesus Christ is both God and man; that is the wonder of the Incarnation! He is the Son of God, fully divine and fully human. And God exalts Him after His humiliation and death to the highest place. Why does God do this? So that one day every knee, in heaven and on earth, will bow their knee to Christ, confessing that He is Lord!

Philippians 2:12–18 Therefore, says Paul, “work out” your salvation, knowing it is God who is at work in you; and seek to live blamelessly as you share this truth with others. Don’t complain or argue but instead give yourself to humble service so your life will adorn the same gospel you share. This is how you might be a light to those living in darkness as you “hold out the word of life.”

Philippians 2:19–30 Paul planned to send Timothy and Epaphroditus back to the Philippians. Paul then praised them for their faithful labor and encouraged the Philippians to honor men like Epaphroditus, their messenger sent to bring Paul a gift and take care of him. He was a servant who faithfully completed his task, even to the point of risking his life. Epaphroditus was Christlike in his service, and Paul honored him for that.

Timothy and Epaphroditus were both faithful men who, like Paul and Christ, looked “to the interests of others.” Paul said Timothy “takes a genuine interest in your welfare.”

What’s this mean? Godly people take a genuine interest in others’ spiritual welfare, a trait well-worth imitating. Later in Philippians, we see that Paul will tell the church to join with others in following his example (3:17) and to put into practice whatever they’ve learned from him (4:9).

Gloria Furman offers help with grumbling as mothers by looking at children as “image bearers” of God.



Gloria Furman - God's Design for Motherhood

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David Platt - The Trinity

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Daily Verse for Meditation

Philippians 2:3-4

3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Reflect & Change

1. Reflect on Paul's example of encouraging and honoring others. Who do you know who takes a genuine and specific interest in the welfare of others?
2. Paul made the point that if Jesus, the divine Son of God, was willing to live selflessly to serve sinful man, even by dying for them, how much more should we be willing to live for others rather ourselves? This should result in our own freely-given service to God.
3. Becoming like Christ doesn't depend only on us because God remains constantly at work in us. Just as Paul encouraged believers to work out their salvation while they trusted in God's sovereignty to carry all things to completion, we should do the same.

Go & Do

- Plan specific ways you can put the interests of someone else ahead of your own this week. Report it to your small group.
- Study a Scripture passage that teaches the deity of Christ. Where would you go in the New Testament to show someone that Jesus is the divine Son of God?

Discipleship Activities

- Read this article on [Conversation Turners](#). Plan several things you can say about ordinary topics that might easily turn toward spiritual matters. Discuss with a partner and practice this week. [[Making Disciples](#)]

Section

Philippians 3

Pray

Lord, help me learn to count everything as a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing You. Help me to know You and the power of Your resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in Your sufferings. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read & Learn

Read Philippians 3

In this chapter, Paul is back to warning the Philippians about enemies of the gospel. In Philippians 1, he spoke about those enemies who put him in prison; this was no matter, he said, because even in that situation, Christ received honor as the gospel was preached throughout the whole palace guard. But now he turns to a different threat.

The threat came from those around them who preached a different gospel, one that trusted not only in the work of Christ but also in the ritual of circumcision. Paul explained those who are true followers of Christ are those who “glory in Christ” and “worship by the Spirit.” There’s nothing, Paul reminds the reader, that can save except the work of Christ and His righteousness, received by faith. So all other “works” of obedience, religion, and tradition—like the ritual of circumcision—don’t profit us anything in the search for salvation. In fact, Paul considered them a loss, rather than a help. We need only to be found in Christ, cloaked in His righteousness; we need only to “glory in Christ” alone.

Paul then told the Philippian church to follow his example, to press on toward the prize, and to imitate him and others who live as he did. Many so-called followers of Christ lived as enemies of the gospel, and Paul pleaded with the Philippians not to follow them. Their god was their stomach (their appetites), their minds centered on earthly things, and they gloried in their shame. What a picture of worldly living! Christians, however, don't belong to this world, Paul reminded them. They belong to another kingdom, and they're waiting for Christ the Savior.

So here's the message of Philippians 3: glory in Christ, watch out for enemies of the gospel, follow Paul's example, and eagerly await the Savior from heaven.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Philippians 3:8-9

8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

Reflect & Change

4. In what ways are you tempted to put confidence in your flesh? In yourself? Your local church? Your Bible knowledge? Your education? Your job? Your kids? Your quick mind?
5. Are there ways you live with your mind on earthly things? What would others who know you say you spend your time doing and thinking? When your mind is in neutral, where does it go?

Go & Do

- Talk to your accountability partner or other Christians about what you and they think might be holding you back from pressing on toward the goal God has called you to.

Discipleship Activities

Rework your testimony based on the feedback you've received. Tell it to a friend outside of your Deepen Discipleship group. Report to the group what you learned and any adjustments you will make. [[Making Disciples](#)]

Section

Philippians 4

Pray

Lord, You are great and worthy of my trust at all times and in all situations! Help me stand firm in You and rejoice in You. Help me not to be anxious but instead to bring my cares to You with thanksgiving. Father, help me train my mind to dwell on what is true, pure, lovely, admirable, and praiseworthy. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read & Learn

Read Philippians 4

As we've seen in the first three chapters, Paul wanted to warn the believers in Philippi about several threats to the gospel: those who would imprison them; those who would require them to be circumcised; those whose gods are their stomachs and who live with their minds on earthly things; and potentially the Philippians themselves, if they were not walking in unity with one another.

DEALING WITH CONFLICT

Learn some 'Relational Wisdom' below.

[- Dealing with Conflict](#)

[- The 4Gs of handling conflict from The Peacemaker](#)

Philippians 4:1-9 Paul wanted them to stand firm in the Lord, so he encouraged them to pursue unity by remembering the way Christ lived, as a humble servant who poured out His life as a sacrifice for others.

If Christ, the Son of God, could serve them this way, then Paul wants to know how exactly is it that the Philippian church can't get along with each other. Should they not be genuinely concerned for the welfare of one another—without complaining or arguing? Shouldn't they be putting the interests of others ahead of their own?

Multiple times in the letter, Paul called them to “conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel,” to be “like-minded,” and “not complain or argue.” And then he mentioned two women by name, criticizing them publicly, so he might plead with them to agree with each other “in the Lord.” He even called on a mediator to help them.

Paul then called the church to “rejoice in the Lord always!” They could think back to Paul's example of singing hymns in the jail in Philippi, still rejoicing in the Lord after being flogged and put in chains.

We, too, have such grounds for this rejoicing—not in our changing circumstances but in the unchanging, finished work of Christ. Why? Because, in short, our sins have been forgiven! Whatever difficulties and trials we face here, we are ultimately looking forward to heaven. Jesus took our sins upon Himself and paid the penalty we deserved. As those who have put our faith in Christ and repented of our sin, we are now called sons and daughters of God and will one day enjoy eternity in heaven with Him—free from sin and sorrow.

And Can It Be, by Charles Wesley
He left His Father's throne above, So free, so infinite His grace.
Humbled Himself in matchless love, And bled for Adam's helpless race;
'Tis mercy all, immense and free, For, O my God, it found out me!
'Tis mercy all, immense and free, For, O my God, it found out me!

Then Paul called them to be known for “gentleness,” for their self-denying kindness. They should be known not as those who promote themselves but as those who don't think about themselves much. Why? Because the Lord is near! He is not far

off, so how can we boast in ourselves? “What do you have that you did not receive?” Paul asks in 1 Corinthians 4:7. Again, he is reminding us of the humility he spoke of in Philippians 2.

As we remember who we are compared to the glory of our Savior, we realize it does us no good to worry about things; God is in control. We should trust Him. We should present our requests to Him, and His peace will guard our hearts.

Yet, Paul said, while we wait for our Savior from heaven, we should think about what is true and noble, excellent and praiseworthy. Whatever these Christians have seen in him or learned from him, they should put into practice, imitating either his life or the lives of people like Epaphroditus and Timothy. Put those things into practice, and the God of peace will be with you.

Philippians 4:10–23 Paul ended his letter with heartfelt thanksgiving for the Philippians’ partnership in the gospel through the years. They have helped Paul over and over again, sending him gifts of money and even sending one of their members, Epaphroditus, to help him while he was in prison. Such help is a “fragrant offering,” pleasing to God.

Clearly, Paul cared for the Philippians. In the first chapter, he prayed with joy because of their partnership. In the second, he called them his dear friends and planned to send Epaphroditus safely back to them so they might be glad and he might feel less anxiety. Finally, he told them how he loved and longed for them, calling them “his joy and crown.”

Daily Verse for Meditation

Philippians 4:4-8

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. 5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; 6 do not be anxious about

anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Reflect & Change

1. God is all-wise, all-knowing, and all-powerful. Do you pray about the things that worry you? Do you cast your cares upon Him, knowing He cares for you? Do you take time to be still before Him, remembering He is the God of peace? Do you dwell in the shadow of the Almighty, believing God works all things for the good of those who love Him?
2. Are there ways you spend time thinking about what is false, wrong, dishonorable, impure, ugly, or shameful? We can train our minds to think of good things. Perhaps we should fill our minds with good and true things in an effort to replace the evil thoughts that too often rise to the surface.

Go & Do

- Talk with your pastor or a church leader about ways your church partners with other churches in their evangelism—either locally or overseas. Think about how you can encourage them in this work of partnership. In fact, plan with another disciple to do just that.

Discipleship Activities

- Visit one culturally different store or restaurant in your area, and learn where the owners are from by discovering their native language. Let's revisit the Person of Peace again below. Remember Lydia, the person of peace in Philippi? Be alert to people of peace as you visit. [All Peoples]
- Write out a prayer of intercession to share with your Deepen Discipleship

group that incorporates prayer for your group, your city, your country, Christians in other countries, and an unreached people group. [Spiritual Disciplines, Teaching Simply]

① Persons of Peace

AS WE LIVE OUR LIVES, BE ALERT TO DISCOVER “PERSONS OF PEACE.”

READ AND LEARN

Missionaries and church planters talk about finding “persons of peace” in a neighborhood, city, or marketplace. Often the person of peace will have friends and relatives who are open to gospel witness and are welcoming to followers of Jesus. Finding them is but one “tool of the trade” that assists us in locating those in whom God may be at work in a community. Often, these people or “households of peace” are like a gateway relationship into a family, neighborhood, or community. Consider prayerfully seeking them out as you go about living more intentionally.

While we’re not required by Scripture to use this approach, we can see this pattern or principle in the New Testament:

- Luke 7:1–10 (The Centurion)
- John 4:1–30 (The Samaritan Woman)
- Acts 8:26–40 (The Ethiopian Eunuch)
- Acts 10:9–11:1 (Cornelius)
- Acts 16:13–15 (Lydia)
- Acts 16:22–38 (The Philippian Jailer)

We can often recognize the person of peace because they will:

1. welcome you
2. receive you
3. be open to you and your friendship
4. be open to what you have to say about Jesus
5. be interested in and open to the life you live as a follower of Jesus
6. assist or serve you in some ways

Review the passages above and look for these six characteristics.

GO AND DO

As you go about your daily life, learn to pray and be alert to these people of peace. Be intentional; look for them. Calibrate your spiritual radar so you can “catch” the opportunities God provides as you simply pray and look around.

Be intentional about seeking out people of peace, and expect that God will be at work in some. Only the Holy Spirit can open blind eyes and change hearts and grant repentance and faith in Christ. Pray to encounter people of peace, listen to and learn their stories, and then be ready to tell your own story (testimony). Finally, though, be sure to tell them the gospel.

As you meet these potential people of peace, remember to let Jesus be the filter. **We go in Jesus’ name, with His authority to be and make disciples, so we need not fear if we meet some people who are NOT people of peace. It’s true that some won’t welcome us or want our friendship.** As we identify with Jesus, they may reject us. They may not be open to friendship with us. That’s okay—Jesus is a divisive person. Let Jesus be the filter.

Consider the following ideas for finding persons of peace and plan some of these with your group:

- **Bold prayer:** Pray and ask for Persons of Peace to be brought across your daily paths.
- **Prayer walking:** Prayer walk in different kinds of neighborhoods and communities.
- **Meet people:** Get out and be with people. Spend time in strategic places and areas the Spirit has laid on your heart as you have prayed and talked with others.
- **Intentionally sow broadly:** Actively go to a number of places and people—as the old adage goes, don't just fish in one pond.
- **Tell them the gospel:** In your conversations, use Jesus and the gospel as your filter.
- **Use honest questions:** Ask questions about their passions, difficulties, and things that are important to them. Ask if they are interested in learning about Jesus. Ask them if they know others who may be interested.
- **Urge a response:** Invite them to respond to the gospel, and invite them to learn more about Jesus in the Word.
- **Reconnecting:** Ask for their contact information so you can reconnect and continue the conversation.
- **Remember the Spirit:** Regardless of how you think it went, expect that God the Spirit is at work bringing conviction and opening hearts—expect the unexpected.

RESOURCE

Check out the below resource for some practical ways to find People of Peace.

[People of Peace Resource](#)

Section
Review

Pray

Lord, help me as I reflect on what I've learned these past six weeks. Thank you for all I've seen in your Word. Thank you for how You have helped me put that Word into practice with others. May I not forget how You've challenged me, how You've encouraged me and others in our group.

Thank You for the gospel which is Your power to save me and all who turn to Christ and believe. Teach me to pray and to love You and others. Give me the humility and the boldness to be a blessing in my church community.

By your Spirit, You are always with us. May I live for Your glory alone. In Jesus' name, amen.

Review

1. Review your reading from these past six weeks. What specific things has God shown you from His Word? From your memorization work? Stop now and take notes, if you haven't already, on any truths you want to remember from this time.
2. Consider what you learned from the "Reflect and Change" questions. Again, stop and note anything you want to remember, pray about, or keep practicing. What have you learned from other people?
3. Review the "Go and Do" and the "Discipleship Activities." How did God help you grow in faithfulness? Which activities do you want to continue? Anything you want further help on? Any new relationships to keep pursuing?

Celebrate

1. Celebrate how the Lord has helped you these past six weeks! Celebrate the truths He has shown you and others in His Word. Celebrate any new acts of obedience He has helped you with, as well as any areas of growth. Celebrate the new relationships you've made.
2. Take note of the things you want to celebrate with your Deepen Discipleship group—and make sure to celebrate together what the Lord has done. Encourage your facilitator(s) and thank them for their service.

Pray

1. Stop now and pray, thanking God for His Word, His people, and His Spirit who works in us.
2. Pray for any new relationships that have begun during these six weeks. Ask God to work in their lives, and for you to continue to have boldness, opportunities, and increased ability to share truth.
3. Pray for the others in your Deepen Discipleship group by name. Pray for those they have met and shared truth with. Pray for God's continued work in their lives as well.
4. Pray for yourself, for God's continued work in your life, and for any specific areas of growth you want to continue to pursue. Pray for continued faithfulness in your discipleship routines.
5. Pray for your church, its leaders, and its members.

Lord, help me as I reflect on what I've learned these past weeks. Thank you for all I've seen in your Word. Thank you for how You have helped me put that Word into practice with others. May I not forget how You've challenged me, how You've encouraged me and others in our group.

Thank You for the gospel which is Your power to save me and all who turn to Christ

and believe. Teach me to pray and to love You and others. Give me the humility and the boldness to be a blessing in my church community.

By your Spirit, You are always with us. May I live for Your glory alone. In Jesus' name, amen.

Plan

1. Deepen Discipleship continues! Make plans with your leader to keep persevering. Create space in your schedule as needed.
2. Prayerfully plan how you will continue to follow up with new relationships.
3. Prayerfully plan any habits or routines you should start, stop, or continue. Create the necessary space for that to happen.

Section

Matthew (Part 1)

Introduction to Matthew

The Gospel of Matthew was written by Matthew, also known as Levi the tax collector. He probably wrote it around 48-50 A.D. The key word is “kingdom,” and it is used 28 times. Written primarily to Jewish readers, the book reveals Jesus as the Messiah, the King of the Jews, from the line of David.

A key characteristic of Matthew’s Gospel is his emphasis on the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy in the life of Christ. His repetition on this point is further evidence of Matthew’s desire to convince his Jewish audience that Jesus was the Messiah promised by Scripture. It’s true that Jesus’ birth, death, and resurrection ultimately set aside the requirements of the Law, yet Matthew zooms in on Jesus’ life and teachings as a fulfillment of that Law.

Like Moses, Jesus is a great teacher, but his message is new. Matthew records several of Jesus’ longer teachings or discourses. The Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7) and His speech on the Mount of Olives (Matt 24-25) are well known, but there are three other long speeches of Jesus. Watch for those because they are important.

Curiously, Jesus refers to his followers as “little ones,” probably to emphasize that humility and dependence should characterize Jesus’ disciples.

Matthew also uses a number of titles for Jesus, including Son of David, Son of God, Immanuel, and Lord, which can mean simply “Master” but may also refer to God.

As we read in Romans, Matthew wants us to understand that Jesus came first to the Jews but the gospel is for all peoples. The Great Commission makes this very clear (Matthew 28:18-20). Throughout Jesus' ministry, there is a growing conflict between the Jewish teachers and Jerusalem's religious leaders who do not demonstrate the righteousness that God required. This conflict peaks with Jesus' trial and crucifixion.

Matthew 1-4 deals with the miraculous conception of Jesus, His extraordinary birth, and some events surrounding His early life, including His very important genealogy. Matthew 5-25 details the earthly ministry of Jesus; these chapters are vital to understanding Jesus as the perfect man who lived on earth and fulfilled every requirement of the Old Testament Law. The last three chapters of Matthew depict the death and resurrection of Jesus. They present the good news of how Jesus took the sins of the world upon Himself.

Understanding the Gospels

The four Gospels are the authoritative testimony of the apostles to the life of Jesus. They were written, according to John, in order that we might believe in Him and be saved (John 20:21). They were also written so we might know what Jesus was like and how He lived, because we are to be imitators of Christ (1 Cor. 11:1; Eph. 5:1). The Gospels are a kind of specialized biography written to explain the most important periods of Jesus' life. You'll notice very little is said of Jesus' childhood or life prior to His public ministry that began around age 30. The Gospels are mostly a "biography" of Jesus' final three years. They don't answer every question we have about Jesus, but they do tell us all we need to know!

Each Gospel presents a portrait of Jesus that complements the other three. The Holy Spirit inspired Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John to include or omit features of Jesus' life, ministry, and teaching to give us a fuller picture of the Savior. Matthew, Mark, and Luke gradually show us who Jesus is as the Son of God, the Messiah sent from God to be the Savior of the world.

John's Gospel starts differently by describing Jesus as the eternal Word and then showing us through various signs and "I AM" statements that Jesus is the innocent God-Man who dies in the place of sinners and then rises again to appear to His disciples.

All four Gospels assume and teach that Jesus has come to fulfill the Old Testament promises and that Jesus is the promised Messiah sent from God come to earth, the One who will also come again at a future date at the end of history.

In interpreting and applying the four Gospels:

Let Jesus be the Hero. Remember that the main point of the four Gospels is to create and strengthen faith in Jesus. Interpret everything in that light.

Keep it in context. Always interpret everything in context. What comes before and after a given passage is important. So is the overall flow of the book. It's also important to remember that Jesus comes to fulfill God's promises to Israel. This is the historical context in which we must read the Gospels: God sends Jesus to fulfill God's promises to Israel by rescuing ruined and rebellious people and to create something new: a worldwide, multi-ethnic people of God, His church.

Parables usually have a punch line. Parables were Jesus' most frequent form of teaching. They are stories that work a little bit like jokes or stories with a moral. Usually, a parable's punch line comes at the end. Some of Jesus' hearers get the parable; some don't. Jesus was a master teacher, and it seems He chose parables for that reason.

Parables, by and large, aren't allegories, and we should never read anything into the parables of Jesus that is not evident in the text. In many cases, Jesus Himself interprets the parables, and when He does, His interpretation is what the parable means—no more and no less. On occasion, He turns the parable into an allegory,

with a point of meaning assigned to each element in the story; when He does, that's what the parable means. Usually, however, we should look for the point or points that Jesus is making in the context of the larger story of the Gospel.

We should not impose anything on the parable that's not found in the context, and we should not press the details of the story that fall outside the main point or points being made.

In the Gospels, most people around Jesus got it all wrong. There are occasional exceptions—like Mary in the story of Mary and Martha—but these exceptions are rare. Don't assume we're meant to follow the examples of those around Jesus, unless they match a clear point of teaching.

He is risen! Read everything in light of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The end of the story casts its light back on everything that comes before.

Two questions to ask: When you read the Gospels, you probably won't go wrong if you focus on asking these two questions:

1. **What does this passage teach me about Jesus?**
2. **What does this passage teach me about becoming and being a disciple of Jesus? (And what kind of people Jesus saves!)**

Philippians 4:6-7

6 Do not be **anxious about anything**, but in **everything** by prayer and supplication with **thanksgiving** let your requests be **made known to God**.7 And the **peace of God**, which **surpasses all understanding**, will **guard your hearts and your minds** in Christ Jesus.

*Section***Matthew 1-3****Pray**

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your faithfulness to Your promises of salvation. Thank You for fulfilling all of them in Your beloved Son Jesus. Thank You for sending Jesus to save people from their sins. Help me daily repent of my sins and trust in Jesus as my Savior, who is always with me. Help me tell others about the Lord Jesus. In His name, amen.

Read and Learn**READ MATTHEW 1-3**

Matthew 1:1–17 According to God's sovereign providence, Jesus is the promised Christ, the Davidic King, and the offspring of Abraham through whom all nations will be blessed (Genesis 12). Believers can trust in God's faithfulness to His promises, all of which are fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Matthew 1:18–25 God unexpectedly and miraculously made clear His salvation plan with the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. The angel of the Lord says His name is Jesus "because He will save his people from their sins" and also Immanuel, which means "God with us."

Though their reputations and eventual marriage were compromised, Joseph and Mary submitted to God's plans and obeyed every detail of His instructions. Their faith in God's promises amidst difficult circumstances is admirable.

Matthew 2:1–23 From Jesus' birth to His childhood, God sovereignly ordained

events to fulfill His promises about the Messiah. Matthew records three fulfilled prophecies surrounding Jesus' childhood: His birth in Bethlehem prophesied in Micah, His time in Egypt prophesied by Hosea, and the killing of children prophesied by Jeremiah.

Matthew 3:1–17 John the Baptist prepared the way for the Lord Jesus through his ministry of preaching repentance and baptizing. While John was out preaching one day, Jesus came down to be baptized. John recognized Jesus and, after baptizing Him, saw the Spirit of God confirm Jesus' deity.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Matthew 1:22-23

22 All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the prophet 23 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel which means, God with us.

Reflect and Change

1. In Jesus' time, being called a Nazarene was close to being insulted. In every area of life, Jesus took the low roads and made himself humble in order to fulfill God's plan.
2. Thank God specifically for His faithfulness to His promises, both in salvation history and in your life personally. Write down three ways you're seeking, by His grace, to bear fruit in keeping with repentance. They could be spiritual or personal, family- or work-related.

Go and Do

Even at the start of His life, Jesus was identified with the lowly. What do you need to do to take paths and attitudes of humility?

Discipleship Activities

Watch [this video](#) on the Honor and Shame, Fear and Power aspects of the gospel. Does your gospel presentation or testimony address any issues related to shame or fear? How could you incorporate the “Honor and Shame” aspects into your gospel conversations with others? Share with your group and get feedback. For a longer article, consider reading Does the “Plan of Salvation” [Make Disciples: Why Honor and Shame Are Essential for Christian Ministry](#). [[Making Disciples, All Peoples](#)]

Section

Matthew 4-5

Pray

Lord Jesus, thank You for defeating Satan on my behalf, and inviting me into Your kingdom if I simply come to You in poorness of spirit. Thank You that the kingdom of heaven is available to people from all cultures, backgrounds, and nations. Help me accurately reflect Your perfections in my life. Help me live as salt and light in this world, so all people would glorify the Father. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read Matthew 4-5

Matthew 4:1–11 As God's Son and the true Israel, Jesus defeated Satan's temptations in the wilderness. This victory over Satan shows the superior power of God's Spirit. Remember that in the garden God's son Adam failed; the wilderness generations of Israel failed; even Israel's greatest kings failed—every one of them. To the present day, we have all failed in this battle to resist every temptation. But God's beloved Son, Jesus, has succeeded. Believers rejoice in Jesus' victory over Satan on their behalf, and by the power of the Holy Spirit they have the will to fight temptations like Jesus did, with the Word of God.

Matthew 4:12–25 Jesus' ministry to all peoples has a simple, solitary message: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Jesus initiates and calls people, and some of them immediately leave everything to follow Him—and these repentant people become ambassadors to bring in more people. The kingdom of heaven has dawned with the coming of Jesus, but it's not yet fully achieved; all the effects of Adam's fall have yet to be reversed forever. That will come only when Jesus returns

at the end of time.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

See below for helpful information about The Kingdom of God

[– Article on The Kingdom of God](#)

[– One page summary chart of The Kingdom of God](#)

Matthew 5:1–16 The Sermon on the Mount begins. Those who follow Jesus are heirs of the King and kingdom. Their lives are personally and publicly blessed. The beatitudes highlight the blessings of reflecting King Jesus, as well as being rejected for King Jesus. Yet, as with Abraham, God's blessing is not meant to end with the blessed. Instead, followers of Jesus are to be God's instruments to bless others. So, insofar as we are blessed in Jesus, we should seek to be salt and light in this world.

IF YOUR EYE CAUSES YOU TO SIN...

In these verses, Jesus uses exaggeration to make His point. But His point is clear: don't play around with temptation.

[Here are 10 Simple Steps to Deal with Temptation](#)

Matthew 5:17–48 The entire Old Testament points to Jesus Christ as its fulfillment. He fulfilled the Law and offers His righteousness to all those who have trusted in Him. Only Jesus' perfect righteousness will allow someone to enter the kingdom of heaven. At the same time, He calls us to an even higher standard than the Law: to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Matthew 4:12-17

12 'Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. 13 And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, 14 so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: 15 'The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea,

beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—16 the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.’ 17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Reflect and Change

1. The Beatitudes reflect God’s values and His kingdom culture, that is, the new lifestyle believers choose to adopt when they follow Jesus. They also tell us about God’s character, and explain the ways Jesus’ life as God’s representative seemed surprisingly weak and vulnerable. Reading through these blessings, it’s useful to ask: which blessings remain hard for you to embrace? Are there any opposing worldviews or values you might need to reject in order to follow Jesus’ way wholeheartedly?
2. Jesus claims not just that there is a blessing in being poor in spirit, meek, or simple, but that those who live this way are at the center of the kingdom of God. Remember, we define “kingdom” as God’s rule and reign. How can this influence the way you understand the gospel, your social standing, and the way God is building a new reality?

Go and Do

- Jesus shows experienced temptation yet completely overcame it by knowing and using God’s Word. With Jesus’ help and God’s Word, we too can learn to fight the enemies’ lies. Think about key areas where you tend to believe Satan’s lies, and work with a fellow believer to identify both how Jesus gives victory over that area and what specific verses you could use as you fight against temptation.

Discipleship Activities

- Spend an extra 15 minutes one day this week meditating on some part of today’s reading or your Scripture memory. Record any further insights.
[\[Spiritual Disciplines\]](#)

Section

Matthew 6-7

Pray

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. Help us seek first Your kingdom and Your righteousness—for the glory of Your name. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read Matthew 6-7

FASTING?

[See these helpful Guidelines for Prayer and Fasting](#)

Matthew 6:1–18 God's children must practice righteousness—not for our own glory but for God's glory alone, which leads to reward from God our Father. Put simply, believers should live all of life for God's glory and honor.

Giving, praying, and fasting are three common examples where believers are prone to draw attention to themselves in order to get praise from men. But Matthew reminds us God sees what is done in secret, and He will reward us. This is not the same as earning our salvation, but is rather a normal overflow in response to having already received salvation, by God's grace.

Matthew 6:19–34 Believers shouldn't allow themselves to be anxious about this current life. Instead, they should focus on living in accord with God's kingdom

values. The heavenly Father takes care of all His children. Matthew warns us that our heart will follow our treasure, so we need to be careful where our treasure is.

Matthew 7:1–12 Kingdom living results in kingdom community and kingdom power. Life in kingdom community is humble, not characterized by self-righteous judging. Life in kingdom community is helpful, desiring all of God's people to accurately reflect the King. To do any of this we need kingdom power, which comes through prayers in faith.

POWER TO BLESS

Notice that Jesus uses His strength, power, and authority to bless His followers, not to use, crush, or take advantage of them.

Matthew 7:13–29 There are only two ways to live. Believers should stick close to Jesus' teachings and beware of false prophets and false professions. False prophets and professions are characterized by a crown without a cross, productivity without purity, gifts without godliness, and hearing without doing. The Sermon on the Mount concludes with people recognizing the unique authority of Jesus' teaching.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Matthew 6:33

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Reflect and Change

1. Do you feel the need to tell others about ways you're giving, praying, or fasting in hopes they will give you affirmation or recognition? Think about cultural ways this has become acceptable despite Jesus' teachings in Matthew 6; pay special attention to social media. How can you choose to live differently?

2. Have you ever thought about how to store up treasure in heaven? Watch [The Treasure Principle](#). Read and reflect on these [6 Treasure Principles Keys](#).

Go and Do

- Jesus explains the way we judge others can be turned on us. What do you need to do to become more aware of the critical tendencies you have? What are some situations where you need to give the same grace to others that you would want to receive yourself?

Discipleship Activities

- Reflect on how each member of your inner circle is doing. Where are they struggling? Talk with each family member and close friends. Listen for 10 minutes without interrupting. Ask for specific things to pray for and then pray for them. [[Healthy Relationships](#)]

Section

Matthew 8-10

Pray

Heavenly Father, we praise You for Jesus and His authority over illness, nature, demons, death, and every curse that stems from man's sin. Thank You for sending Him not to call the righteous, but sinners. Help us follow Jesus by faith and spread His gospel to all. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read Matthew 8-10

Matthew 8:1–9:34 Jesus Christ has authority over all things. He demonstrates power over illness, disease, and death (8:1–17; 9:18–33), healing those who believe in His authority; in doing so, He fulfills Isaiah's prophecy (8:17). Jesus also defines true discipleship (8:18–22; 9:9–13), explaining plainly the costs of following Him. Both the physical and spiritual worlds recognized Jesus' authority, even as many of the religious leaders remained skeptical. Many in the crowds, however, praised God for the authority they saw Jesus exercise, both to forgive sins and to heal bodies (9:1–8).

Notice that Jesus is looking for disciples who know and feel their need of Him; He did not come for "righteous" people (9:10–13).

In these verses, we observe several aspects of Jesus' authority:

- He is compassionate: Jesus touched the shunned leper when He could have simply healed him through His Word. Jesus called the outcast sinners to follow

Him (8:1–4; 9:9–13).

- He has cleansing power: When Jesus touched the unclean, they were cleansed (8:1–4).
- His authority is comprehensive: Jesus did not need to be physically present to heal (8:5–13).
- His authority seems divine as He recognizes and commends genuine faith (8:10–13; 9:1–2; 9:18–26; 9:27–30).

Matthew 9:35–10:42 Jesus' disciples are called to follow him in a variety of ways, regardless of the circumstances or cost.

- In prayer: asking the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers (9:37–38). Note that the first step is praying to the Lord of the harvest!
- In witnessing with gospel power: proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom with Jesus' authority (10:1–15).
- Expecting and enduring persecutions: as our Lord was persecuted, so will persecution come to all who follow Him faithfully. We must take up our cross and follow Him (10:16–25; 10:34–42).
- Finding God's protection: despite persecutions, we have nothing to fear because our Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus Christ protect us in love (10:26–33).

Daily Verse for Meditation

Matthew 9:37-38

Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.'

Reflect and Change

1. Following Jesus is fairly simple, but it's not easy. What hinders you from proclaiming the gospel of Jesus and His kingdom? Lack of compassion for sinners? Fear of persecution? Journal some reflections and share with your group or accountability partner for prayer.

Go and Do

- Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers. Where are the near harvest fields? The distant ones? Perhaps you are the answer to your own prayer. Share the gospel with at least one person this week, and recruit another Deepen Discipleship participant to go along.

Discipleship Activities

- Look again at the guidelines and description of [a local church](#). Notice what's not included: meeting location, meeting time, the amount of people who should gather, whether gatherers are able to read or just listen, the length of meetings, the kind of music—this list goes on and on. Which aspects of your church experience are cultural expressions and not essential guidelines for a biblical church? [[Local Church](#)]

Section

Matthew 11-12**Pray**

Father, thank You for sending Jesus as the promised Messiah, the Lord of all, the Davidic King, the strong man who defeats Satan, the conqueror of death, the One who invites us into His family, and the giver of rest to our souls. Help us do Your will by faith, as we seek to follow Him. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn**Read Matthew 11-12**

Matthew 11–12 In the midst of various negative responses to His ministry, Jesus graciously gives an invitation for all nations to find rest in Him. Note that Jesus' generous invitation is extended from God the Father, who revealed it directly to Jesus (11:25–27). Here, as Jesus models unusual meekness and offers ultimate spiritual rest and adoption, there remains a need for commitment to Jesus' call. Jesus can be meek, yet still divisive, and His followers must take His yoke and do the Father's will (11:28–30; 12:46–50). This is what it means to join the spiritual family of God (12:46–50).

Notice that Jesus had warned His disciples to expect all kinds of difficulty in their work for Him, but also urges them to rely completely on the Holy Spirit, who will give them all they need (10:16–23).

In these chapters, observe at least three types of negative response:

- Some people who heard Jesus expressed disappointment and confusion (11:1–

15). John the Baptist, like most Jews, was disappointed and confused because Jesus did not come in judgment and power, overthrowing all nations opposed to Israel.

- Some hearers listen, only to reject and find fault with Jesus or His disciples (11:16–24; 12:43–45). Note: To enjoy and even appreciate Jesus' miracle working authority is not the same as to repent, believe, and follow Him.
- Another group of Jewish leaders actively and willfully oppose Jesus and His ministry (12:1–14, 22–42) even though a correct reading of the Old Testament should have indicated Jesus as the coming Messiah! Instead of worshiping the Lord of the Sabbath, the Pharisees conspired against Him, even planning to destroy Him (12:1–14). These men who were students of the Old Testament and religious leaders actually called Jesus' work demonic (12:22–42).

Jesus is consciously living as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah in whom the nations will one day put their hope. Prophecy is being fulfilled, yet many still reject the Messiah (12:15–21).

Daily Verse for Meditation

Matthew 11:28-30

28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Reflect and Change

1. Kingdom values are often at odds with the world's values. Jesus explains that proud, intellectual, and self-sufficient minds will not understand the rule of the new kingdom of God. Little children, on the other hand, are dependent and helpless. Similarly, true knowledge about God, His rule, and the gospel is not accessible even to the sharpest thinkers

unless—or until—Jesus opens their eyes and heart. Put simply, in the economy of Christ, faith is honored above intellectual degrees. How can your language, attitude, and lifestyle better reflect this new kingdom value?

2. Jesus tells us that what we say originates in the disposition of our heart. Careless or hurtful words reveal a heart problem. If that's true, what's the solution for our careless speech?

Go and Do

- Jesus never said it would all be easy! Recognize that, with these chapters in Matthew, Jesus normalizes difficulty for those who follow Him. How can you and your fellow believers work together to better integrate Jesus' perspective as you make decisions and seek to encourage one another?

Discipleship Activities

- As you identify yourself as a follower of Jesus, take a spiritual interest in others and let Jesus be the filter. Mention your love for Christ early in the relationship. Pray for the boldness, opportunities, and ability to share the gospel with an unbelieving friend or stranger. Remember the [MOR](#). [[Making Disciples](#)]

Section

Matthew (Part 2)

Introduction to Matthew

The Gospel of Matthew was written by Matthew, also known as Levi the tax collector. He probably wrote it around 48-50 A.D. The key word is “kingdom,” and it is used 28 times. Written primarily to Jewish readers, the book reveals Jesus as the Messiah, the King of the Jews, from the line of David.

A key characteristic of Matthew’s Gospel is his emphasis on the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy in the life of Christ. His repetition on this point is further evidence of Matthew’s desire to convince his Jewish audience that Jesus was the Messiah promised by Scripture. It’s true that Jesus’ birth, death, and resurrection ultimately set aside the requirements of the Law, yet Matthew zooms in on Jesus’ life and teachings as a fulfillment of that Law.

Like Moses, Jesus is a great teacher, but his message is new. Matthew records several of Jesus’ longer teachings or discourses. The Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7) and His speech on the Mount of Olives (Matt 24-25) are well known, but there are three other long speeches of Jesus. Watch for those because they are important.

Curiously, Jesus refers to his followers as “little ones,” probably to emphasize that humility and dependence should characterize Jesus’ disciples.

Matthew also uses a number of titles for Jesus, including Son of David, Son of God, Immanuel, and Lord, which can mean simply “Master” but may also refer to God.

As we read in Romans, Matthew wants us to understand that Jesus came first to the Jews but the gospel is for all peoples. The Great Commission makes this very clear (Matthew 28:18-20). Throughout Jesus' ministry, there is a growing conflict between the Jewish teachers and Jerusalem's religious leaders who do not demonstrate the righteousness that God required. This conflict peaks with Jesus' trial and crucifixion.

Matthew 1-4 deals with the miraculous conception of Jesus, His extraordinary birth, and some events surrounding His early life, including His very important genealogy. Matthew 5-25 details the earthly ministry of Jesus; these chapters are vital to understanding Jesus as the perfect man who lived on earth and fulfilled every requirement of the Old Testament Law. The last three chapters of Matthew depict the death and resurrection of Jesus. They present the good news of how Jesus took the sins of the world upon Himself.

Matthew 7:24-27

24 Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. 26 And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.

Section

Matthew **13-15****Pray**

Heavenly Father, thank You for revealing the secrets of the kingdom in Your Word. Thank You for revealing Jesus as the focal point of Your revelation, the new and better Moses, the Son of God, the Great I AM. Help us have ears to hear Your Word; help us believe in Christ and worship You with a clean heart. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn**Read Matthew 13-15**

Matthew 13:1–14:12 Jesus spoke in parables because the secrets of the kingdom of heaven are only revealed to those who have ears to hear. Believers first need new spiritual ears to accept Jesus' explanation of the kingdom of heaven. Notice that Jesus is still Lord, even if many reject Him and His kingship.

REMEMBER

Parables usually have one main points.

[Review how to understand Parables.](#)

Even to His followers, Jesus' idea of the kingdom was radical and unexpected. Notice how His kingdom begins small and insignificant, transforming people in invisible ways (13:31–33). Notice also how it grows quietly alongside other evil kingdoms. It's like the same seed scattered on different soils that produces different responses. Be willing to scatter the gospel widely, praying it falls on good soil.

Matthew 14:13–36 Notice that Jesus is at the center of this new kingdom. He is the new and better Moses who teaches and provides abundant bread in desolate places. He is the Son of God, the Great I AM who has authority over all creation. His

care, provision, and authority are real and sufficient for believers.

Matthew 15:1–20 The traditions religion develops cannot be equated with God's values, and Jesus explains that God is most concerned with people's hearts, intentions, and motives. External religion and rule-keeping can never make someone right with God. Similarly, one cannot claim to honor God while hanging on to traditions that clash with His values. Christ changes His people from the inside out.

Matthew 15:21–39 Jesus compassionately extends His healing power outside the Jewish people, demonstrating that His new kingdom family includes people from all places and backgrounds. As they turn to Him to receive teaching, He sympathizes with and even meets the most basic physical needs of His followers.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Matthew 13:10-11, 17-19

10 Then the disciples came and said to him, 'Why do you speak to them in parables?' 11 And he answered them, 'To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.' . . . 17 For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it. 18'Hear then the parable of the sower: 19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.'

Reflect and Change

1. Jesus says a person's words and motivations are what make them clean or unclean to God. Though a person may have correct external forms, genuine worship and God-honoring living begins with the heart, the center of our being. The Christian life is not made up of just going through the proper motions. Spend some time in prayer asking God to

show you any places where your heart's disposition is not pleasing to Him. Confess and repent of those attitudes.

2. Reread and prayerfully reflect on the parables in our reading today, particularly what they teach about God's rule. Consider how their main ideas should motivate us to be disciple-makers now, not later. Remember Jesus' words: the kingdom may start small, but it will finish big!

Go and Do

- Choose one or two parables from this section, and practice explaining it to a fellow believer. Commit to integrate that parable in your conversations over the next week.
- Begin spiritual conversations with those you come in contact this week and begin sowing the seed of the gospel widely and broadly!

Discipleship Activities

- If you're married, invite a married couple you respect over and ask them questions about their relationship. If you're single, invite a single person whom you respect over and ask him or her questions about their life as a single person. [[Healthy Relationships](#)]

Section

Matthew 16-18

Pray

Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Jesus, who saves sinners through His suffering, death, and resurrection. Help us discern and turn away from any teaching that seeks to move us away from the cross of Christ. Help us deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow You. In Christ, help us to be humble, hate sin, love sinners, and forgive others. In Jesus name, amen.me, amen.

Read and Learn

Read Matthew 16-18

WHO DO YOU SAY JESUS IS?

Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.'

[Read the description of Jesus, God the Son.](#)

Matthew 16:1–27 Any gospel that doesn't include Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection is deceptive and false. Following Jesus requires adherence to pure teaching as well as total surrender to His kingdom work.

'He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.'

– Jim Elliot

What will it benefit a man if he gains the world and loses his soul?

[Read the story of Jim Eliot and his friends.](#)

Matthew 16:27–17:27 Jesus' death was not permanent and the cross was simply the path toward His coronation as King of His kingdom. The glory of King Jesus is unparalleled (16:28–17:13). Notice God's verdict on His Son as the Father approves Jesus in the presence of Moses and Elijah. This is the final prophet whom Moses mentioned in Deuteronomy 18:15-18. Jesus is the final Word of God, so we should listen to Him and interpret all Scripture in a Christ-centered manner (17:1–8). The power of the Son of Man defeats Satan, saves sinners from the curse of sin, and makes nothing impossible (17:14–20). The cross of King Jesus brings sinners into His family (17:22–27).

THE TITLE: SON OF MAN

Jesus' favorite title for Himself was 'Son of Man.' We find this term in the Old Testament in Ezekiel (2:1–3; 3:1–4) and Daniel (7:13–14). In Jesus' day, people likely associated the Son of Man with the Messiah, but Jesus used the Son of Man title to communicate His divine authority, His suffering, His death and resurrection, and also His glorious second coming. Jesus was both the Suffering Servant of Isaiah and the Son of Man of Daniel.

Matthew 18:1–35 When believers come into the new covenant family, they are transformed and should live differently from the world. God's children, as disciples of Jesus, should be humble and avoid tempting others. Disciples should hate personal sin—and, like their Heavenly Father, they should help others turn from sin (18:1–14).

Because God the Father lovingly pursues straying sinners through the church and church discipline, God's church must love sinners and hate sin enough to practice church discipline toward those who are unrepentant (18:15–20).

Notice finally that because of the Father's great mercy and forgiveness toward us, we ought to quickly forgive one another every time someone sins against us (18:21–35).

Daily Verse for Meditation

Matthew 16:24-25

24 Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.'

Reflect and Change

1. Because believers are a part of God's family, their lives are expected to represent the character of God. In this section, Jesus outlines many characteristics and behaviors of believers. Which of these seem hardest for you to adopt, culturally or personally? Do you currently hold values or behaviors that might be preventing you from embracing God's call of discipleship? Ask God to set you free as you turn from these and turn afresh to following Jesus.
2. How are you doing with forgiving others? Do you think you always need to forgive? How might meditating and considering God's forgiveness toward you help you forgive others?

Go and Do

- Discuss some ways we're tempted to stray from focusing our lives on Jesus' death and resurrection. Share with at least one person what it means that Jesus is the Christ, the Beloved Son of God to whom all should listen.

Discipleship Activities

- Watch the [Creation to Christ](#) video; you will be learning this over the next several weeks. This week, take time to learn the first three stories. See [Creation to Christ stories](#). [[Making Disciples, Teaching Simply](#)]

Section

Matthew 19-20**Pray**

Heavenly Father, thank You for your generosity in bestowing immeasurable treasure upon all who enter Your kingdom through childlike faith in Jesus. Help us joyfully follow Christ without comparing ourselves to others. Help us pursue true greatness by serving others like Christ. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn**Read Matthew 19-20**

Matthew 19:1–12 God's design for marriage is the union of one man and one woman for life. God only permits divorce because of man's sinful and hard heart of rebellion, which brought much sin and abuse into marriage. Therefore, God allows divorce only when there is sexual immorality. According to Jesus, the only alternative to heterosexual marriage is celibacy.

Matthew 19:13–29 Notice again how coming to Jesus requires a childlike approach. There are so many adult hindrances to childlike faith: external evaluations of worth, self-righteousness, trust in our own effort or good works, fear of man, the love of money—the list goes on. God wants us to treasure Him and trust Him to provide all we need, like a child trusts his father. Praise God that the power for childlike faith comes not from man, but from God who makes all things possible.

Matthew 19:30–20:16 All who follow Jesus will receive the immeasurable treasure of the kingdom of heaven, regardless of how long they've been a disciple. Those who follow and serve Jesus a long time (like Peter from 19:27) might think they

deserve more than recent converts; as a result, they might grumble at the King's perceived inequality (20:10–12). But they would be wrong. Since the treasure of salvation comes only by God's merciful grace, all should rejoice in the King's generosity (20:13–16), not compare it with others.

Matthew 20:17–34 Notice again how Jesus' words reverse our expectations: Jesus came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. Jesus' service—culminating in His suffering, death, and resurrection—brings total salvation for sinners. Therefore, those who want to be truly great in following Jesus must be a servant and slave to all.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Matthew 20:26b-28

26 But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, 28 even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Reflect and Change

1. Jesus teaches on many obstacles that might prevent us from entering His kingdom. What areas of life are you holding on to, hoping you can follow Jesus and _____? How can you get rid of those obstacles? Talk with another follower of Jesus about them and enlist their prayer support as you seek to repent and follow Him.
2. Do you struggle to let go of earthly idols? Reflect on this article on [Idolatrous Habits](#). Be willing to talk and pray with another believer about any idols you discover.

Go and Do

- Discuss the ways we're all tempted to underestimate the importance of

child-like faith. Consider the times you have preferred more adult, “intellectual” ways of relating to Jesus. How does a dismissal of childlikeness affect our faith or faithlessness?

- In Jesus’ new kingdom, those who want to lead should be ready to serve. They should be willing to fill any gaps, cover any needs, and do the hidden, dirty work in service of those they wish to lead. Talk with your community about adjusting your leadership and service styles to reflect Jesus’ values. What are specific ways you are a leader in your environment? Identify specific ways you can develop more service habits.

Discipleship Activities

Learn a greeting in the language of your new culturally different friend and try it out with them. Remember to look for [People of Peace](#). Ask questions about things that are important to them, emphasizing any religious heritage or religious holidays. [[All Peoples](#)]

Section

Matthew 21-24**Pray**

Jesus, we praise you for being the promised Davidic Messiah, the King with authority over all. Father, we praise You for Your mercy in sending a Savior, and for Your justice to punish unrepentant rebels. We thank You that in the midst of great tribulations, Christ will return again to consummate His glorious kingdom. Help us be prepared and faithful until that time. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn**Read Matthew 21-24**

Matthew 21:1–27 Jesus is God's promised Davidic Messiah (2 Samuel 7:10–16; Psalm 2 and 110; Isaiah 7:14; Isaiah 11; Jeremiah 23:5–6; Micah 5:6). In Romans 1:3, Paul reminds us that Jesus was the Son of David according to the Scriptures, the King with authority over all. King Jesus is in sovereign control over all details, yet humble and desirous to save sinners (21:1–11). King Jesus had authority to cleanse the Temple and curse the fig tree (21:12–22). All challengers to King Jesus will fail (21:23–27).

Matthew 21:28–22:14 God's judgment against all who refuse to repent and believe in His Son is severe, just, and eternal. The first parable highlights all people's duty to repent and believe. The other parables highlight God's judgment against anyone who, like the religious leaders, refuse to repent and believe.

God will judge anyone who doesn't listen to Jesus. Note, however, that God's judgment comes with a merciful warning: there's still time to repent. Pay attention to how Jesus' opponents sometimes fear man more than God. They alternately stir

up the crowds in opposition to Him, and fearfully poll them before acting against Him. These same opponents see that Jesus is fearless and speaks the truth no matter what. In Acts, we saw Jesus' Spirit-filled disciples speak fearlessly, as well.

37 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.38 This is the great and first commandment.39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT (MATTHEW 22:37–40)

Matthew 22:15–46 Sadly, despite knowing that Jesus spoke the parables against them, these religious leaders refused to repent and instead tried to trap Jesus. But Jesus won't be mocked by anyone, certainly not those who try to trap Him. Jesus escapes all three traps (22:15–40), and then went on the offensive and silences them with his understanding of Psalm 110(22:41–46).

Matthew 23:1–39 Jesus has compassion for lost sinners but condemnation for the willfully rebellious. After exhorting His disciples and the crowds to submit to God's Word, Jesus condemned the religious teachers for their hypocrisy with seven woes. Notice the woes focus on Jerusalem, particularly its religious leaders' persecution of the righteous and blindness to God and His ways.

HOW DO WE KNOW THE NATIONS AND UUPGS THAT HAVE YET TO HEAR THE GOSPEL?

Jesus doesn't tell us, but we can be sure that since Christ has not yet returned, there are peoples who still need to hear the gospel, repent, and believe!

Matthew 24:1–51 When the disciples ask specifically about when the end will come, Jesus gives a long speech. While some signs of the end are clear, the precise timing is unknown. We do know, however, that this "gospel of the kingdom will be

proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." We're living in the last days already. Rather than curiously trying to read the headlines and identify specific signs, Christians are to be alert and prepared, proclaiming this gospel as faithful followers of Jesus.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Matthew 22:37-70

37 And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: 39 You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.'

Reflect and Change

1. Jesus spoke often of the coming judgment. Those who won't repent and believe the gospel will be judged. When we share the gospel, it's important to urge people to repent before the coming judgment.
2. Jesus' speech makes it sound like life will be difficult and challenging for His followers up until the end. In the meantime, we must endure, remain alert, and share the gospel. Did Jesus' disciples live this way in the book of Acts? Absolutely. In many places in the world today, followers of Jesus face great tribulations that require supernatural endurance. We should pray for them, and emulate their faith.
3. Rejoice, for the Son of Man's second coming is sure and certain. In the meantime, the gospel must be told to all peoples.

Go and Do

- Have you recently met people from different nations who live near you? Develop a practical plan to get to know them; pray for opportunities to share the gospel with them.

Discipleship Activities

- Fast one day this month, and ask others to join you. If this discipline is new to you, read a few of these articles: [Godly Purposes for Fasting](#), Practical Guidelines for [Fasting for Beginners](#). [[Spiritual Disciplines](#)]

Section

Matthew 25-28

Pray

Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Jesus to die on the cross as the true Passover Lamb; His shed blood brings forgiveness of sins once for all. Jesus, thank You for conquering sin and death. Help us worship You and obey You by making disciples of all nations. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read Matthew 25-28

Matthew 25:1–26:16 Again, Jesus' life and teaching proves to be divisive. When Jesus comes again, the salvation of the righteous and destruction the unrighteous will be complete. Because of this, as Christ's servants, we should be alert and faithful until He comes, paying special attention to the least of His brothers. Notice the binary nature of Jesus' teaching. There are only two kinds of people: those in the kingdom and those outside. There are evil murderers, like those who plot against Jesus and betray Him—and there are righteous worshipers, like the woman with perfume; there are sheep, and there are goats.

Matthew 26:17–29 Jesus is the true Passover Lamb. In the Old Testament's Passover, God set apart the Israelites as His atoned for, purified, and sanctified people (Ex. 19:6). Passover took place in Egypt right before God led Israel out of slavery and into the Promised Land. The Passover is not only a powerful act of God to be remembered, but it also points forward to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Blood was sprinkled on the doorposts of the Israelites as protection against the death of the firstborn in Egypt. Jesus' sacrificial

death, the shedding of His blood, sets people free from sin and death. Jesus now has a new people of God who worship Him through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. All of this means Jesus' shed blood brings forgiveness of sins once for all. God's people ought to recognize Him as the true Passover Lamb, regularly remembering His sacrifice in the Lord's Supper.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

Click below to read through what we believe about the Lord's Supper, sometimes called communion, and what we believe about baptism.

[Our beliefs in the BFM](#)

Matthew 26:30–27:61 Though crucifixions were commonplace in Jesus' day, it's undeniable that He died a unique death. Notice all the careful details about His trial, death, burial, and resurrection.

On the way to the cross, where He will drink the cup of God's wrath against sin, Jesus is deserted by everyone. But He doesn't abandon His own. He prays for them, even on the cross, and willingly offers Himself to be forsaken by God in their place.

At Jesus' death, darkness of judgment came in the middle of the day, just as the Son cried out to the Father in agony: "My God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus' voluntary death in the place of sinners paid the punishment for sin—and as a result, God opened a way into relationship with Him, signified by the temple curtain torn in two.

Jesus' true identity was misunderstood, which makes it all the more fascinating that in His death, even the callous Roman soldiers who murdered Jesus were filled with awe. One said, "Truly, this man was the Son of God!" Nearly all of Jerusalem had failed to recognize Jesus—and now, a group of Gentile Roman soldiers are the one who make the true confession!

Matthew 27:62–28:20 The good news is that King Jesus has risen victoriously from the dead! He has all authority in heaven and earth. With His power and presence, He now sends us out to make disciples of all nations; as we go, we are to baptize new believers in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything Jesus commanded.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Matthew 28:18-20

18 And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

Reflect and Change

1. Jesus expects believers to proclaim the gospel of His kingdom (25:14–30). In this life, we'll likely face risk as we pursue God's kingdom. Each person should work diligently in the areas God has placed them for a season. With this in mind, how can you more actively pursue kingdom work and integrate it into your daily life?
2. Are you currently both being discipled and making disciples? Are you seeking to follow Jesus by learning from someone and seeking to do specific spiritual good to others? Is there something you can do to embrace an intentional discipleship lifestyle? Take time to pray and think of two or three others whom you might ask to join you as you seek to be more active in both being a disciple and making disciples of others.

MOMS MAKING DISCIPLES

[Learn from Gloria Furman to look at motherhood through the lens of eternity \(1:25\)](#)



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Go and Do

- For Jesus, words must be accompanied by actions, so much so that any compassion believers show to each other, they also show directly to Him (25:31–46). Talk with your group leader or accountability partner about ways to do tangible gospel work as well as speak specific gospel words. Spend some time in prayer about this.

Discipleship Activities

- Write out a prayer of thanksgiving to share with your group. Include thanksgiving for the hope we have in Christ. Remember the below benefits of preparing prayers ahead of time. [[Spiritual Disciplines, Teaching Simply](#)]

i Prepared Prayers

GENERALLY SPEAKING, TAKING TIME TO WRITE DOWN, OUTLINE, OR OTHERWISE PREPARE FOR PUBLIC PRAYERS IS A GOOD IDEA FOR THESE REASONS:

- Spontaneity does not guarantee sincerity just as preparation does not mean hypocrisy or a lack of genuine desire or godly motivation.
- Free (or spontaneous) prayers aren't necessarily better. Instead, they often end up being a kind of "form prayer" that sounds the same every time. Perhaps time to prepare would prevent the repetition of such spontaneous form prayers.
- When we take time to prepare in advance, we can give careful, concentrated, prayerful, reverent, worshipful, and hopeful attention to who God is in His character and His goodness to us. We can consider our sins and also our real needs, not just those that are immediately urgent. We can jot down items for thanksgiving, and we can consider gospel work in other places. We can include Scripture as we find the disciples doing when they pray in Acts.
- We always want our prayers to remain tethered to God's Word, especially when leading others in public prayer.
- When we prepare our prayers, we should prepare them prayerfully, so that we aim to communicate with God for others. That communication should be meaningful, heartfelt, sincere, clear, and full of faith.
- Preparing our prayers beforehand shouldn't mean then reading those prayers to others. Reading isn't the same as praying.
- When we lead in prayer, we're speaking to God on behalf of others, so it seems wise to give extra attention to those prayers.
- When we lead others in prayer, we want them all to say "Amen" at the end of our prayers. This is their way to say, "May God make it happen!" We honor others by preparing thoughtful prayers.
- Leading in prayer functions as an informal lesson that teaches others

how to pray. People listen and they learn how to pray from our example.

- Corporate singing is also a kind of prayer, as many hymns and songs are addressed to God. These songs are all prepared songs and hymns—and yet we sing them with joy, reverence, enthusiasm, and even sincerity. If singing prayers (songs) in corporate worship can be sincere and meaningful, it's hard to see why prepared prayers cannot also be sincere.
- Preparing and even writing down our prayers ahead of time doesn't have to be insincere. On the contrary, it may make them more edifying to us and others and thus more honoring to God.

Hebrews

Introduction to Hebrews

Hebrews was written around 67 A.D. to Jewish Christians who were under pressure to abandon, or at least compromise, their faith. The author was writing to a group of Christians under severe persecution. Because some were considering a return to Judaism, the book's primary theme is the superiority of Jesus. The author encouraged those who were struggling not to abandon Jesus, their only hope of salvation.

In chapters 1-10, the author repeatedly demonstrates Jesus' preeminence over angels, Moses and the Old Testament priesthood. Jesus is the final prophet sent from God. He identifies Christ as high priest of the new covenant and makes his case for the superiority of the new covenant over the old. Based on this knowledge, the author exhorts his readers to persevere, knowing there's no other sacrifice for sin to which they can turn.

In chapters 11-13, the author focuses on the importance of faith in successfully following Jesus. He provides numerous examples from the Old Testament of those who lived by faith. He reminds his readers that a life of faith is a life shaped by trust in God's promises, rather our experiences or our senses. Real faith gives one a kind spiritual eyesight that focuses on the coming Christ, sees future rewards, and enables endurance in the face of temporary trials.

Matthew 28:18-20

18 And **Jesus** came and said to them, '**All authority in heaven and on earth** has been given to me.19 **Go therefore and make disciples of all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the **Father** and of the **Son** and of the **Holy Spirit**,20 teaching them to **observe all that I have commanded you**. And behold, I am with you always, to the **end of the age**.'

Section

Hebrews 1-2

Pray

Father, thank You that Jesus is both fully God and fully man and that He is able to help us in times of need. We praise You for our great Savior who is greater than any man and even greater than the angels. Help me see that Jesus can help me through every situation, and give me grace to turn toward Him in times of trial. Open the eyes of the lost to see Jesus as your Son whose salvation they desperately need! In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read Hebrews 1-2

Hebrews 1 The book of Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who were under pressure to abandon, or at least compromise, their faith. Some may have already turned back to Judaism. The author's purpose is to encourage them to persevere in the face of persecution. But if these early believers are going to do that, they must see Jesus in all His glory.

So the author begins by reminding them Jesus is not just the latest revelation of God, as if they've traded up to a newer model phone with better features. He is the unique revelation of God to which all previous revelation pointed. As the divine Son of God, Jesus reveals God in all His glory. As God, He not only created and sustains everything, but He accomplished God's plan of salvation. Therefore, He's superior to the angels, who had delivered God's message of redemption in the Old Testament at Mount Sinai.

In the face of trials and persecutions, we often want answers to our “why” questions—and sometimes, we get such answers. But God knows that what we really need isn’t a “why” but a “Who.” If we keep in sight the majesty and superiority of Jesus, we are strengthened to place our faith in God.

Hebrews 2 If Jesus is the “radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being,” then we need to hold on to the message we’ve received from Him. This is the first of several warnings that will come throughout the letter. Notice how the author draws a comparison: if messages from God delivered by mere angels were binding, then how much more binding would messages be that were not only delivered but accomplished by God’s Son!

Once we’ve been reminded why this message is worth our attention, the author returns to his comparison of Jesus and the angels. Unlike the angels, the Son of God became a human being to bring about “the world to come,” that is, the new age of God’s kingdom. He is the pioneer of our salvation, not only leading the way but actually setting us free from the rule of sin and death in which we’re by nature enslaved. The author wants us to understand that Jesus did this by becoming like us, identifying with our humanity and then suffering for us as a sacrifice. In that way, He is both the high priest representing His people and the sacrificial lamb who dies as a substitute, satisfying God’s wrath toward sinners.

ATONEMENT OR PROPITIATION

Watch a [helpful explanation of sacrifice and atonement](#). (6-minute video)



Produced by the Bible Project. The Bible Project content is available for free at www.thebibleproject.com.

Consider this: if the Son had not become fully human, He could not have served as our high priest and substitute. And if the Son had not been fully God, He could not have endured God's wrath.

i The words of the Nicene Creed have been a standard of belief for Christians throughout the ages.

Nicene Creed 325 A.D.

WE BELIEVE in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.
Amen.

When Constantine won control of the Roman Empire in 312 A.D., he elevated Christianity to favored status. He soon discovered the fractured state of the church and what it believed. To bring unity, he convened a council in the year 325 that met in the city of Nicaea. Out of that convention came the Nicene Creed, which is still a standard of belief for many Christian churches.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Hebrews 1:1-4

1 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,⁴ having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Reflect and Change

1. Consider that if the Son had not become fully human, He could not have served as our high priest and substitute. If the Son had not been fully God, He could not have endured God's wrath.
2. If we want to know what God is like, we must look to Jesus. We will not be satisfied by creation's beauty, our spiritual experience, or any other revelation because only Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, reveals the grace of God that covers our sin. So when we share the good news, we should share Jesus—who He is and what He's done.

3. When we think of Jesus, we shouldn't think he's no different from any other human. Neither should we consider Jesus to be only God and not at all like us. Praise God that because He became man, He is sympathetic to our predicament, and because He is God, His help is effective. When you pray, relate to Jesus in this way.

Go and Do

- Take some extra time to reflect on Jesus as you go about your day. Praise Him and thank Him for who He is and what He's done. If you face temptation, or if you feel misunderstood and alone, remember Jesus felt that, too—but He never sinned. He's there for you today, if you turn to him for help.

Discipleship Activities

- Pray for God to be at work in your new acquaintances or any new relationship with an oikos or family. Invite them into your home for coffee, meal, dessert, or a holiday. Consider hosting overnight guests (visiting missionaries in town, guest speakers, etc). [[Spiritual Disciplines, Making Disciples](#)]

Oikos

(Summary of Tom Wolff's ideas on Oikos Evangelism and Outreach)

An **oikos** is a social system composed of those who relate to each other through common ties and tasks. The New Testament oikos included members of the nuclear family, but extended to dependents, slaves, and employees. Oikos members often lived together, but always sensed a close association with each other. And note this carefully, the oikos constituted the basic social unity by which the early church grew.

Sometimes people today also talk about **tribes** as any group connected to

one another through an idea or a leader—kind of a voluntary oikos, if you will.

As Michael Green reminds us, an oikos for the New Testament church consisted of “blood relations, slaves, clients, and friends. Christian missionaries made a deliberate point of gaining whatever (oikos) households they could as lighthouses, so to speak, from which the gospel could illuminate the surrounding darkness.”

OIKOS EVANGELISM, then, is one God-given and God-ordained means for naturally sharing our supernatural message. The early church spread through oikos evangelism. It's about evangelizing family members who saw the old sinner become the new saint; it's about sharing with the neighbor who questioned how such a difference had come over his old friend or reaching the guys in the local trade union or the oikos that played tennis together.

OIKOS

[Another resource here.](#)

An oikos corresponds to what contemporary anthropologists define as the three universal social systems of **common kinship** (extended family, though in urban settings the extended family might live far away); **common community** (might be neighborhoods, not in urban settings); and **common interests** (also referred to as a “clan” below, these are affinity groups with mutual interests and usually networks of relationships where trust is expressed).

These three natural social groupings include:

1. Family
2. Community
3. Clan

The (urban) clan has developed into social units which are basically extensions of the local group—voluntary associations based on common interests ranging from trade unions and medical associations to bridge clubs and parent-teacher associations. Each of these groupings is held together by a common interest, an interest arising from mutual participation in the same trades, the mutual enjoyment of a game, or mutual problems in relation to a set of children.

ADJUSTING OUR TACTICS FOR THE URBAN SETTING

If you expect neighborliness or extended family in urban settings, you'll probably be disappointed. In looking for persons or households (oikos/oikoi) or peace, in urban settings you will want to aim for clans or affinity groups or clubs or societies rather than your apartment neighbors. You will need to "insert" yourself into some clans or urban social groupings. Urban outreach is different.

MEETUP.COM

Check out Meetup.com below to find ways to find oikos groups in urban and not-so-urban areas.

[Meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com)

Consider these questions:

1. What am I doing to learn about the variety of urban social groupings in my city? (Examples: Cooking club, hiking, kite flying, poetry reciting, soccer, sewing, walking, exercise, yoga, retirees, urban tea houses, false religion groups, etc.)
2. When do these groups get together? Where? Are they mostly men, women, young, old, mixed?
3. Are they free, or is there a charge? Is there an orientation? How does one “enter” the club/group? Do I need a sponsor?
4. How can I learn more about them?
5. How can I (and my family) get involved in one or more of these clans (urban social groupings)?
6. What can I do to intentionally approach one or more of these groupings and try to get involved?
7. How can being a part of a clan help me find a person/oikos of peace?

[What is Hebrews all about?](#)

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Section

Hebrews 3:1-6:12

Pray

Father in heaven, as I read today, help me see how Jesus is the perfect Savior for me, for Israel, and for anyone who will believe. Make me firm, strong, and steadfast in Christ so I will not look back to my old life but cling to Jesus and the life only He provides. Help me persevere in loving obedience and faithful living all the days of my life. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read Hebrews 3:1-6:12

Hebrews 3 Having explained the superiority of Jesus to the angels and the salvation Jesus accomplished through His incarnation, death, and resurrection, notice now how the author directs our attention to Christ, the “apostle and high priest” of our faith.

In calling Jesus an apostle, he reminds us that God sent Jesus to accomplish a mission. That mission, like Moses' mission in the Old Testament, was to lead God's people out slavery to the kingdom of death and into the Sabbath rest of God's kingdom. Therefore, Jesus is superior to Moses, since Moses' mission was merely an anticipation of Jesus' greater mission.

However, the author doesn't intend to put down Moses. Moses was faithful in the mission he was given. The problem is that the people he led out of slavery in Egypt did not persevere in faith. Instead, the Israelites had hard, unbelieving hearts, and so failed to enter into the rest of the Promised Land. The author is drawing a lesson for his readers. We shouldn't be like the unbelieving Israelites; instead, we should

encourage each other to persevere, constantly reminding each other of the hope we've received in the gospel.

Hebrews 4:1–13 The author then explains why Jesus' mission was greater than Moses'. He points out the Promised Land of Palestine was never the final destination anyway. Joshua eventually led faithful believing Israelites into the Promised Land, but the promise of rest remained unfulfilled. "There remains then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God" (4:9), and it's that rest into which Jesus brings us. Therefore, we want to persevere to enter that rest by holding onto, in faith, the promises of God's Word in the gospel. Notice that faith in God's promises looks backward and forward at the same time.

Hebrews 4:14–5:10 The author now summarizes what he's said: We have a faithful high priest. He sympathizes with us, rather than condemns us. He prays for us, and His prayers are heard because God Himself appointed Him for this task. Jesus is the source of our salvation because He suffered for us; He is greater than any earthly high priest, and we should hold firmly to our faith in Him.

WARNINGS

Warnings are a means God uses to cause His people to persevere in faith. So pay attention to any warnings in the Bible.

Hebrews 5:11–6:12 The author concludes with a strong warning against turning away from this teaching about Christ. He identifies three ways we can fail to benefit from his teaching: ignorance, immaturity, and unbelief.

Babies only know about milk. They're ignorant of the richness found in solid food. What they need is to grow up into maturity, and when they do, their diet changes. This is what the author says we need to do as Christians. We shouldn't be content with merely basic knowledge of Christ; we should desire to grow into a mature understanding of our faith. We should also beware of unbelief. While babies can

grow and the immature can mature, the author warns that a hardened heart does not change. He compares it to land that shows its true nature by the crop it produces.

One note of clarification: these warnings aren't teaching that those once genuinely saved can lose their salvation. Instead, the strong warning is a means God uses to cause His people to persevere in faith. That's the conclusion the author draws. God is aware of their faith and faithfulness, so the author is "confident of better things" for them, that they will endure "to the very end."

Daily Verse for Meditation

Hebrews 4:14-16

14 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Reflect and Change

1. Perseverance isn't about gritting it out or "letting go and letting God." On the one hand, we're called to "diligence" in good works, to vigilance against unbelief, and to carefulness in our attitude toward God's Word. On the other hand, we have in Jesus a faithful high priest who helps us every step of the way. Are there ways you are guilty of either presuming upon your salvation or thinking it's all up to you? Take some time to talk with your heavenly Father about this.

Go and Do

- Try to think of specific ways you can encourage fellow believers against the

deceitfulness of sin. Invite fellow believers to warn and encourage you when sin deceives you. Make sure that you have people in your life who can point out your blind spots and “culturally acceptable sins” from which you need to turn away. Lovingly be that person for other followers of Jesus.

Discipleship Activities

- If you don't have plans to do so already, plan a time for a marriage retreat in the next three months. Use a tool like this [Do-it-Yourself Marriage Retreat](#) or attend a planned retreat. You can do this on a Saturday or over a Friday/Saturday. It doesn't need to be expensive; just make a plan and do it. [[Healthy Relationships](#)]

*Section***Hebrews 6:13-8:13****Pray**

Father, thank You that You do not lie, and Your promises are certain. Thank You, Jesus, for being our high priest who understands us, is able to save us completely, and lives to intercede for us. What an amazing truth! We praise You for sending such a wonderful Savior! In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn**Read Hebrews 6:13-8:13**

Hebrews 6:13–20 We've seen Jesus' superiority to Moses, as well as the superiority of His mission to accomplish our salvation. Now the author picks up and expands on the second half of Jesus' identity as the "high priest that we confess" (3:1). But first, having warned us against turning away, he assures us of God's faithfulness. It's this assurance that leads into a discussion on the priesthood of Christ.

God's trustworthiness is grounded in His character. When He makes a promise, we can take it to the bank. When He swears an oath, we can be certain He will keep it. The author points out that God did both of these things when He revealed His plan of salvation to Abraham. And in both of these things—the promise and the oath—He cannot lie.

Notice how Abraham is the example par excellence of a man who trusted and hoped in God. Such hope isn't wishful thinking, but solid and secure, like an "anchor for the soul" (6:19). In a world where all too often we and others break our promises, the certainty of God's promises to us in Christ provides a foundation on which we can build our lives.

Hebrews 7 Having reminded us of the covenant promises to Abraham, the author returns to the superiority of Jesus' priesthood. In arguing the superiority of Jesus' priesthood of the New Covenant over the Levitical priesthood of the Old Covenant, the author points to Melchizedek. In the first half of the chapter, he explains that Melchizedek's priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood because Abraham, Levi's great-grandfather, paid a tithe to Melchizedek, who then blessed the patriarch. He writes, "And without doubt, the lesser person is blessed by the greater" (7:7).

In the second half of the chapter, beginning in verse 11, the author argues for the superiority of Jesus' priesthood in the order of Melchizedek, based on the prophecy of Psalm 110:4. Several features of Melchizedek and his order are emphasized: it's a royal priesthood (7:2), it's an eternal priesthood (7:16–17), and it's a priesthood according to divine promise, not regulation (7:20–21).

All of this is in contrast to the Levitical priesthood, which could neither save itself nor those who came to it for salvation. But Jesus, the high priest and guarantor of a new and better covenant, "is able to save completely" for three reasons: "He always lives to intercede"; His single sacrifice was sufficient; and He is suited, or "perfected," for this task through His suffering and death.

According to Hebrews 7, Jesus alone is the high priest who "meets our need," who saves "completely," and who sacrificed for our sins "once for all [time]." But so often, we live as if we need to finish the work Christ began—through our good works, through our self-sacrifice, through our faith. What would change in your life and your witness if Jesus didn't just make salvation possible, but fully accomplished it?

Hebrews 8 The role of the high priest was to offer sacrifice for sin for the sake of God's people under the old covenant. Having established Jesus as the high priest of a new and better covenant, the author turns to the new covenant prophecy in

Jeremiah 31:31–34. He points out that the old covenant, with its temple and altar, was just a shadow—or type—that pointed forward to the superior heavenly reality of the new covenant.

“God found fault” with the old covenant, he says, because it could not save. The superiority of the new covenant that Christ mediates is that it actually saves and changes its worshipers because of the decisive forgiveness His sacrifice secured. It’s not that the old covenant was defective; no, it “worked” when someone like Jesus Christ came along who perfectly obeyed it and never sinned. But it could not save sinners through its endless sacrifices, so it never “worked” for Israel.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Hebrews 7:26-28

26 For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.27 He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.28 For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

Reflect and Change

1. The reality of saving faith is evidenced by a life transformed by the gospel. But assurance that we are indeed saved isn’t finally found in us or anything we’ve done. Assurance is found in Christ’s completed work on the cross as our high priest and God’s unchangeable promise to forgive on the basis of that sacrifice. This is the “anchor within the veil” that does not give way. So, we should put all our hope in Christ and His perfect life and substitutionary death. His death removes our guilt, shame, and fear.

Go and Do

- Talk with a fellow believer about the truths in today's reading; identify ways you might point yourself and others to the finished work of Christ this week. Remind one another that your salvation depends entirely on Christ's perfect obedience and perfect sacrifice for sinners. Encourage one another to trust fully in the Son's perfect life and atoning death for sinners.

Discipleship Activities

[IN A LOCAL CHURCH, WHAT IS "TRELLIS WORK" AND WHAT IS "VINE WORK"? \(2:27\)](#)



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- Talk to your pastor or elders to discover ways your church makes disciples. What trellis and vine structures exist? (The vine is God's people being and making disciples together; the trellis is the structures, programs, and facilities to support the vine.) How can you be involved in either vine-work or trellis-work in your local church? [[Local Church](#)]

Section

Hebrews 9-10

Pray

Dear Father, You alone could have made a way for me to be forgiven. I praise You for Your amazing plan of salvation, for the sacrifice of Christ. Help me draw near to You today in full assurance of my faith, knowing Christ has made a way for me to come into Your presence. Strengthen me to hold fast to my hope, because I know You are faithful. In Jesus' name.

Read and Learn

Read Hebrews 9-10

Hebrews 9:1–10 The author continues to make his case for the superiority of Christ's ministry as high priest of the new covenant over the old. The old covenant had a specific location for worship, the tabernacle, which was set up according to regulations. These laws determined who could enter where, when, and under what circumstances. The whole point of these restrictions, the author says, was to illustrate that something better was needed. Old covenant worship was external and ceremonial and thus could not "clear the conscience of the worshiper." It could not save sinners.

Hebrews 9:11–28 In contrast to the temporary earthly tabernacle and its repeatable, imperfect sacrifices, Jesus Christ entered the heavenly presence of God, and there offered Himself as a perfect and eternal sacrifice. Unlike the "blood of goats and bulls," His blood is effective to "cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death."

NEW COVENANT VS OLD COVENANT

One way to think about the two covenants is this:

The old covenant said, “Do this and live!” The new covenant says, “Now that you live (in Christ), do this!”

The old covenant was never designed to save sinners; Jesus was the only person who was ever able to actually do what the old covenant required and so was worthy to live forever. Yet, He died in the place of sinners, to bring new life to those who turn and believe.

Because of this unique sacrifice, Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant. On the one hand, His death ratified the new covenant, just as the blood of calves ratified the old. On the other hand, His blood purified the members of the covenant, because “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (9:22).

Ultimately, God’s people are the “heavenly things” that are cleansed by His better sacrifice. So perfect was Jesus’ sacrificial death that it needed to happen only once in order to completely “take away the sins of many people” (9:28). So, this new covenant “worked” to save sinners, whereas the old covenant only pointed to the need for a Savior.

The author refers to Christ appearing three times in this chapter: in the past, to obtain our eternal redemption (9:11–12); in the present, as our mediator before God (9:24); and in the future, to consummate the salvation of all “who are waiting for Him” and persevering in faith (9:28). We don’t simply look back to what Christ did. We also depend upon Him now and look forward to His return. Faith in Christ brings both present strength and future hope based on Christ’s past work.

Hebrews 10 The long argument for the superiority of Christ's ministry now reaches its climax. All that came before in the old covenant was simply a shadow of the better things that have arrived in Christ. Rather than mere burnt offerings of animals, Jesus offered His fully obedient life. Rather than priests who stood repeatedly to offer sacrifices, Jesus offered Himself once and then sat down at the right of God, since He had "made perfect forever" His people. Rather than ineffective sacrifices, Jesus' sacrifice accomplished forgiveness and so brought sacrifices to an end. It worked to save sinners!

In light of this glorious and superior ministry, the author returns again to exhort us to persevere in our faith in Christ, knowing there is no other sacrifice for sin to which we can turn. He wants us to draw near to God, hold fast to our hope, and spur one another on in love and good deeds.

This encouragement to draw near is a call to live in the assurance that Christ's work was effective. The exhortation to hold fast is a call to keep our eyes on the promised reward, even in the face of persecution. And the invitation to spur one another on is a plea to love one another in the corporate context of a local church. Lone rangers need to return to the fellowship for faith-building encouragement and challenge. For those who don't heed this warning, there is no other hope of salvation. But the author is hopeful that "we are not of those who turn back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Hebrews 9:27-28

27 And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment,²⁸ so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

Reflect and Change

1. Faith is not a box we check to get a ticket to heaven. While we look back to what Christ accomplished, our faith depends on Christ who “appears for us in God’s presence.” We look forward to His return and our promised reward. That perspective changes the way we interact with God and each other. Our faith has a past, present, and future aspect. This is reflected in the Lord’s Supper when we remember (past) and proclaim Christ’s death (present) until He comes again (future).

Go and Do

- Ask a fellow Christian what spurs them on to greater faithfulness. Tell them what spurs you on and then go ahead and practice spurring one another on in the weeks to come. For some people, it’s spoken words of challenge or encouragement; for others, it’s a note or a Scripture passage. Prayerfully discern how you’re wired and what encourages you.

*Section***Hebrews 11-13****Pray**

Father in heaven, glory be to You, to Jesus, and to the Holy Spirit. Thank You for the many faithful men and women who have lived out the story of Your faithfulness. It is a blessing to be a part of that same story today. Help me to fix my focus on Jesus and to love my brothers, sisters, and neighbors. When I grow tired today, be my strength and help me run my race well. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read Hebrews 11-13

Hebrews 11 At the end of Hebrews 10, the author exhorts his readers to persevere in light of who Jesus is and what He's done, is doing, and will do. He has called us to faith, hope, and love. Now the author ransacks the Old Testament to offer examples of what persevering faith looks like. Again and again, we see that faith looks like a life shaped by trust in God's promises, rather than what we see with our senses. But this "hall of faith" is not just an example for us. We're reminded that we're part of a centuries-long story of faith; in fact, it's with us that our ancestors' faith has reached its final end.

ROOT OF BITTERNESS?

Don't let the root of bitterness grow. Watch a short reminder on [Avoiding the Tempting Seeds of Bitterness](#) (3 minutes).



Video posted under Standard YouTube License.

Hebrews 12 In light of these examples of faith, and knowing the goal of our faith has been revealed in Christ, the author urges us to “fix our eyes on Jesus” and persevere in hope, rather than “grow weary and lose heart.” He addresses several things that might cause us to quit the race: our ongoing struggle against sin, the Lord’s discipline through suffering and hardship, conflict within the body, and worldliness. To encourage us not to give up, he reminds us not only of the consequences of falling back, but the great spiritual reality that we’ve come to in Christ. We have been included in the heavenly assembly itself; we’ve been given an unshakable kingdom. Rather than turn away, we should be thankful and filled with awe; we should worship for such a great salvation.

Hebrews 13 Knowing our future is secure and the reward of persevering faith is great, the author calls us to live lives of love, completing his exploration of the three exhortations from Hebrews 10. We should love one another, especially those suffering for the faith.

We should love our spouses and not fall in love with money. We should love our

leaders in the church, listening to them, rather than to false teaching. And we should love God in Christ, even if it means we face the shame and scorn of this world as He did.

The final benediction in 13:20–21 summarizes the entire letter. It's a prayer that the God who resurrected Jesus from the dead and made peace with us through His blood would also give us all we need to persevere in faith. Having called us to persevere, he finishes the letter by praying God will preserve us by His grace and to His glory.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Hebrews 12:1-3

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

Reflect and Change

1. Faith, hope, and love are held out not only as the main virtues, but as living proof of persevering faith in the superior work of Christ, our high priest of the new covenant. Faith, hope, and love come from fixing our eyes on Jesus. What causes you to lose sight of Christ and fix your eyes on lesser things? Where do you feel weary and ready to give up? Do you need to refocus your eyes on Jesus today?

Go and Do

- What specific ways you can make an effort to live at peace with your brothers and sisters in Christ? What sins need to be confessed or confronted in love, so that “no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble”?

Discipleship Activities

- Continue meeting regularly with your accountability partner, assessing one another’s spiritual growth. [[Being a Disciple](#)]

James

Introduction to James

The Apostle James, half-brother of Jesus and leader of the early church in Jerusalem, authored this letter around A.D. 48, making it one of the earliest New Testament books. He wrote to encourage mostly Jewish believers scattered throughout the Roman Empire to endure persecution with joy. (James himself died a martyr's death about A.D. 62.) James also encouraged these believers to live out a practical faith, one marked by works of obedience.

Because of its content, some have characterized the book of James as an extended commentary on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Indeed, there are many similarities.

James also focused on relationships in the church. In Chapter 1, he encourages those who are suffering to ask God for wisdom and to even count it joy because their faith is being perfected. He challenged them to practice true religion, to be "doers of the word," and to care for orphans and widows in the church. In Chapter 2, James warns the church against favoritism and calls believers to both love one another and show their faith by their good works.

James writes, "Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. But someone may well say, 'You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works'" (2:17-18). This doesn't contradict the Paul's teaching that justification comes by faith alone (see especially Romans). Instead, James emphasizes that good works must follow true faith. He declares clearly that we will never be justified by our works, but we also cannot continue to willfully sin while claiming to be disciples of Christ.

In Chapter 3, James warns against bitter jealousy, selfish ambition, and using speech to tear one another down. He encourages the church to seek wisdom from above that results in peace. In Chapter 4, he urges the believers to examine their selfish desires and quarrelsome worldliness. He calls them to draw near to God in humility and refrain from speaking evil against one another. In chapter 5, James encourages the church to persevere without grumbling, to pray and confess sins, and to bring back from their wandering ways those who are pursuing sin.

Hebrews 12:1-2

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also **lay aside every weight**, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with **endurance** the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the **founder and perfecter** of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Section

James 1

Pray

Father, I know every good gift comes from you, the unchangeable One. Thank You for all Your good gifts. Thank You for using trials to make Your people mature and complete. Thank You for giving wisdom when we ask for it. Help me persevere today in whatever circumstances come my way. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read James 1

James 1:1–8 Do you rejoice when life is hard? James wrote to Christians who were dispersed throughout the Roman world because of persecution. He told them to rejoice because their trials were refining their faith, making them steadfast so they would be complete and perfect on the last day.

We need wisdom from God to endure trials—wisdom that sees God's purposes and wisdom to respond appropriately. Praise God, for He gives generously to those who ask without being double-minded. The double-minded person always has one eye on the world, and he doesn't know if he wants God's way or the world's. He wants to serve two masters, but he must make up his mind (see Matthew 6:24).

James 1:9–18 The Christian in low circumstances should boast in his eternal riches in Christ, while the wealthy Christian should boast that he is deeply sinful but has a great Savior. All earthly riches will pass away. We all die, but those who love God and remain steadfast in trials will receive eternal life.

Although trials come from God to refine our faith, temptation comes not from God but from our own desires. We want comfort, security, and ease in life—and too often we're willing to sin to get it. But sin leads to death. We should not be deceived by the world's promises. Every good thing in our lives, including the refining of our faith, comes from our heavenly Father who never changes. He planned our salvation and saved us by the gospel of his Son Jesus. As Romans 8:32 says, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?"

James 1:19–27 The natural yet sinful response to trials is anger. However, Christians should listen, be slow to speak, and slow to become angry. Anger doesn't produce righteousness in the one who becomes angry, nor does it encourage righteousness in the one who is the brunt of the anger. Instead of getting angry, Christians should reject all sinful ways and instead apply the Word of God in difficult situations. Instead of pridefully doing what we think is good for us, we should humbly accept God's way. After all, the Word implanted in our hearts is able to save our souls.

We should not deceive ourselves by thinking that hearing the Word is what transforms us. After all, knowledge alone puffs up (1 Cor. 8:1), and we should be doers of the Word also. That Word tells us we're sinners saved by faith in Jesus Christ. So, when we contemplate the law of liberty—the gospel of Christ—it enables us to persevere in doing good in the midst of trials. It enables us to bridle our tongues, care for orphans and widows, and resist the temptations of the world.

Daily Verse for Meditation

James 1:19-20

19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

Reflect and Change

1. What trials are you facing? Will you ask our generous God for wisdom, knowing He is sovereign and good? Or will you handle your trials in the ways of the world?
2. How does the gospel of Christ change the way you look at trials? Does it give you joy to know your heavenly Father is working in and through your trials for your good?
3. In the next day or so, take stock of how you handle trials. Consider an irritation or difficult situation: do you react in anger or humbly apply the Word?
4. How would you describe your religion? Does your speech confirm it? Are you caring for others, particularly those in your church who are suffering? What are you doing to keep yourself unstained from the world?

Go and Do

- Using the lessons from James, how can you help other brothers and sisters in their trials?

Discipleship Activities

- Discuss financial stewardship with your accountability partner. Do you have a budget? Do you keep to it? Are you giving generously to your local church and to others? How can you grow in stewardship of the resources the Lord has entrusted to you? Use the financial stewardship assessment below to help guide you. [[Being a Disciple](#)]

i FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP ASSESSMENT

1. Do you have a budget?
2. Do you have consumer debt? how much?
3. Do you give regularly to your church or other ministries?

James 2

Pray

Lord, forgive me when I show favoritism. Help me to see it and repent. Strengthen me today to live out my faith with my deeds—all to Your glory. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read James 2

COMMENTARY ON THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Go back and read the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7. Notice how James is often a commentary on those teachings!

James 2:1–13 Who do you gravitate toward in your church? Is it someone who can do something for you, or someone you can serve? Partiality is normal in the world, but a grievous sin in the church.

God has “chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom” (2:5; see also Matt. 5:3). Showing partiality to the rich is not loving your neighbor as yourself; it’s loving yourself as a means to get something from your neighbor. There should be no distinction in the church. God has shown mercy to us, and we should treat one another with mercy.

GOSPEL AND KINGDOM

[What is Gospel Work and What is Kingdom Work?](#) (5-min video)



Video posted under Standard YouTube License.

James 2:4–26 Faith without works is dead. True faith is shown by works. If we say we believe but do not live in accordance with those beliefs, our faith is useless, for even the demons know God is one and Jesus is His Son (Matt. 8:29 and Mk. 1:24). Abraham and Rahab are two Old Testament examples of works emanating from faith. Abraham believed God would be faithful and acted in accord with his beliefs; this is made clear in Genesis 15:6 and Genesis 22. Similarly, Rahab believed the Lord of Israel is “God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath,” so she hid the spies (Josh. 2:11).

Elsewhere, the apostle Paul wrote, “We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ” (Gal. 2:16, emphasis added). Does the Bible now contradict itself? Not at all. James was not arguing that faith plus works leads to salvation. James was explaining that saving faith, the kind that Paul wrote about, would lead to works. The works are the evidence of a faith that justifies.

Daily Verse for Meditation

James 2:18-20

18 But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! 20 Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?

Reflect and Change

1. What fruit of faith can you point to in your life? Do your beliefs about God match up with the way you live?
2. When you share the gospel with others, how do you explain saving faith? Are you offering “fire insurance” from hell, or are you offering a new way of life?
3. How does knowing faith without works is dead affect the way you disciple others?

Go and Do

- Examine your words against your actions. What are some things you need to change so that your words and actions match?

Discipleship Activities

- Continue learning [Creation to Christ](#). Begin learning the next three stories (4–6). Practice the first three stories with your accountability partner or someone else. [[Teaching Simply, Making Disciples](#)]

James 3

Pray

Heavenly Father, I know I have sinned with my tongue. Please forgive me and grant me the humility that comes from wisdom. By your strength, help me to grow in wisdom from heaven and in peacemaking. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read James 3

James 3:1–12 How do you use your tongue? James wrote that our tongues are powerful; we can use them to praise God or curse those made in His image.

Those who use their tongues to teach must take special care because they will be judged by a greater standard. James writes his letter because false teachers had entered the church and were teaching “easy-believism”—that once a person was saved, his or her works no longer matter. Careless words by a teacher in the church can lead others into unrighteous living. What’s more, false teaching can destroy a church. As Christians, we must take care to use our words to build one another up and stay away from corrupting speech (see Eph. 4:29).

RELATIONAL WISDOM

[5 ways to weave relational wisdom into your life.](#)

James 3:13–18 Good speech and good conduct come from a wise and understanding heart. Wisdom is from God and bears much fruit in the church. Bitter jealousy and selfish ambition lead to disorder and immorality in the church.

Daily Verse for Meditation

James 2:2b

2 And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.

Reflect and Change

1. Examine your heart for jealousy and selfish ambition. What motivates you in your speech and conduct? Do you humbly and wisely seek peace and show mercy toward others in the church? Or are you more concerned with your reputation and how others treat you?

Go and Do

- What kind of speech builds others up in the faith? What's the difference between that and flattery? Today or tomorrow, have a conversation with another believer with the intent of building that person up in the faith.
- Why is it so important for teachers to speak carefully and intentionally? What are some examples of careless or false speech from a teacher—maybe even from your own tongue?

James 4

Pray

Lord, I want to live for You; I want to love and desire what You love and desire. Change my heart, that I wouldn't be a friend of the world in any way. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read James 4

ENMITY WITH GOD?

Watch this 3-minute video explaining [Sin as Contempt for God](#) by Thabiti Anyabwile.



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James 4:1–12 “Friendship with the world is enmity with God” (4:4). What causes quarrels and fights in the church? Desiring the things of this world—better stuff, lofty reputations, the treatment we think we deserve.

In our jealousy and selfish ambition, we seek after the world and pray God will grant our wishes instead of satisfaction in His will. Yet “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (4:6). If we submit to God and resist the devil, the devil will flee and God will draw near. We do this through humble repentance and mourning our sin. We refrain from gossip; we refuse to tear down our brothers and sisters and leave it to God to judge. In the end, He will exalt the humble.

WHAT CAUSES FIGHTS AND QUARRELS?

[Read Getting to the heart of Conflict to think more about the heart’s role in conflict.](#)

James 4:13–17 In light of eternity, our lives are short. This passage offers a warning to businessmen, reminding them—and us—that we have no control over the future, so we should hold our plans lightly and trust the Lord to do what is best. In the meantime, we should seek to do the right thing, particularly toward others in the church (see Gal. 6:10).

Daily Verse for Meditation

[James 4:1](#)

1 What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?

Reflect and Change

1. Examine your life: Do you tend to be quarrelsome or easily offended? After reading James, what do you think is at the heart of your quarreling? Perhaps take some time to recall your work on Heart Idols in an earlier discipleship activity where you used one of these articles or worksheets—[20 Idol Crushing Questions](#), [Identifying Personal Idols](#), or [Identifying Idols](#)—to prayerfully evaluate your heart and its idols. Discuss with your accountability partner, and think about a plan for

growth. See this [example](#), or this [one](#) for help with growth plans.

2. If people with worldly desires cause quarrels and fights in the church, what kind of leaders should we look for in a local church?

Go and Do

- Are you too friendly with the world? Are you more familiar with the top 10 songs on the radio or the latest TV shows and movies than you are with the Word of God? Recognize the areas you need to submit to God and draw near to him and discuss with another believer.

Discipleship Activities

Reflect on any conflicts that you're currently trying to sweep under the rug. What were the heart issues that caused your frustration? Confess any sinful attitudes, actions, or words to God. Seek counsel on any next steps needed, and journal your answers. For a longer resource see [chapter 1 of Peacemaker](#) by Ken Sande. [[Healthy Relationships](#)]

James 5

Pray

Father, You are so patient with us. Help me be patient as I wait for Your coming. And for any who have wandered from the truth, use me to bring them back. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read James 5

James 5:1–12 After previously warning businessmen in the church, James now railed against the rich who exploited and defrauded people in the church. Storing up earthly treasure at the expense of eternal treasure will testify against the rich man in the last days. Living in luxury and self-indulgence is like fattening oneself for the day of slaughter, and the riches' corrosion will one day testify against and burn the rich man.

In light of this inevitable corrosion, Christians should be patient like farmers, waiting for precious fruit. We should have steadfast hearts, and we shouldn't grumble against one another in times of trouble. Instead, let's patiently wait for the imminent coming of the Lord. The prophets suffered and were patient, as did Job. Now, James wrote, we can see the purposes of the Lord and His compassionate mercy in their suffering.

As Jesus taught in Matthew 5:33–37, we shouldn't take oaths but should answer with a straightforward "Yes" or "No."

James 5:13–20 Pray when suffering. Sing praise when cheerful. Call the elders to pray and anoint with oil the person who is sick. (This oil is likely medicinal, like the oil used by the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:34. See also Mark 6:13.) The sick person can still be forgiven if he prays in faith.

In fact, as Christians, we should confess our sins to one another and pray for one another. God may choose to use our prayers to heal the sick or bring someone to repentance and faith. James writes, “The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working” (5:16). In the Old Testament, Elijah is an example of the power of prayer. He was just a man, but God used his prayers to change the weather (1 Kings 17–18).

If anyone in the church turns from the truth of the gospel and begins to live in sin, we should go after him and bring him back. What a privilege to be used by God to save souls and cover sins.

James’ letter is focused on relationships in the church. In James 1, he encouraged those who are suffering to ask God for wisdom and count it joy because their faith was being perfected. He then spurred them on to practice true religion, being doers of the Word and caring for orphans and widows in the church.

In James 2, he warned the church against partiality and called them to love one another. He also expected them to show their faith by their works.

In James 3, he warned against bitter jealousy and selfish ambition. He wrote at length about the power of the tongue and how Christians must avoid using speech that tears others down. He encouraged the church to seek wisdom from above that results in peace.

In James 4, he urged the church to examine their selfish desires and their quarrelsome worldliness. He exhorted them to draw near to God in humility and to

refrain from speaking evil against a brother.

In James 5, he encouraged the church to persevere without grumbling, to pray and confess sins to one another, and to bring those who are in sin back from their wandering.

Daily Verse for Meditation

James 5:16

16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.
Reflect and Change

Do you have this kind of love and concern for the church? How can you sow peace and exercise wisdom in the church? How can you help others be patient when they are struggling through various trials? What will you do when you perceive that someone is wandering away from the church in sin?

Go and Do

James gives us many things to go and do. So, listen again and decide those you need to do today.

- “You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.”
- “Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.”
- “Let your ‘yes’ be yes and your ‘no’ be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.”
- “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.”
- “Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.”
- “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let

them pray over him.”

- “Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.”

Discipleship Activities

Singles: Spend time thinking about what situations are most difficult for you. Create a plan for those times, and share it with an accountability partner. [[Healthy Relationships](#)]

i HOW CAN YOU HELP SOMEONE WHO WANDERS FROM THE TRUTH?

CHURCH DISCIPLINE AND THE LOVE OF GOD

by Jonathan Leeman

Do the words “church discipline” seem like they don’t belong together, like “painful friendship” or “conditional grace”? In fact, church discipline builds healthy churches and vibrant gospel witnesses.

What Is Church Discipline?

Broadly, church discipline is one part of the discipleship process. As in many areas of life, Christian discipleship involves both instruction and discipline, just like soccer practice or math class.

Narrowly, church discipline is correcting sin. It begins with private warnings. It ends, when necessary, with removing someone from church membership and participation in the Lord’s Table. The person will

generally be free to attend public gatherings, but he or she is no longer a member. The church will no longer publicly affirm the person's profession of faith.

A number of sins might call for loving warnings in private. But formal public discipline typically occurs only in cases of sin that meet three further criteria. A sin must be outward—it can be seen or heard (unlike, say, pride). It must be serious—serious enough to discredit the person's verbal profession to be following Jesus. And it must be unrepentant—the person has typically been confronted but refuses to let go of the sin.

Is Discipline Biblical?

Church discipline first shows up in Matthew 18, where Jesus says concerning the person in unrepentant sin, "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector" (v. 17). That is, treat him as outside the covenant community. The person has proven uncorrectable. His life does not match his Christian profession.

Another well-known passage on discipline, 1 Corinthians 5, helps us see the purpose of discipline.

First, discipline exposes. Sin, like cancer, loves to hide. Discipline exposes the cancer so that it might be cut out (see 1 Cor. 5:2).

Second, discipline warns. A church does not enact God's judgment through discipline. Rather, it stages a small play that pictures the great judgment to come (v. 5).

Third, discipline saves. Churches pursue it when they see a member

taking the path toward death, and none of their arm-waving causes him or her to stop. It's the device of last resort (v. 5).

Fourth, discipline protects. Just as cancer spreads from cell to another, so sin quickly spreads from one person to another (v. 6).

Fifth, discipline preserves the church's witness. Strange to say, it serves non-Christians because it keeps churches distinct and attractive (see v. 1). After all, churches are to be salt and light. "But if salt has lost its taste..." Jesus said, "It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet" (Matt. 5:13).

Why Is Discipline So Challenging?

The challenge of discipline is, sinners don't like to be held accountable for their sin. No matter where you are on the planet, people find an excuse not to practice discipline. In East Asia, they argue that the shame culture makes discipline impossible. In South Africa, they refer to the role of tribal identity, and maybe Ubuntu. In Brazil, they claim family structures will get in the way. In Hawaii, they talk about the laid back culture and the Aloha spirit. In American, they say you will get sued!

In short, sinners have found rationalization to not correct sin ever since the Garden of Eden. But obedience and love call us to practice church discipline.

Is Discipline Really Loving?

Church discipline at its core is about love. The Lord disciplines those he loves (Heb. 12:6). The same is true for us.

Today, many people today have a sentimentalized view of love: love as being made to feel special. Or a romanticized view of love: love as being allowed to express yourself without correction. Or a consumeristic view: love as finding the perfect fit. In the popular mind, love has little to do with truth and holiness and authority.

But that's not love in the Bible. Love in the Bible is holy. It makes demands. It yields obedience. It doesn't delight in evil but rejoices in the truth (1 Cor. 13:6). Jesus tells us that if we keep his commandments, we will abide in his love (John 15:10). And John says that if we keep God's word, God's love will be perfected in us (1 John 2:5).

How do church members help one another abide in Christ's love and show the world what God's love is like? Through helping one another obey and keep his word. Through instruction and discipline.

1 Corinthians

Introduction to 1 Corinthians

In roughly AD 56, the Apostle Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians to address immorality and divisions within the young church. Chapters 1-4 address the church's problems, as Paul calls them to unity and reminds them of who they are as followers of Jesus.

Chapters 5-10 spell out the blatant sexual immorality within the church. Instead of mourning over the sin, the church was arrogant and boastful. In no uncertain terms, Paul reminded the church that sexual immorality is sin, and believers living in open, unrepentant sin should not be allowed to remain members of the church. These words were harsh but necessary to help young believers understand the importance of living holy lives.

In Chapters 11-14, Paul cleared up confusion about worship practices and corrected difficult doctrines that caused division, including gender distinction. Paul taught the Corinthians that God does not value people differently based on their gender, economic status, or cultural background. However, he strongly warned the church against obliterating gender distinctions because they're a purposeful part of God's good creation. He also dealt with issues surrounding the Lord's Supper and the purpose of spiritual gifts.

Paul concludes his letter in 1 Corinthians 15-16 and directs their focus back to the heart of their faith—the gospel itself. Using Old Testament prophecy as the background, Paul positioned Christ's death and resurrection as the event toward which all Scripture and all history points. Christ's resurrection, Paul taught, is the

heart of the gospel and the reason for hope.

James 4:1-3

1 What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your **passions are at war** within you? 2 You **desire** and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because **you do not ask**. 3 You ask and do not receive, because **you ask wrongly**, to spend it on your passions.

Section

1 Corinthians 1-4**Pray**

Lord, when I am with lost people, help me explain the simple message of Jesus Christ and His crucifixion. Please use even my weakness, my fear and trembling. Help me humbly trust in the power of Your Holy Spirit to give others spiritual understanding, instead of being so concerned with whether or not my own words sound wise. My faith and theirs rests in Your power, not in how persuasive I am. And as I read your Word today, I ask for your wisdom so I can understand spiritual truth. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn**Read 1 Corinthians 1-4**

1 Corinthians 1 Paul rejoiced in God's faithfulness to the Corinthian church, but he also drew attention to a serious problem: disunity. Corinthian believers were splitting into factions, pledging allegiance to whichever church leader they considered most "worthy" of praise. Have you noticed the tendency among Christians to idolize certain leaders? Have you ever been guilty of "hero worship"? Paul called these believers to be unified in their thinking because they had experienced salvation and baptism through one name—Jesus Christ. Instead of focusing on Christ, however, the Corinthians were focusing on people. And they were judging those people by the world's standards.

One problem was their assumption that godly wisdom and worldly wisdom are the same. Paul addressed this error by reminding his readers that the gospel itself sounds foolish according to the world's way of thinking. Jesus' death appeared to demonstrate weakness and defeat, but in reality it displayed God's power and

victory. Similarly, God often chooses those who appear foolish, weak, and lowly to communicate His deepest wisdom. His wisdom cannot be pressed into our limited, human categories. Therefore, it's truly foolish for Christians to judge anyone, including church leaders, by human standards of success or worth.

1 Corinthians 2 Paul reminded the Corinthians how he first shared the gospel with them: simply, clearly, humbly, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. He didn't come with eloquent speech or slick arguments. As a result, those who believed put their faith in God, not him.

Paul explained how God's Word contains deeper truth beyond the simple gospel message. This truth can be discerned by the spiritually mature, as the Holy Spirit transforms their minds and gives them wisdom and insight into God's Word.

For example, the Old Testament is filled with descriptions of the coming Savior of the world, but this truth was "hidden" from view for much of history. Even the most educated Jewish scholars and religious leaders could not understand it without the work of God's Spirit to open their eyes. Compare the responses of the scribes and Pharisees (Mark 3:1–6, 3:22–30) with those of Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:22–38). What was the Holy Spirit's role in their understanding? How has the Holy Spirit given you a deeper understanding of the Bible since you first trusted in Christ?

1 Corinthians 3 Although the Corinthians had what was necessary to grow and mature in Christ, they were still spiritual babies. This was evident by the "fruit" they were producing—the jealousy, strife, and divisions among them. Paul reminds them the Christian life is not a human competition. Believers are privileged to be involved in God's work, and despite our different roles, we're all fellow workers, building on the same foundation of Christ. We cannot boast in our own success or that of others because it is God who both enables and judges our work.

1 Corinthians 4 In this light, how should we view church leaders? As servants and

stewards. They're called to serve the church humbly and teach the church clearly, using the insight God has given them into His Word. They're called to faithfulness, not spiritual super-stardom.

In fact, pride has no place in the ministry of any believer because we're only using what God has given us. Paul thanks God for the suffering and poor treatment he and other church leaders experience because any success that comes through such apparent "weakness" is clearly a result of God's power—so God receives the glory. In conclusion, Paul asked the Corinthians to imitate his life, not because he's successful, but because he's their spiritual father.

In summary, Paul called the Corinthian church to be unified, to humbly work together in the power of the Holy Spirit to glorify Jesus Christ, to share the simple gospel message, and to mature spiritually.

Daily Verse for Meditation

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

26 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are,²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.³⁰ And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,³¹ so that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'

Reflect and Change

1. When you share the gospel with others, do you put your confidence in how persuasive or intelligent you sound? Or do you avoid sharing because you don't feel smart or spiritual enough? The heart of the

gospel is simple and can be communicated by ordinary people like us.

Go and Do

- This week, write or voice-record a short, clear summary of the gospel message, and then practice it with at least two people.

Discipleship Activities

- Invite a new friend into your home for coffee, meal, dessert, or holiday. Consider hosting overnight guests (visiting missionaries, a guest speaker, etc.) [[Making Disciples, Spiritual Disciplines](#)]

Section

1 Corinthians 5-7

Pray

Father, help me run fast and far from temptation. I don't want to use my body for sin because I know my body doesn't belong to me. You bought it with the precious blood of Jesus, and now it's the temple of the Holy Spirit. So please help me be controlled by Your Holy Spirit and not my own appetites. As I make decisions, help me not just consider what's "allowed," but what's helpful, so I will glorify You in all I do. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read 1 Corinthians 5-7

1 Corinthians 5 Paul was grieved by the blatant sexual immorality within the Corinthian church. Instead of mourning this sin, the church as a whole was arrogant and boastful, perhaps even interpreting sexual sin as "freedom" in Christ. Paul doesn't mince words: Sexual immorality is sin, and believers living in such open, unrepentant sin must not be allowed to remain a church member. He gives two reasons:

1. It's for the good of those sinning. If the church ignores or accepts sin, believers living in sin have no incentive to repent. Breaking fellowship with them may eventually lead to their repentance.
2. It's for the good of the church: Unaddressed sin tends to spread within the body.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

[What is church discipline, and why is it important? \(2 min\)](#)

Paul also addressed a command he had previously given the Corinthians. When he told them not to associate with sexually immoral people, he was referring to those who claimed the name of Christ but lived sexually immoral lives. He was not telling them to avoid unbelievers living in sin (an impossible task). Christians are called to hold each other, not unbelievers, to the Bible's standards of holiness.

1 Corinthians 6 Paul moved to another matter concerning church unity. Corinthian Christians were suing fellow believers in civil court. Not only were they squabbling with each other over "trivial disputes," but they made it worse by subjecting each other to the world's warped judgment. Paul says disputing believers should either seek godly mediation within the church, or they should drop the matter completely—putting the good of the church above perfect financial fairness.

The deeper issue here involves a Christian's freedom in Christ. Paul taught that Christian freedom doesn't give believers license to do whatever they want. Instead, believers must rely on the Holy Spirit and use godly wisdom. This goes beyond asking, "Is this allowed?" to questions like, "Is this helpful?" and "Does this control me?"

Paul mentions two appetites that threaten to control believers: food and sex. He says an uncontrolled sexual appetite is particularly damaging to the believer. Why? A believer is united with Christ in spirit, and his body is the Holy Spirit's residence. By its very nature, a sexual relationship unites the two participants uniquely in body and spirit. Therefore, when a believer takes part in sexual sin, he is basically launching an attack against his own body, against Christ, and against the church. Paul reminds us our bodies belong to the Lord, and we should use them to bring Him glory.

1 Corinthians 7 All things considered, some Corinthian believers wondered if it was better to just avoid sex completely. Paul responded by affirming celibacy and instructing those who are unmarried to remain celibate. However, he said married believers should maintain a selfless sexual relationship with their spouse. Paul honestly wished all Christians were single like himself. However, he acknowledged that God has not called everyone to a single lifestyle. Paul encouraged believers to be content with their life circumstances. Specifically:

- Those already married should remain married unless the unbelieving spouse leaves. Those who are unmarried or widowed shouldn't frantically seek a spouse or assume God wants them to marry.
- A circumcised Jew shouldn't be ashamed. An uncircumcised Gentile will not be more holy by submitting to circumcision.
- A slave or an indentured servant shouldn't frantically seek freedom, assuming freedom will make him or her more useful to God. However, if the opportunity for freedom arises, the slave should take it with a thankful heart.

Finally, Paul cleared up some common misconceptions about marriage. Marriage is not life's pinnacle. It's not a necessity. It's not even a right. Single believers are able to be more single-minded than married believers, especially when it comes to their focus, affections, and time. What's more, marriage involves anxieties that singleness does not. However, Paul taught that marriage is not a sin and that it's far better to marry than to give into sexual temptation outside of marriage. If a single or widowed believer was contemplating marriage, Paul instructed them to count the cost of marriage beforehand, marry someone who is "in Christ," and be willing to give their primary allegiance to Christ, not their spouse.

In summary, Paul wanted the Corinthians to take God's commands seriously because sin is never just a "personal" matter. Individual sin affects the spiritual health of the entire church. In fact, even the "personal" decisions believers make about sex, marriage, and finances can deeply affect the body of Christ. Believers are

not called to simply avoid sin; they're called to live in a way that values God's glory and the church's good ahead of their own personal gain.

Daily Verse for Meditation

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, 20 for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

Reflect and Change

1. Which appetites threaten to control you? Sex? Food? Money? Acceptance? Success? Entertainment? How does this appetite keep you from being fully controlled by the Holy Spirit? Pray now, surrendering this area to the Lord, and ask the Holy Spirit to control you instead.

Go and Do

- Take one practical step this week to help loosen the hold of this appetite on your life.
- Read *A Christian View of Sex* for a big-picture understanding of what the Bible teaches about sex, celibacy, marriage, and singleness.

Discipleship Activities

Write out a prayer of confession and repentance, and lead your weekly group or family in praying it with you. See Prepared Prayers below [[Spiritual Disciplines, Teaching Simply](#)]

i PREPARED PRAYERS

GENERALLY SPEAKING, TAKING TIME TO WRITE DOWN, OUTLINE, OR OTHERWISE PREPARE FOR PUBLIC PRAYERS IS A GOOD IDEA FOR THESE REASONS:

- Spontaneity does not guarantee sincerity just as preparation does not mean hypocrisy or a lack of genuine desire or godly motivation.
- Free (or spontaneous) prayers aren't necessarily better. Instead, they often end up being a kind of "form prayer" that sounds the same every time. Perhaps time to prepare would prevent the repetition of such spontaneous form prayers.
- When we take time to prepare in advance, we can give careful, concentrated, prayerful, reverent, worshipful, and hopeful attention to who God is in His character and His goodness to us. We can consider our sins and also our real needs, not just those that are immediately urgent. We can jot down items for thanksgiving, and we can consider gospel work in other places. We can include Scripture as we find the disciples doing when they pray in Acts.
- We always want our prayers to remain tethered to God's Word, especially when leading others in public prayer.
- When we prepare our prayers, we should prepare them prayerfully, so that we aim to communicate with God for others. That communication should be meaningful, heartfelt, sincere, clear, and full of faith.
- Preparing our prayers beforehand shouldn't mean then reading those prayers to others. Reading isn't the same as praying.
- When we lead in prayer, we're speaking to God on behalf of others, so it seems wise to give extra attention to those prayers.
- When we lead others in prayer, we want them all to say "Amen" at the end of our prayers. This is their way to say, "May God make it happen!" We honor others by preparing thoughtful prayers.

- Leading in prayer functions as an informal lesson that teaches others how to pray. People listen and they learn how to pray from our example.
- Corporate singing is also a kind of prayer, as many hymns and songs are addressed to God. These songs are all prepared songs and hymns—and yet we sing them with joy, reverence, enthusiasm, and even sincerity. If singing prayers (songs) in corporate worship can be sincere and meaningful, it's hard to see why prepared prayers cannot also be sincere.
- Preparing and even writing down our prayers ahead of time doesn't have to be insincere. On the contrary, it may make them more edifying to us and others and thus more honoring to God.

Section

1 Corinthians 8-10**Pray**

Dear Father, thank You for knowing me and loving me. Help me to know You and love You more. As I learn more about You and your Word, please help me to resist the temptation to be puffed up with pride, or to think I know something when I really don't. I want to use what I learn to love others and build them up. Father, please keep me from living in a way that hurts the conscience of other believers or tempts them to sin. They are my brothers and sisters—and You sent Jesus to die for them. If I sin against them, I sin against You. So please, help me make whatever sacrifice is necessary to build them up instead of tripping them up. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn**Read 1 Corinthians 8-10**

1 Corinthians 8 In this chapter, Paul built on the theme of living for the glory of God and the good of others. In ancient Corinth, meat sold in the market often came from animals that had been sacrificed in pagan temples. Corinthian believers apparently disagreed about whether or not they should eat this meat. Because there is only one God and the gods being worshiped by pagans don't actually exist, Paul taught that food sacrificed to idols doesn't contain mystical properties. He affirmed that eating such food doesn't spiritually benefit the eater (as the pagans believed), nor does it contaminate them spiritually (as the Jews believed). To the Corinthian believers who understood this reality, Paul warned: Don't be prideful about your spiritual knowledge, and don't use your freedom in Christ selfishly. Lovingly choose to do what's best for each other.

GIVING UP RIGHTS

Consider people like Amy Carmichael who gave up many 'rights' because of a love and desire to reach the lost with the gospel.

[Amy Carmichael's Story](#)

Just because believers can do something doesn't mean they should. Paul explained that believers who previously worshiped idols might be unclear about the spiritual reality behind those idols. If a "weak" believer saw a more mature believer eating meat in a pagan temple, it might damage his conscience, tempting him to participate in an activity he believed was sinful.

This "weaker" believer might even be "destroyed" by the other believer's exercise of freedom if it ultimately drew him back into idol-worship. The undergirding principle here is love. Love means valuing the spiritual well-being of others more than our own "freedom." Love means willingly sacrificing our "rights" rather than compromising our witness or tempting others to sin.

1 Corinthians 9 Anticipating the Corinthians' likely response, Paul asked: What about my rights? What about my freedom? In response, he used his own life as an example. He defended his right to be supported by the church financially. He even built an airtight case with biblical, legal, and common sense arguments. The reader almost expects him to ask for a salary! Instead, Paul concluded his argument by saying he had not and will not exercise this right. Why? For the sake of the gospel. After considering what was best for the spread of the gospel at that time, he chose to support himself by doing manual labor in addition to his work as an apostle. He trusted God to reward him for his sacrifice.

Paul exercised his freedom in an unusual way: by giving it up. He made himself a servant to all people—both believers and unbelievers—even to those unbelievers whose cultural and religious backgrounds differed from his own. For example, even though he wasn't morally bound by Jewish ceremonial laws or Greek cultural norms,

at times Paul chose to live as if he was for the sake of communicating the gospel effectively.

When Paul said he had “become all things to all people,” he was not talking about being a people-pleaser who sought the approval of others. No, he sought to please God and bring Him glory. Paul was willing to sacrifice personal preferences for the sake of communicating the gospel clearly because he recognized a person’s life often speaks as loudly as their words. Such sacrifice is not easy. Appropriately, Paul likened the Christian life to a race. He said that without discipline and self-control, any believer, including himself, could fall into sin and be “disqualified” from the race. 1 Corinthians 10 In light of this, Paul pleaded with the Corinthians not to trust in their own ability to resist sin, even if it’s a sin they can’t imagine committing (like idolatry). Pride weakens believers and leaves them vulnerable to temptation.

Paul called the Corinthians to focus instead on God’s power and faithfulness to help them resist temptation. As an example, Paul referred to a believer eating meat in an idol’s temple. Idolatrous worship is essentially the worship of Satan and his demons. Then Paul asked the Corinthians to consider the Lord’s Supper. When a believer in Corinth ate the bread and drank the wine, he was spiritually “taking part” in Christ. Similarly, those who feasted in a pagan temple were “taking part” in idol worship. Even though idols are not really gods, Paul taught that a Christian shouldn’t participate in any part of pagan worship. This is outside the bounds of our freedom in Christ.

1 Corinthians 10 concludes with a reminder that believers should make every decision—large or small—based on what brings the most glory to God. Even if something is “allowed,” we should consider three things:

1. Is it helpful? Does it help the lost hear and believe? Does it help other believers walk in holiness? Does it in any way confuse the gospel message or add barriers to belief?
2. Does this build up? Does it build up God’s kingdom and not my own? Does it build up others?

Am I seeking the good of my neighbor? Do I have the best interests of others in mind? Or am I focused more on my own preferences, convenience, reputation, and rights?

Paul applied these principles to the specific issue discussed in 1 Corinthians 8. He concluded that Corinthian believers could buy meat at the market—without questioning its source. They could eat what was served to them in the homes of idol-worshippers—without a twinge of conscience. However, if someone specifically told them the meat was sacrificed to idols, they shouldn't eat it—not for their own good but for the good of the other person who might attach spiritual significance to the meat and might misinterpret the believer's reason for eating it.

So, was Paul saying a Christian's rights and freedoms should be limited by another person's conscience or spiritual weakness? Yes! In fact, Paul said Christians should purposely live in a way that doesn't unnecessarily offend the believers or unbelievers around them, even those from a different cultural background. Such lives follow the example of Jesus, valuing the spiritual well-being of others above personal preferences.

Daily Verse for Meditation

1 Corinthians 10:23-24

23 'All things are lawful,' but not all things are helpful. 'All things are lawful,' but not all things build up. 24 Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.

Reflect and Change

1. When it comes to applying God's Word to the specifics of everyday life, Christians don't always draw the same conclusions—from drinking alcohol to choosing clothing to entertainment. Factors like spiritual maturity, cultural background, socio-economic status, and even age

play into this. Has it ever come to your attention that another believer considered an aspect of your lifestyle or certain choices offensive or sinful? If so, how did you respond? Did you defend yourself? Did you prayerfully consider the other person's perspective

Go and Do

- As you continue reading today, write down at least five principles from 1 Corinthians 8–10 that should guide believers when faced with such a dilemma.

Discipleship Activities

- Re-read the article on Honor/Shame, and Fear/Power below. Think about your gospel presentation again. How could you incorporate an aspect of God's power into your gospel presentation? Share with your group and get feedback. Then watch this 2-minute [gospel presentation](#) and note how he incorporates God's power into the message. [[Making Disciples](#)]

① THREE ASPECTS OF CULTURE: HONOR/SHAME, FEAR/POWER, GUILT/INNOCENCE

Each culture has its own personality. Some people even call it a culturality! That said, cultures are usually a mixture of these three types:

1. Guilt/Innocence
2. Shame/Honor
3. Fear/Power

Each of these somewhat determines the different ways a person will initially hear the gospel.

It's important to be aware that people from **honor/shame** or **fear/power** cultures may initially hear the gospel differently than those from **guilt/innocence** ones.

Of course, the gospel is good news to all, to those overwhelmed by shame or fear as well as those who feel guilty. In Genesis 2 and 3, we read that sin affects societies in all three ways, not just one. Likewise, Christ's life, sacrificial death, and resurrection addresses all three of these aspects—not just one. Once aware of this, we begin to see how God's gospel is beautifully designed to address all the effects and problems of sin.

The gospel addresses the effects of sin in animistic or folk religious communities (usually fear/power cultures) as well as shame/honor societies. It's good to pay attention to these three dimensions of sin's effects so that when we read Scripture we don't miss how the gospel speaks to each of them. Similarly, as we share the gospel, we should be alert to proclaim the good news as it applies to every result of sin and not just one.

Warning: A gospel presentation that ONLY addresses guilt, shame, or fear is missing something. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection solves the sin problem and addresses the effects of sin for anyone who turns from sin and believes.

3 ASPECTS OF CULTURES, 3 RESULTS OF SIN

Guilt – Innocence: This is present in more individualistic societies (mostly Western) where people who break the law are guilty and seek justice or forgiveness to rectify a wrong.

Shame – Honor: This is present in more collectivistic societies (common in the East) where people are shamed for not fulfilling group expectations and then seek to restore their honor before their community. In these cultures, the loss of identity and being cast out brings shame. Conversely, inclusion restores honor.

Fear – Power: This is present in more animistic societies (typically tribal or folk religious) where people who are afraid of evil pursue power over the spirit world through magical rituals, superstition, and magic.

We can see how the gospel addresses all three of these in the book of Ephesians.

- “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins . . .” (1:7). “God made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in our transgressions . . .” (2:5) Our **guilt** is forgiven!
- “In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ . . .” (1:5). “You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household” (2:19). You have **honor** in God’s household! In Christ, your **shame** is covered.
- “That power is like the working of His mighty strength, which He exerted in Christ when He raised him from the dead and seated Him at his right hand in the heavenly realms . . .”(1:19–20) Christ has **power** over **fear** and death!

Can you think of other examples in the Word?

See also: [Wu, Jackson \(2016\)](#). Does the “Plan of Salvation” make disciples? Why honor and shame are essential for Christian ministry. Asian Missions Advance, pp. 11-17.

Section

1 Corinthians 11-14

Pray

Lord, may my love, especially for my family and church, be characterized by patience, kindness, selflessness, joy, hope, and forgiveness—not envy, arrogance, pride, or rudeness. Help me not insist on my own way, rejoice at others' failures, or quit loving when loving gets tough. May Your love continually flow through me to others. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read 1 Corinthians 11-14

In 1 Corinthians 11–14, Paul affirmed the Corinthians' efforts to obey him and then addressed three areas where they needed to grow in obedience, particularly in relation to corporate worship and body life.

1 Corinthians 11:3–16 / Issue 1: Gender distinctions

THE BIG PICTURE—GENDER AND THE BIBLE

In our culture of gender confusion, it's essential for us as believers to grasp the big picture of what God's Word says on the subject. Then we should interpret specific chapters like 1 Corinthians 11 with that big picture in mind. So, here's that big picture.

Men and women are equal; male and female believers are co-heirs with Christ. At the same time, the Bible teaches us men and women have distinct gender roles in the home and the church while not dictating all the specifics of those roles. Both

men and women are called and gifted to minister in the local church, but the office of elder (pastor) is reserved for biblically-qualified men.

These convictions are commonly called “Complementarianism.” For more on this subject, read the following two articles.

[- I am a Complementarian, but...](#)

[- Follow-up piece](#)

Big picture: According to Paul, God doesn't value people differently based on their gender, economic status, or cultural background (see [Galatians 3:25-29](#)). Male or female, slave or free, anyone who trusts in Christ has equal worth and access to God. In 1 Corinthians 11, however, Paul implied some of the Corinthians were confusing the concept of gender equality with gender sameness. He strongly warned the church against obliterating these distinctions. Why? Because they're a purposeful part of God's good creation. Paul then backed up his claim with biblical evidence and an appeal to common sense, reminding them that men naturally feel ashamed about appearing feminine and vice versa.

A belief in these distinctions should affect a believer's attitude and guide the outward expressions of their gender. In this particular context, Paul instructed believing women to wear head coverings when they pray or prophesy publicly as a symbol of their submission to God-given authority. He then reminded the Corinthians of the mutual interdependence of men and women, and the fact that both genders are indispensable to the church body. He asserted a biblical understanding of gender involves role rather than rank, leaving no room for comparison, arrogance, or jealousy.

1 Corinthians 11:17-34 / Issue 2: Celebrating the Lord's Supper

The Corinthians' celebration of the Lord's Supper resembled a wild party, complete

with drunkenness, over-eating, fighting, and utter selfishness. Paul rebuked the church and reminded them of the meaning behind the bread and wine. In partaking, each believer proclaims Christ's work on the cross until He comes again. Paul said when believers participate in the Lord's Supper flippantly, without first examining their hearts and lives, they're asking for God's judgment.

1 Corinthians 12–14 / Issue 3: Spiritual Gifts

Finally, Paul helped the Corinthians better understand spiritual gifts—the various spiritual abilities given to individual believers for the church's benefit. He taught that:

1. All genuine spiritual gifts come from one source: God.

Therefore, their use in the church should reflect this oneness:

- Unity of doctrine: The legitimate exercise of spiritual gifts will neither deny who Christ is nor contradict God's written Word. No matter how convincing a person's teaching or how successful their ministry, their message (word and deed) must line up with the Bible.
- Unity of purpose: Since God gives diverse gifts to individual believers for the good of the church, each member should use their gifts in ways that best serve the whole church.
- Unity in practice: The variety of spiritual gifts and their diverse uses should result in harmony, not disunity. Individual believers are like parts of a healthy human body. Each individual part fulfills its unique and necessary role, in harmony with the other parts, for the good of the whole.

2. The Holy Spirit, knowing the needs of the church, chooses which spiritual gift(s) to give each believer.

HOLY SPIRIT

Watch these two videos on the Holy Spirit: [Who is the Holy Spirit?](#) (1 minute)



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and [How Does the Holy Spirit Help us?](#) (2:33)



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Paul warned the Corinthians not to judge spiritual gifts by worldly standards, ranking their relative worth based on flashiness or popularity. Specifically, he warned them not to judge their own worth in God's kingdom—or the worth of others—according to worldly estimations. What about you? Do you struggle with

contentment? Do you envy the gifts of others? Paul encouraged trusting the God as the gift-giver, and to use what He has given us for His glory and the good of the church.

3. Without love, the exercise of our spiritual gifts is empty and powerless.

Paul described love not as an emotion but as something purposeful and sustained, characterized by kindness, patience, humility, and forgiveness. Grounded in this love, a believer's relationships and their acts of service wouldn't be characterized by selfishness, arrogance, or irritability; he or she wouldn't insist on their own way. When we compare both the limited nature of our human understanding and the temporary nature of our spiritual gifts to love, which lasts forever, things quickly fall into perspective. This is why Paul urged the Corinthians not to earnestly desire particular spiritual gifts, but to actively pursue love.

4. When the church gathers together for worship, they should give priority to the spiritual gifts that best build up the whole church, and they should set boundaries for the exercise of those gifts.

These boundaries should help maintain order, reflect a respect for authority, and safeguard against human error. Paul specifically addressed the gifts of prophecy—receiving and passing on a specific word of truth from God—and speaking in tongues—spiritual communication between the believer and the Holy Spirit that is unintelligible to others. He urged the Corinthians to prioritize prophecy during worship because of its potential for building up the church and for helping unbelievers come to faith.

In comparison, the gift of tongues more naturally benefits the individual, and should therefore play a limited part in public worship. Ultimately, the church must create boundaries for the exercise of all spiritual gifts. Regarding prophecy, when a believer claims to have a message from God, he or she may share it with the

congregation, so long as the church then publicly “weighs” the message against God’s written Word. Paul only tasked men with this public “questioning” of each prophetic message, in keeping with the biblical teaching about gender roles and authority in the church.

Summary

Paul wanted the Corinthians to know diversity in gender roles and spiritual gifts is purposeful. God planned it that way. He has orchestrated each individual part of the church body to function together in harmony, and believers must be willing to trust His plan and obey it.

Daily Verse for Meditation

[1 Corinthians 12:24b-27](#)

24 But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, 25 that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. 27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

Reflect and Change

1. Women commonly wore head coverings in Paul’s day, so the need for this instruction may have implied some Christian women were pushing the cultural boundaries of appropriate clothing. Perhaps they were so focused on their Christian “freedoms” that they failed to consider what their actions communicated. Have you ever been careless in your exercise of Christian freedom? What do your everyday actions communicate about your convictions, your commitment to holiness, and your respect for authority?

Go and Do

Further study:

- For a more technical look at the question of head coverings, read [Should Women Wear Head Coverings?](#)
- For more on a biblical understanding of the gift of prophecy, listen to or read [The Authority and Nature of the Gift of Prophecy.](#)

Discipleship Activities

Attend your church's prayer meeting or a meeting of another ministry of your church (International Students, local outreach, etc). Find a way to serve this week. [[Local Church, Spiritual Disciplines](#)]

s Section

1 Corinthians 15-16

Pray

Father, thank You for giving me victory over sin and death through Christ's death and resurrection. And thank You for the hope I now have, knowing You will one day raise me from the dead. But until that day, help my faith be steadfast and my hope unshakable. Help me serve You with all of my life, because I know any sacrifice I make or suffering I endure will be worth it. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read 1 Corinthians 15-16

DOES YOUR SINFUL PAST MAKE YOU FEEL UNWORTHY TO TELL OTHERS ABOUT JESUS?

[Here's good news!](#) (13 min)



By John Piper. © Desiring God Foundation. Source: desiringGod.org. Used by permission.

1 Corinthians 15:1–11 As Paul neared the end of his letter to the Corinthians, he directed their focus back to the heart of their faith—the gospel itself, as passed on

to them by the apostles.

His summary of the good news was short and simple: In the exact fulfillment of everything promised in the Old Testament, Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and was raised from the dead—a fact supported by many eyewitnesses.

1 Corinthians 15:12–34 Though the Corinthians all claimed to believe the gospel, Paul had heard some of them didn't believe people could be raised from the dead. What was Paul's response? He pushed these supposed believers to follow this stated belief all the way to its logical conclusion. If they didn't believe God raised people from the dead, then they couldn't believe that God raised Christ—and if they denied Christ's resurrection, then they denied the gospel itself. In 15:20–28, Paul explained the link between Christ's resurrection and the future resurrection of believers. Just as Adam's sin made death inevitable for mankind, Christ's death and resurrection brought eternal life for those who believe. Those "in Christ" will be raised when He returns.

Paul pointed out a few more logical implications of their false belief regarding the resurrection. If there's no resurrection, then our faith and teaching are pointless. In fact, if there's no resurrection, then we're guilty of misrepresenting God, we're still dead in our sin, and we face eternal condemnation. What's more, if the Christian's hope is limited to what we get out of this lifetime, then we're the most pathetic people in the world!

Paul said if Christians have no hope beyond this life, then they may as well live for today, getting all the pleasure they can out of life. Apparently, as a result of their false belief and the bad influence of unbelieving friends, this is exactly what some of the Corinthians were doing. Paul called these misguided believers to "wake up" and stop acting like drunken fools.

1 Corinthians 15:35–58 Paul recognized some would not respond to his correction

with repentance and faith. Instead, they would demand proof: “How exactly will God raise our bodies after they’ve decayed?” Paul’s response helps us recognize these questions as less than genuine: “Don’t be foolish,” he says. “Surely the Creator of the universe can figure it out. We can trust the details to him.”

Paul then addressed those who actually had genuine questions. He said God has provided two clues concerning our resurrection bodies:

- Our current body. This “natural” body, bound by the “natural laws” of this fallen world, points forward to what will come. Like a simple seed that grows into an amazing plant, so our present bodies will die and one day be transformed into bodies that are incomparably more amazing—eternal, glorious, and powerful.
- Christ’s resurrection body. Our natural bodies bear the mortal image of Adam, but our resurrection bodies will bear the immortal image of Christ. His glorified body after the resurrection gives us a taste of what’s to come.

In conclusion, Paul argued our glorified bodies are a necessary part of Christ’s final victory over death. Not only is the resurrection essential to the gospel; it also empowers Christians with the hope they need to persevere in times of suffering.

1 Corinthians 16:1–24 Paul’s final remarks demonstrate practical ways to “do church” beyond weekly worship services:

- Generous giving and financial integrity. Believers in another city needed financial help. Paul instructed the Corinthians to prayerfully and individually set aside money for a period of time. They should then collect the money before Paul arrived and choose two trusted members of the congregation to deliver it. Note that Paul distanced himself from the actual collection and distribution, guarding against accusations of profiting personally.
- Valuing people the way God does. Instead of focusing on talent or success (as defined by the world), Paul instructed the church to serve and practice

hospitality. He affirmed individual believers who use their spiritual gifts for the good of the body. He even told the Corinthians to “recognize” those who encourage others and “be subject to” those who devote themselves to serving the church.

- Humble leadership. Paul’s exercise of authority over the Corinthians resembled a loving father, not an arrogant despot. He’d written to them with authority and at times forcefulness, correcting sin and false belief. In this portion of the letter, he humbly communicated his need for them and a genuine desire to spend time with them. He closed with expressions of genuine fatherly affection.

Summary

Paul wanted the Corinthians to understand that for Christians, belief in the resurrection is not optional. It’s the heart of the gospel and the reason for our hope.

Daily Verse for Meditation

1 Corinthians 15:54-58

54 When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ 55 O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58 Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Reflect and Change

1. Notice how Paul’s mention of Old Testament prophecy provided a big-picture context for Christ’s death and resurrection. In terms of a timeline, Paul positioned this as the event to which all of Scripture and history had pointed. Also notice his emphasis on eyewitness accounts, and the fact that those eyewitnesses were still alive. In both cases, Paul

invited his readers to actively face their doubts: “Don’t take my word for it. Check it out for yourself.” When you tell others about Jesus, how can you follow Paul’s example? How can you give the big picture and invite others to investigate for themselves?

2. Take a few minutes to reflect again on Christ’s resurrection and the hope we have that one day we will be changed, and the mortal will be clothed with immortality. Death has been swallowed up in victory!

Go and Do

- Encourage another believer this week with truths from 1 Corinthians, especially 15:50–58 and 16:13–14: “Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.”

Section

2 Corinthians

Introduction to 2 Corinthians

Like his first letter, Paul wrote his second letter to the church at Corinth around 56 A.D. This time, he wrote to defend himself from personal attacks by some within the church and to warn against false teachers who were spreading heresy. In 2 Corinthians 1-3, Paul's heart is broken over the Corinthians' tensions, but he urged them to forgive one another and maintain unity so Satan couldn't compromise them further. Although Paul had moved on to teach in other cities, he was still heavily invested both emotionally and practically in the Corinthians' lives. He took responsibility for their continued discipleship and guidance.

In chapters 4-8, Paul reminded believers that lifestyle choices either reinforce or destroy the impact of God's words. He warned believers to guard against tethering their reputations, work, or life to unbelievers because God brings all believers out of their old identities and into a new family. God doesn't judge people based on how well they've lived; that's why grace is so amazing. That said, believers' lives validate their faith through how they live and act, according to the Spirit.

In Chapters 9-11, Paul rejected the attacks made on his and Timothy's character and re-established his authority over opposing Corinthian voices. Paul and Timothy lived their lives according to God's standards, and they refused to compare their lives with others. Instead, Paul offered the quality of his commitment and the sincerity of his life as proof of his God-given authority.

Paul concluded his letter by sharing how difficulties taught him to depend on God. He valued human weakness because God displays grace and provision through

it. About to return for his third visit, Paul worried he and the Corinthians might be humiliated by the way in which their lifestyles dishonored God's name. Paul was ready to confront people who refused to live God's way. However, Paul begged the Corinthians to seek the Holy Spirit's help and correct their behavior before he arrived so they could celebrate God's grace and mercy together.

James 5:16

16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

Section

2 Corinthians 1-3

Pray

Father, teach us to root ourselves in Your kingdom reality, not this world's. We want to grow in our confidence of the gospel's greatness, so that we're untouched by our circumstances as we walk with your Spirit doing your work. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read 2 Corinthians 1-3

2 Corinthians 1:1–11 Paul and Timothy praised God for His mercy and comfort. The more we suffer in God's kingdom, the more we learn about His comfort and strength—and the better we can encourage others. When Paul and Timothy accepted that they would likely be killed by the persecution they were experiencing, God showed them how He loves to resurrect. As a result, they had a stronger confidence in risking everything for God's kingdom.

Notice that Paul and Timothy deepened their faith in God's goodness when things were hard. By obeying and accepting that they were facing death, they rejected all self-reliance and trusted God. Because of this, they intimately experienced God's grace and found a new level of boldness to do God's work.

2 Corinthians 1:12–2:13 Paul changed his visitation plans to protect himself and spare the Corinthians pain because they were reeling from inside attacks. Paul's own character was also being questioned. Paul defended himself and challenged believers to understand the bigger kingdom picture. Paul's heart was broken

over the Corinthians' tensions, but he urged them to forgive one another and stay unified so Satan couldn't compromise them further.

Notice that Paul had moved on to teach in other cities but remained invested both emotionally and practically in the Corinthians' lives. He took responsibility for their continued discipleship.

2 Corinthians 2:14–3:18 Despite the world's mixed reception of the good news, Paul was rooted in the belief that God's kingdom was progressing and spreading. He rejected any personal benefits of doing God's work and operated with spiritual values—pleasing God, seeing the Spirit change people, mediating God's Word to people, and bringing life by sharing the Spirit.

God's new covenant is amazingly good; it gives everyone a permanent way to be at peace with God! And being in this new family should make believers bold. They have no reason to be over-protective of what God gives because the Spirit opens eyes to see God's glory and even changes their lives to look like Jesus.

Notice that before Jesus, contact with God was limited and protected, and the experience of His presence always faded (e.g., Moses' veil as described in 3:13–18). But now, because of God's gift of Holy Spirit, constant and intimate contact with God is possible, especially as His character grows in the lives of His people.

Daily Verse for Meditation

2 Corinthians 3:6

6 He has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Reflect and Change

1. Believers have no reason to hide, protect, or limit what they share or

risk for the kingdom. Because we're permanently fixed in the kingdom, no amount of serving, sharing, or risking will result in spiritual loss. In fact, the more we share, the more the Spirit adds.

2. How well do you understand the differences between the old and new covenant? Paul's joy and confidence are rooted in God's historic narrative. Avoid religious generalizations or fluffy phrases when discussing God's goodness; instead, identify new ways you can talk about the greatness of God's plan based on these chapters. (See the bolded sentence in section 2:14–3:18 for an example.)

Go and Do

Choose one of the following:

- Learn to articulate the reality of God's mercy and grace by writing or sharing a three-sentence summary from these chapters. Then, identify a time in your or another disciple's life where you experienced deeper grace or comfort after following God through difficulty. Work with a friend to develop a concise personal example you could share with a new believer while studying these chapters.
- Do a brief study of the old and new covenant differences by referring to Hebrews 8, Matthew 5, and Romans 7. Identify four or five key changes when Jesus came, and share these with someone this week. How might these changes be relevant to other religions?

Discipleship Activities

- Reflect on your current relationships. Is there any unresolved conflict? Did you seek counsel two weeks ago about any next steps? (Week 4, Day 4) Discuss particular growth areas with your accountability partner, and with your spouse if you're married. [[Healthy Relationships](#)]

*Section***2 Corinthians 4-5****Pray**

Father, because we're a part of Your family, we want to adopt Your values and perspective. Teach us to root ourselves in the invisible yet absolutely real kingdom. Grow our faith stronger and deeper when opposition comes. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn**Read 2 Corinthians 4-5**

2 Corinthians 4:1–15 Paul and Timothy's identity was in God's invisible kingdom, and they saw themselves as messengers of God's plan to bring light. Though people accused them of confusing and hiding truth, they explained the good news only makes sense when receivers' hearts and minds are opened to it. They were not going to use secret ways or deception, but rather would set forth the truth plainly, preaching Jesus Christ and not themselves.

Because they loved their new lives as believers, no obstacle or attack could deter them from the hope and work of God. They had God's strength and perspective and were excited that even their suffering served to open others' hearts to God. Notice that it was God Himself who changed Paul and Timothy's spirits to know and see God. They simply explained the change, but only God could do the spiritual opening and transplanting.

2 Corinthians 4:16–5:10 Paul and Timothy were undeterred by personal attacks, obstacles, or death threats because they had a concrete belief that God was

planning a new, fuller life for them in His coming kingdom. Physical bodies are temporary, but in the new earth, neither spirits nor bodies will break down or die. God guarantees believers new bodies and, in the meantime, He gives them His Spirit. But believers must learn to live obediently through their faith in God's unseen reality. Paul and Timothy were fully confident that God would make good on His Word, so they lived to honor the light and hope God had given them.

2 Corinthians 5:11–6:2 The Spirit and light God has given believers is a serious responsibility because every believer is now a mediator between God and the world. Their job is to reconcile the rest of their families and cities to God. Paul and Timothy had spent their lives on this work and begged the Corinthians to think with kingdom perspective when they evaluated people's "successful" ministries or thought about their life with God. It would be a shame for people to hear about God's offer of reconciliation without responding to it.

Notice that Paul knew he looked crazy from a human perspective but was completely committed to his new life and amazed by his partnership with God as a reconciler. He saw believers as the voice and mouth of the invisible God in the world, so he spent his life sharing everything he heard and knew.

Daily Verse for Meditation

2 Corinthians 4:16-17

16 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

Reflect and Change

1. What kind of baggage does the word "evangelism" have for you? How, based on this passage, could you adopt new attitudes and terminology for your role as God's voice for reconciliation in the world?

2. What needs to happen in your own heart and mind to more fully adopt kingdom values and perspectives on life and ministry? Think back on what you know about Paul and Timothy's values as believers. Then, look at Paul's differentiation between "those who brag about a successful ministry" and have "a sincere heart" (v. 12).

Go and Do

- Talk with a fellow disciple about any personal fears or insecurities that prevent you from more boldly sharing your resources and energy with your family and city. Identify a specific way you could better commit to God's work with your spending/saving habits, time, housing situation, commute, recreational activities, or conversation topics. Think creatively about how to act on that new commitment and check in with each other over the upcoming weeks.
- Reread 1 Corinthians 2 and 3—perhaps in multiple translations or in your second language—and identify new vocabulary you could integrate about how to discuss suffering in your life and how to communicate the incredible glory of the new covenant. Then begin looking for opportunities to use your new vocabulary with unbelieving friends and family.

Discipleship Activities

- Fast two days this month, abstaining from at least one or two meals twice. [\[Spiritual Disciplines\]](#)

Section

2 Corinthians 6-8

Pray

Lord, help us respect the amazing gift of the gospel by doing whatever we can to be respectable and honorable in our city. We know you have accepted us fully through Jesus, so teach us now to validate our faith in our everyday actions and lifestyles. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read 2 Corinthians 6-8

2 Corinthians 6:3–7:1 Paul and Timothy realized their lifestyle choices either reinforced or destroyed the impact of God's words, so they worked to develop godly character in all circumstances. Because believers are proved by their love, they opened their hearts to the Corinthians and asked them to reciprocate that care and trust. Paul warned believers about the foolishness of attaching their lives to unbelievers because God calls all believers out of their old identities into a new family, calling them "my people." We have an obligation to honor the family name He's shared with us by living His way.

Notice the "works" or right lifestyle discussed in 2 Corinthians 6:3–6. God doesn't judge people based on how well they have lived. That said, believers do bring validity to their professions of faith through the way they approach their work and daily lives.

2 Corinthians 7:2–16 While Paul and Timothy suffered in Macedonia, they were encouraged as they heard about the Corinthians' faithfulness, loyalty, and

obedience. The Corinthians received the previous difficult letter with appropriate sorrow and earnest commitment to change. Their response proved their faith was genuine.

In God's kingdom, confrontation is valuable when it proves our faith and results in a genuine desire to live God's way. Paul risked upsetting the believers and knew his words would hurt them (7:8-9), but he valued the outcome more than their comfort.

2 Corinthians 8:1-15 The Macedonian believers, for whom Paul left the Corinthians, were living and growing in faith. They particularly exhibited a gift of giving, which Paul commended to the Corinthian church. Paul gave specific advice about how they could better view their money and learn to surrender it to God so that all the believers were equally provided for. He then encouraged Corinthian believers to give financially both to prove their love for the church and to make sure God's resources were evenly distributed.

2 Corinthians 8:16-24 Paul and Timothy vouched for the life and character of the teachers they were sending to the Corinthians. These teachers had proven themselves and were eager to spend time with the Corinthian church. Since Paul and Timothy couldn't visit themselves, they recommended Titus and the other teachers as Paul's own colleagues. And meanwhile, Paul encouraged the Corinthians to show themselves to be above criticism in all areas of their work and life.

Daily Verse for Meditation

2 Corinthians 6:16-18

16 What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, 'I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 17 Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, 18 and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.'

Reflect and Change

Paul and Timothy didn't shy away from the dirty work of discipleship: confronting the Corinthians, pushing them to new levels of faith and obedience, and encouraging them to follow other believers' examples.

1. Are there ways you might need to be more open to instruction in your own discipleship or with your believing family? Are there people with whom you're not willing to say something difficult, even though you know they need to hear it for their own growth?
2. Paul seems concerned that believers be openhanded with their money and willing to give what they can to provide equally for everyone in their circles. Are there ways you or your fellow disciples could better share your resources to meet all needs equally?

Go and Do

- Do you receive great news about other believers' faith as encouragement or as an attack on your self-esteem, comparing your "success" to others? Think through how this passage could be used to train new believers to learn to rejoice in others' growth. Is there a way you and fellow disciples could regularly take time to notice, celebrate, and learn from each other's faith and obedience?

- Read Leviticus 26:12, Jeremiah 32:38, Ezekiel 37:27, and Revelation 21:3. Thinking about your personal history and your city's culture, what significance is there in calling a group "my people"? Think through how your friends and neighbors group themselves and what's important for them as they identify with others: family name? place of birth? school? sports team? national loyalty? Then use similar terminology to discuss your identity in God's kingdom.

Discipleship Activities

- Read [25 Ways to Be Missional in Your Neighborhood](#) and [Tips to Reach Internationals](#). Then explore one option, or spend time with your culturally different friends. [[Making Disciples, All Peoples](#)]

Section

2 Corinthians 9-11

Pray

Lord, please protect us from being impressed by people who promote their human values and standards, and teach us to root our identities only in things that matter to You. We want to develop faith and obedience in all areas of our lives so we can validate the gift of faith we received from Your Spirit. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read 2 Corinthians 9-11

2 Corinthians 9:1–15 Paul bragged on the Corinthians' past generosity and sent Titus to help them meet their giving goal with enthusiasm. If believers learned to trust that God rewards openhanded giving, then they could trust Him to provide what they need to do kingdom work. Those who learn to be generous will receive both physical and spiritual provision from God, who is aware of even the needs of animals. Paul and Timothy saw believers' financial support of others as evidence of their faith. Believers should adopt a kingdom-minded understanding of wealth; they should value meeting needs, being generous, and showing off God's goodness much more than building their own savings.

Notice Paul's concern that the Corinthians not embarrass or shame Paul and Timothy's trust in them. In much the same way, Paul and Timothy were obligated to honor God's words by keeping pristine reputations. They taught the Corinthians to honor the gospel investment they'd received.

2 Corinthians 10:1–18 Paul rejected the attacks that had been made on his and

Timothy's character and re-established his authority over the opposing Corinthian voices. Paul and Timothy lived by God's spiritual standards, not the human values of their opponents; they even refused to compare their lives with others'. Instead, Paul offered the quality of his commitment and sincerity of his life as proof of his God-given authority.

Notice how Paul derived his reputation and credibility from God's work in the people he'd previously shared with. He refused to play comparison games with hierarchies, knowledge, or experience.

2 Corinthians 11:1–33 Even though he felt ridiculous discussing his own credibility, Paul pushed the Corinthians to be more discerning about those they trusted and respected because God's enemies often pose as people of light. They fell for the apparent prestige of false teachers in their city, and Paul argued his own (simple, caring, humble) lifestyle among them was better proof of his authority than the false teachers' self-promoting ways. Because the Corinthians were impressed by the false teachers' claims, however, he proved his experiential superiority by relating the ways he had willingly and repeatedly risked his life to help reconcile people to God.

Daily Verse for Meditation

2 Corinthians 9:8

8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

Reflect and Change

Based on everything so far in 2 Corinthians, there are right and wrong ways to demonstrate validity in God's kingdom. Believers' credibility is established when their lives clearly show God's work. It has very little to do with their achievements, charisma, resumes, or background.

1. Are there times you sometimes feel insecure in your faith? Though many people start introspective searching, Paul says believers prove the validity of their faith through their obedient lifestyles. Think with a fellow disciple about action steps you can take to reinforce your faith to yourself.

Go and Do

Choose two of the following:

- Work with a fellow disciple to develop a narrative of your walk with God that focuses on the things most important to God.
- Paul explains generosity two ways: as a desire to tangibly meet others' needs, and as a love of sharing resources for equal benefit. Generosity is the spiritual fruit of God's material investments in believers' lives. In light of this, think about your city. What things are considered most valuable? Ask people around you whom they consider most generous. Then stay alert and commit to meeting the needs God brings your way.
- Even though the Corinthians had a willingness to give, they still needed help and the structures in place to do it well. Are there areas in your life where you may need guidance or systems to help you exercise your spiritual role?

*Section***2 Corinthians 12-13****Pray**

Lord, we value our relationship with You and want to honor You above everything else. So we open ourselves to receive correction and teaching from those who can help us grow in faithful obedience. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn**Read 2 Corinthians 12-13**

2 Corinthians 12:1–19 Paul was upset the Corinthians valued the more prestigious teachers who forced their allegiance and support. After all, Paul brought them the gospel without strings attached, so he wanted them to stay committed to the simple, original message. He defended his ministry, not in an effort to prove anything about himself but to help the Corinthian believers re-establish their confidence in the truth. Experiences of attack and suffering made his life a display case of God's provision and grace, and any remarkable experience of visions is balanced by the "thorn" to keep him humble.

Notice that Paul knew God allowed this specific difficulty in his life—described in 12:7 as a "thorn"—to keep him weak enough to rely fully on God. Paul accepted this difficulty to grow his humility. He valued his human weakness because God displays grace and provision through it.

Though Paul and Timothy lived and worked self-sufficiently among the Corinthians, some claimed they were tricked into believing Paul's teachings. But Paul's life with them had been above reproach, so he argued for his parent-like commitment to

them.

2 Corinthians 12:20–13:14 About to return on his third visit, Paul worried both he and the Corinthians would be humiliated by how their lifestyles were dishonoring God's family name. Paul was ready to confront people who refused to live God's way, because living God's way proves the reality of their faith both to themselves and each other. When believers are able to receive and apply correction, they demonstrate themselves to be spiritually alive. Paul begged them to test and prove God's Spirit before he arrived so they could see if they were in the faith.

Notice that Paul and Timothy had already lost face over the Corinthians' lifestyles. Despite this, they would have been happy to see them reconciled to God and each other, even if their own reputation was never regained. Paul and Timothy had a radical love for their disciples and were deeply rooted in God's approval, not other people's.

Daily Verse for Meditation

2 Corinthians 12:10

10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Reflect and Change

1. How do you evaluate the faith or credibility of teachers? Think through what you learn from Paul's model of right judgment in this section, and perhaps assess the language you use to endorse believers or teachers.
2. Even when veteran disciple-makers follow apparently blameless methods, things can go very wrong. With a fellow disciple, discuss how you can better attach your self-worth to God's perspective, not people's. Think through ways to encourage each other when, despite all good efforts, relationships and work don't turn out as hoped.

Go and Do

- Go to a respected mentor, teacher, or fellow disciple and ask them which areas in your life could better honor God's name. Ask God to open your heart and ears, and then prayerfully make a concrete action plan to live differently.
- Remember how so much of Paul's encouragement and concern was related to the faith and lives of his disciples and churches? Think of a mentor, teacher, or leader in your life who has helped you reconcile with God and live His way. Take time this week to write or speak to that person and thank them for how they served and shaped you.

Discipleship Activities

- Continue learning [Creation to Christ](#). Begin learning the next three stories (7-9). Practice the first six stories with your accountability partner or someone else. [[Teaching Simply, Making Disciples](#)]

Section

Review

Pray

Lord, help me as I reflect on what I've learned these past six weeks. Thank you for all I've seen in your Word. Thank You for how You have helped me. Help me not forget how You've challenged me. Thank You that You are always with us. May I live for your glory. In Jesus' name, amen.

Review

1. Think back to your reading from these past six weeks. What specific things has God shown you from His Word? From your memory work? Stop now and take notes, if you haven't already, on any truths you want to remember from this time.
2. Reflect on what you learned from the "Reflect and Change" questions. Again, stop and note anything you want to remember, pray about, or continue to work on. What have you learned from other people?
3. Review the "Go and Do" and the "Discipleship Activities." How have you seen God help you? Were there any new activities you want to continue? Anything you want further help on? Any new relationships you hope to keep pursuing?

Celebrate

1. Celebrate how the Lord has helped you these past six weeks! Celebrate truths He has shown you in His Word. Celebrate any new acts of obedience He has helped you with, any areas of growth. Celebrate new relationships you've made.
2. Take notes of these things to celebrate with your Deepen Discipleship

group. Take time to celebrate together what the Lord has done.

Pray

1. Stop now and pray, thanking God for His Word, for His people, and for His Spirit who works in us.
2. Pray for any new relationships that have begun during these six weeks. Pray for God to work in their lives and for you to continue to have boldness, opportunities, and increased ability to share truth.
3. Pray for the others in your Deepen Discipleship group. Pray for those they've met and shared with. Pray for God's continued work in their lives.
4. Pray for yourself—for God's continued work in your life, for specific areas of growth, for continued faithfulness in discipleship routines.
5. Pray for your church, for those both leading and following.

Plan

1. Deepen Discipleship continues! Make plans with your leader to keep persevering.
2. Prayerfully plan how you will continue to follow up with new relationships.
3. Prayerfully plan any habits or routines you should start, stop, or continue.

Mark

Introduction to Mark

In AD 64, a fire destroyed much of Rome. It was rumored the fire had been ordered by the emperor to make room for a new palace. As a distraction, Nero blamed the Christians, who were then arrested, tortured, and condemned to death. It was not for the crime of arson; Christians were already being ridiculed and their humiliation was permitted.

In this climate, frightened Christians might decide God had abandoned them, seek to hide their identity, choose to believe He would not let them be harmed, passively await arrest and death, or continue to worship together with bold commitment to Christ. John Mark of Jerusalem responded to the needs of Christians to be strengthened in their faith. Just as Jesus accepted suffering and death and was strengthened by His Father, so too must Christians obey and persevere as a church, trusting in the sure knowledge that Christ is the living promise of God's salvation.

At the outset of Mark's account of the life and ministry of Jesus is the gospel. In Mark 1:1–45, Mark acknowledged Jesus is fully God who willingly chose to identify Himself with sinful man.

In Mark 2:1–6:6, Jesus showed He knows our needs before we know them ourselves. He was not indifferent to the material needs of His children but He also never lost sight of their deeper need for repentance and faith.

The message is clear in Mark 6:6–9:13: The call of discipleship is a call to suffer. There's a cost to following Jesus. As the world lies about what's truly important,

Christians realize they deserve nothing from a good and holy God except His wrath—yet He’s given us everything! Jesus walked the path of suffering that led Him to take up a wooden cross and die for our sins.

Jesus called for a life of faith in Mark 9:14–13:37. Faith is a gift from a good God. We need to ask Him to help us have faith and place our faith in Jesus alone, not in ourselves or in others.

In Mark 14:1–16:20, Jesus fulfilled His mission. He willingly went to the cross. He died for the forgiveness of sins and then victoriously rose from the grave. The gospel is the good news of victory that is found in Christ alone. We, as His disciples, are called to proclaim this gospel to all nations.

Understanding the Gospels

The four Gospels are the authoritative testimony of the apostles to the life of Jesus. They were written, according to John, in order that we might believe in Him and be saved (John 20:21). They were also written so we might know what Jesus was like and how He lived, because we are to be imitators of Christ (1 Cor. 11:1; Eph. 5:1). The Gospels are a kind of specialized biography written to explain the most important periods of Jesus’ life. You’ll notice very little is said of Jesus’ childhood or life prior to His public ministry that began around age 30. The Gospels are mostly a “biography” of Jesus’ final three years. They don’t answer every question we have about Jesus, but they do tell us all we need to know!

Each Gospel presents a portrait of Jesus that complements the other three. The Holy Spirit inspired Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John to include or omit features of Jesus’ life, ministry, and teaching to give us a fuller picture of the Savior. Matthew, Mark, and Luke gradually show us who Jesus is as the Son of God, the Messiah sent from God to be the Savior of the world.

John's Gospel starts differently by describing Jesus as the eternal Word and then showing us through various signs and "I AM" statements that Jesus is the innocent God-Man who dies in the place of sinners and then rises again to appear to His disciples.

All four Gospels assume and teach that Jesus has come to fulfill the Old Testament promises and that Jesus is the promised Messiah sent from God come to earth, the One who will also come again at a future date at the end of history.

In interpreting and applying the four Gospels:

Let Jesus be the Hero. Remember that the main point of the four Gospels is to create and strengthen faith in Jesus. Interpret everything in that light.

Keep it in context. Always interpret everything in context. What comes before and after a given passage is important. So is the overall flow of the book. It's also important to remember that Jesus comes to fulfill God's promises to Israel. This is the historical context in which we must read the Gospels: God sends Jesus to fulfill God's promises to Israel by rescuing ruined and rebellious people and to create something new: a worldwide, multi-ethnic people of God, His church.

Parables usually have a punch line. Parables were Jesus' most frequent form of teaching. They are stories that work a little bit like jokes or stories with a moral. Usually, a parable's punch line comes at the end. Some of Jesus' hearers get the parable; some don't. Jesus was a master teacher, and it seems He chose parables for that reason.

Parables, by and large, aren't allegories, and we should never read anything into the parables of Jesus that is not evident in the text. In many cases, Jesus Himself interprets the parables, and when He does, His interpretation is what the parable means—no more and no less. On occasion, He turns the parable into an allegory, with a point of meaning assigned to each element in the story; when He does, that's what the parable means. Usually, however, we should look for the point or points that Jesus is making in the context of the larger story of the Gospel.

We should not impose anything on the parable that's not found in the context, and we should not press the details of the story that fall outside the main point or points being made.

In the Gospels, most people around Jesus got it all wrong. There are occasional exceptions—like Mary in the story of Mary and Martha—but these exceptions are rare. Don't assume we're meant to follow the examples of those around Jesus, unless they match a clear point of teaching.

He is risen! Read everything in light of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The end of the story casts its light back on everything that comes before.

Two questions to ask: When you read the Gospels, you probably won't go wrong if you focus on asking these two questions:

1. **What does this passage teach me about Jesus?**
2. **What does this passage teach me about becoming and being a disciple of Jesus? (And what kind of people Jesus saves!)**

2 Corinthians 4:1-2, 5

1 Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. 2 But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. . . .5 For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake

Section
Mark 1

Pray

Lord, help me live a life marked by the gospel. May my life be a living witness, and may my voice speak much of the gospel. Help me understand more clearly the height, depth, and breadth of Your mercy and grace. Open my eyes that I might see wonderful things in Your Word today. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read Mark 1

Mark 1:1–8 Unlike the other Gospel writers, Mark didn't spend time focusing on the events leading up to the beginning of Jesus' ministry. He didn't see a need to spend time establishing the genealogy of Christ. Matthew and Luke both did this; John opened his gospel with the theological foundation of the coming and ministry of Jesus. But Mark got straight to the gospel.

This is characteristic of Mark. His gospel is action-packed and to the point. It reads like a docudrama, as clips of Jesus' life and work are brought into vision, and His teachings on discipleship jump off the page in high-definition.

In Mark 1:4, John the Baptist called people to repent. Repentance is both a turning away from sin and a seeking of God's forgiveness. John called people to repentance before he baptized them. Even John's baptism was one that symbolized repentance, an inner work of the Holy Spirit, rather than the means by which people were

saved. God was clearly working in the hearts of the people to call them to confess their sins and turn back to Him. This was a necessary work that needed to be done before they would be ready to receive the Messiah and His good news.

Mark 1:9–11 Jesus, though He was without the need of repentance, was baptized by John. Even though He was free from sin, He went through the baptismal waters identifying Himself with the sins of the world. Furthermore, His baptism is an example to us of humble obedience. Jesus humbled Himself by being baptized by John.

His baptism also clearly points to the humanity and divinity of Christ. He was baptized by His earthly cousin, John. At the same time, Jesus' place in the Trinity was clear as the Spirit descended on Him and the voice of His Father declared, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Jesus didn't equate equality with God as something to be taken advantage of but instead cast it aside in order to identify with sinful man and rescue His beloved. The rescue mission has begun!

Mark 1:12–15 Notice how quickly Mark moved. Almost in passing, he mentions that Jesus experienced intense spiritual warfare in the wilderness as Satan tempted him and also that John the Baptist was arrested.

Instead, he goes straight to the fact that Jesus went into Galilee proclaiming the gospel. Clearly, Mark's focus is on the gospel. There is a clear juxtaposition of the spiritual torment of Jesus at the hand of Satan and the suffering of a faithful servant, John, with the ongoing, unstoppable work of the gospel. Arrests, deaths, beatings, floggings, spiritual attacks, and suffering will not eliminate the reality that the "time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand." The gospel will not fail.

Mark 1:16–45 In this long section, Jesus calls out the first disciples. He called, and they immediately responded. In these verses, the authority of Jesus is on full display. He has authority over men as they responded to His call. He has authority over sickness as He healed many. He has authority over evil spirits as they cowered before Him and fled. He has the authority of a teacher as He taught in the synagogue with “great authority.”

Daily Verse for Meditation

Mark 1:15

15 The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.

Reflect and Change

1. What lengths would you go to, on a daily basis, to humbly identify with those you're seeking to evangelize?
2. When trials come, are you tempted to doubt the reality that the kingdom of God is at hand? Where do you go to remind yourself that God is in control and His gospel will never fail?
3. How does the knowledge that Jesus has such commanding authority help you in your daily struggles and battles?
4. What role does prayer play in your evangelism? How much of your evangelism is based on your own efforts and strategies? This week, write out a list of those you're currently witnessing to, or hoping to witness to, and pray for them each day. Ask specifically that the Holy Spirit would prepare their hearts and bring them to a place where they can humbly acknowledge they are sinners in need of a Savior.

Go and Do

- If you would like to improve at memorizing Scripture, read this free resource to get you going: [An Approach to Extended Memorization of Scripture](#).
- Prayerfully look out for opportunities this week to share the good news.

Discipleship Activities

Choose a chapter or a several-chapter passage you want to teach on. Prepare a summary of the main points of the text, like the “Read and Learn” section of Deepen Discipleship. Focus on the clear main teachings of the passage, not the parts that are difficult to understand. Share it with a friend outside of Deepen Discipleship and get their feedback. [[Teaching Simply](#)]

*Section***Mark 2:1-6:6****Pray**

Lord, help me live as one under Your authority. Would You, by your grace, conform me more to Your image and likeness? Help me know Your will more clearly and to follow You. Help me, as I open Your Word, to see the things You desire to teach me. Give me a heart to respond to Your Word, Lord. Amen.

Read and Learn**Read Mark 2:1-6:6**

Mark 2:1–17 Our section of Mark’s Gospel today contains a number of healing miracles. In 2:1–17 we see Jesus teaching and proclaiming the kingdom of God. This is His primary concern: that the Word is taught and people are brought to repentance and faith.

His miracles and healings were never ends in themselves. They were part of His ministry of proclamation and reconciliation. Jesus, in healing the paralytic, goes straight to the true need of the man before Him. The world saw a man paralyzed and unable to walk; Jesus saw a man lost in his sins, unable to save himself. So He told the man his sins were forgiven. Notice, however, that Jesus met the man’s physical and spiritual needs. He was not indifferent to the genuine desire of the man for physical healing.

Bottom line: Jesus knows our needs before we know them ourselves. He is not indifferent to the needs of His children. He went out of His way to meet the needs of those who came to Him, but He never lost sight of their true need. He never

stayed silent about the state of their souls or their need for repentance and faith. Jesus continues to call out His disciples. In calling Levi, it becomes clear He's not an ordinary religious leader. He deliberately surrounded Himself with sinners and tax collectors. The world may look at some people and think they're a lost cause, that God could never use them. But Jesus, full of mercy, takes the most broken, the weakest, and the most unsuitable and turns them into gospel-saturated ministers of His Word.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

[- An Overview of the Kingdom of God](#)

[- Longer article answering the question, 'What is the Kingdom?'](#)

Mark 2:17–4:41 Mark focuses on Jesus as He teaches about the kingdom of God. In Mark 4, Jesus begins to teach in parables. Jesus taught in parables because it was a medium His audience understood. Jesus, however, used them specifically as a means by which He judged those outside the kingdom—those with no ears to hear—and instructed those inside the kingdom—those with ears to hear.

Mark 5:1–6:6 In this next section of Mark, Jesus' compassion is on display. We see Jesus cast out a man's demon, heal a woman with a bleeding problem, and even raise Jairus' daughter back to life. In all three incidents Jesus shows great authority, as well as mercy and kindness.

Notice that in 5:34 and 5:36 Jesus highlights the role of belief and faith. It was the woman's faith that made her well, and He commanded Jairus not to fear but to believe. Knowledge without faith is meaningless. Jesus healed and met the needs of those He encountered in order for them to be able to hear and respond to the truth of who He is.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Mark 2:17

17 And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.'

Reflect and Change

1. Are there people in your community you've dismissed as lost causes? Have you been too quick to judge, thinking of yourself more highly than you ought? Seek forgiveness and ask God to help you see people as He sees them.
2. Notice how the stories Jesus told were short but packed with contextualized meaning. Consider the ways in which you communicate the gospel with those you work with. In what ways do the parables of Jesus provide a model for us in our own communication of God's Word?
3. As we disciple others, we must be mindful of the fact that knowledge often accompanies authority. How do we ensure that we use this authority in a way that's always merciful and kind?
4. As you seek to love and serve those in your community, do you do so with an attitude of humility, mercy, and grace? Are you patient and long-suffering? Consider the way Jesus has treated you, and seek to treat others likewise. If you see a need, be active to meet that need. Yet always be mindful to look for opportunities to turn these moments into opportunities for the gospel to be proclaimed.

Go and Do

- Ask God for wisdom to help you see the true needs of those around you. As you're able, and in a way that's helpful, seek to sacrificially meet the practical needs of someone this week. Perhaps visit a patient in the hospital, cook a

meal, or help someone with a task at work—and look for an opportunity to talk about the gospel.

Discipleship Activities

Visit the [Dare to Share](#) website. Choose one worldview to learn about. Read about the best ways to evangelize a person of that faith. Also read one of the below worldview summaries to learn more about the one you've chosen: Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Animist, Jewish, Secularist, and Catholic. Share something you learn with someone this week. [[Making Disciples, All Peoples](#)]

i MUSLIM WORLDVIEW SUMMARY

There's no way to introduce all the actual beliefs and values of the people you will meet. Instead, use these summaries as information on generalized types. With these rough contexts for your new friends, you'll at least have some baseline knowledge you can use to truly learn about what's important to them. Like you, your new friends don't want to be put in a box, and they have important personal stories. Use these brief introductions to start thinking about how to relate Jesus to the people—not the religion—you meet.

MEET MUSLIMS

- 1.6 billion people with different interpretations of Islam
- Worship a single god, Allah
- Generally follow teachings of "final" prophet, Muhammad (also the religion's founder)
- Emphasize submission to holy book, the Koran
- Committed to community prayer and fasting, divine rules over everyday

life, strong families, pilgrimage, and ritual sacrifices

- Two main types of Islam (**Shia** and **Sunni**) with deep divisions between these types
- Islam often defines an adherent's culture, national/ethnic identity, and government
- **Folk Muslims** can turn to spirit world for divination, healing, and cultural ceremonies
- CORE VALUES: family, hospitality, friendship, loyalty, quality time, and generosity

MUSLIMS SHARE WITH CHRISTIANS:

- Belief in angels, heaven/hell, final judgment, eternal life after death
- Prophets like Adam, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist, Jesus

ACCORDING TO MUSLIMS

Serious Muslims may consider Christians pagan worshippers of three gods, with obscene theology about God and Mary sexually producing a "son." Christians, they say, rightly respect many prophets, including Jesus, but are profane to worship a human man as a god. Jesus either did not really die or did not resurrect. For serious Muslims, many Christians have a cheap view of God's greatness, believing they will attain heaven despite shameful lifestyles. Many Muslims think Christians have low respect for women because Christian women do not dress modestly (an Islamic value); they also think Christians should be more vigilant about their families and social values. Some think Christians are deceptive and will try anything to earn converts.

CONNECT WITH MUSLIMS

Focus on understanding first! Show genuine interest with no accusations or assumptions. Exchange stories or teachings about shared prophets, but don't debate theology. Refer to Jesus' words and God's stories often in conversation with comments like, "Jesus taught about that, too!" or "Praise God for (anything good that happened). Jesus shows me He cares about (healing, providing, bringing peace, etc)." This communicates true respect for God, which is very important to Muslims.

Expect to spend lots of relational time with new friends, to be served food every time you meet, and to include whole families. The more quality time you spend listening and learning, the more open your friends will likely become to hearing about Jesus. Jesus has shown the true way to God, and you can point Muslims to His power and His teachings by sharing verses and stories from the Word while maintaining respect for what they share. God proves and defends His own Word; your job is simply to share what He says and maintain right relationships. Ask to pray for people in Jesus' name when needs arise.

Always work first to understand the values, hopes, and fears of the person in front of you. That often creates a peaceful space for spiritual conversations. Try questions like:

1. I respect your serious faith! Tell me more about what you/your family believes is important for a good life.
2. What makes a "true" or "good" Muslim? How do you know if/when you are one?
3. What is your main concern in life right now?
4. What do you think about Jesus? Could I share why I choose to follow Him?

For more questions and resources about sharing with Muslims, check out [Dare2Share](#).

DEFINITIONS:

Shia are often in a country's minority. Only Iran, Iraq, Syria, and parts of Lebanon, Azerbaijan, and Bahrain have dominant Shia populations.

Sunnis make up most of the Muslim world: Southeast Asia, African-Arab, Arab gulf, South and Central Asia, most of the Middle East.

Folk Muslim: Culturally Muslim; don't strictly follow Islam

i BUDDHIST WORLDVIEW SUMMARY

- Leader and founder is Buddha ("Awakened/Enlightened one") from Nepal ~ 600 BC
- 500 million followers, growing quickly in the West
- Set of philosophies and practices, no god figures
- Two main types: **Theravada** and **Mahayana** (see below)
- Established as a self-denying path to control desires
- Focused on managing Karma (rules of managing actions and their impact, cause/effect)
- Four key truths about the nature, causes, and overcoming of suffering
- Committed to meditation and achieving enlightened perspectives on reality
- Nothing is fixed or permanent
- Deep environmental and humanitarian concern

CORE VALUES: peace, mindfulness, tolerance, self-awareness, non-violence, agency

More of a philosophical system than a religion, Buddhism developed as a response to suffering and a need for peace. It outlines a purpose to life, explains apparent injustice and inequality around the world, and teaches a peaceful way that pursues real happiness.

ACCORDING TO BUDDHISTS

Many Buddhists consider Christians dogmatic, rigid, or oppressive. Christian “myths” prevent them from seeing the world clearly and distract them from practical, real questions. As serious Buddhists are non-argumentative and looking for commonality and peace, they can be suspicious of Christians who seem to have conversion as a goal. Most Buddhists reject the idea of supreme beings or a Creator God and see the concept of sin as unhelpful. Jesus was a good teacher with some enlightened ideas, but people should not worship him or any other teachers as divinity. Some Buddhists will see clear commonalities of value with Christians, such as charity, generosity, self-control, love, and peace.

CONNECTING WITH BUDDHISTS

Remember that your religious language will be foreign to new Buddhist friends. Reviewing the values and language on this page, find new ways to articulate truths about Jesus (i.e. “freedom from evil/suffering,” “achieving eternal peace” and “breaking the cycle of bad karma”). Confrontation and apologetics will be highly unwelcome, so instead look for opportunities to share simple teachings of Jesus that are appropriate to the circumstances. Jesus’ words carry ultimate, divine authority and can completely transform your new friends’ perception of reality. But first, seek to understand your new friend’s personal Buddhism. Ask:

1. How do you think people can individually achieve true peace? How would you define peace?
2. What has most influenced your ideas about life and the world?
3. Who would you consider the most enlightened/awakened person you know? May I share mine?
4. May I share about someone who opened my spiritual eyes in a transformative way?

Theravada: Dominant in Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia

Mahayana: Found more in East Asia, e.g. Taiwan, Vietnam, Korea, and Japan. It includes Zen Buddhism, which popular in the West.

i HINDU WORLDVIEW SUMMARY

Nearly 1 billion Hindus strive for perfectly good lives to achieve a spiritual existence. Following a personal guru (leader/teacher) helps one be freed from darkness and the evils of life. Many Hindus are looking for true peace, so all life decisions (food, friends, clothes, body) are weighed for their spiritual impact. Key ways to pursue higher spiritual life include personal purity, mystic disembodiment, and specific devotion to a chosen god or goddess.

“Brahman” is the supreme being expressed in many gods and goddesses, each of which have unique virtues and vices. Jesus and Mary are acceptable to some modern Hindus as part of the pan-Indian pantheon. There are three major Hindu paths (Shaivism, Vaishnavism, and Shaktism) based on three different primary gods.

Many Hindus value race-based or caste-based hierarchies, believing that certain types of people are naturally more holy. Some are also highly

superstitious or skilled at interacting with the spirit world; many also put heavy stock in dreams and divination. For many Hindus, spirituality is connected to social and class standing. Personal agency and positive life direction is extremely important, as is maintaining social respect. Most Hindus are born into their religious system and often both family threats and spiritual fear hold them to it.

ACCORDING TO HINDUS

Some Hindus will see Christianity as the West's colonizing missionary religion. For many, Jesus could be a good example of a guru who leads to one of many spiritual paths to transcendence. Parts of the Bible contain meaningful teachings, but other parts are too violent and manifest the evil things of the world. Christians cannot be on the path to light while soaking in darkness.

Hindus believe Christians don't take seriously enough the need for good deeds and a pure life, so their devotion to Jesus as a guru or a god is weak. Some Hindus see Christians as lower-caste people who have sold out on their long, rich heritage for money or hand-outs.

CONNECT WITH HINDUS

Respect their long tradition of spirituality, and agree if necessary about the colonizing, divisive nature of Christianity's history. Work to isolate conversations about Jesus rather than engaging in religious discussions, and focus on your shared need for peace (spiritual, personal, etc). Jesus has the power to overcome all evil in the world; He made clear the way to eternal life. So, when your Hindu friends are open, you can share how your life is being transformed by God's Spirit.

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- You're not the one who converts, but someone who has found the true light and wants to share
- Find ways to share how Jesus identifies Himself: "Did you know that Jesus calls Himself the 'light of the world'?"
- Refer often to Jesus' way: "Jesus' way has important teachings about _____, too!" or "Jesus' way gave me hope for spiritual life when I was desperate."

Remember not to make assumptions about your new friends. Try to understand their personal and spiritual stories. Ask questions like:

1. How do you know when you find a path, guru, or teaching worth following?
2. What's your deepest hope in life right now? Your biggest fear?
3. Who is the most perfect person you've personally known? What are/were they like?
4. How does one transform themselves? May I share how following Jesus has changed me?

i ANIMIST WORLDVIEW SUMMARY

Animists have an unusually wide-ranging set of beliefs and ideas (borrowing elements from Buddhism and Hinduism, as well as Western expressions of Wicca and Native American rituals). But all animists focus on the power of the spiritual world, believing that everything in nature, including many deceased relatives, contains spirits that interact with people's lives. Any number of gods may exist, and spirits are the connection to those gods. Spirits can have either helpful or harmful intentions toward people, and animists' lifestyles are centered around either appeasing or worshiping the various spirits.

Most animists would not consider their beliefs a religion but rather a way of managing reality. As such, their beliefs and practices are often incorporated by people of other religions. Most animist traditions have no holy text and rely on their own spiritual strong people, or shaman, to guide their lifestyles and spiritual interactions. Rather than an ethical code or moral law, they've developed magic tools to manipulate the surrounding spirits that direct their lives. Most animist groups have strong superstitions, traditions, and tokens that protect their values and loved ones. They value knowledge, spiritual power, careful lifestyles, and respect for nature and the environment.

ACCORDING TO ANIMISTS

Because there are so many spirits and gods, there are many ways to achieve a good life and positive afterlife. Some animists consider Christians arrogant or dangerous to claim a monopoly on truth about life and God, while others find their focus on worshipping a single God far too narrow and risky. If there is a God, He is far too distant and disengaged to have any impact on people's lives, and it would be foolish to stop any form of spirit management because that could end in personal or family disaster. Animists aren't necessarily looking for the truth or a knowledge of God; rather, they're hoping to limit the amount of bad things that happen to them and manage spiritual forces on their behalf.

CONNECTING WITH ANIMISTS

Your new friends are trying to control the impact of evil on their lives and have taken the matter into their own hands. While some may have been born into animistic families or cultures, others may have been drawn in after indulging an interest in spiritual beings. Either way, your role is to create a safe relational space in which Jesus can come as the God-man

with ultimate power and true peace. This will require open ears and careful framing of your own spiritual narrative.

Notice if your new friends have any tokens or spiritual items they keep with them, and ask about those. Animistic lifestyles are often incredibly fearful, so recognize that talking about their spiritual experiences could be very uncomfortable. Try to reciprocate disclosure, and offer to pray in Jesus' name when your friends are disturbed or spiritually uneasy. Start with questions like:

1. If you could have anything in life right now, what would it be?
2. Do you ever sense that there could be a personal but supreme God?
3. Tell me a story of the most spiritual experience you've ever had. May I share one of mine also?
4. Jesus is very important to me. What do you know of Him?
5. Did you know that Jesus had perfect power over spirits and leaves the Holy Spirit to help anyone who chooses to follow Him?

① JEWISH WORLDVIEW SUMMARY

1. One of world's oldest religions, started with the Law given to Moses
2. Single, all-powerful Creator God
3. Holy book, the Torah, is God's revealed will and commands
4. Spiritual traditions and religious family passed down through generations from Abraham
5. Commitment to feasts and sacrifices for pure life
6. Rabbis (religious leaders) interpret the Scriptures for life application
7. Three main types: Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform
8. The world is broken and people are suffering

9. A Messiah is coming to restore righteousness and full life
10. There is a clear ethical law all should follow to stay right with God
11. All Jews are connected in global community

CORE VALUES: obedience, commitment, community, ethics, spiritual responsibility, hope, faith.

ACCORDING TO JEWISH PEOPLE

Some Jewish people view Jesus as a good teacher, but only the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament) is from God and Jesus cannot be a part of God. Christians are violent to focus so heavily on the idea of hell. The Creator God couldn't and never would embody a human man. Many Jewish people would consider blasphemous or at least impossible the idea that people can be saved simply by faith, without regard to law-keeping or lifestyle. Similarly, many would consider it preposterous to place the weight of their whole existence on a single decision.

CONNECT WITH JEWISH PEOPLE

You share a respect for God's Word and God's honor. You also agree that right relationship with God is imperative. Be careful about your terminology when you mention your own faith, perhaps using the words "believer" or "follower of Jesus" rather than Christian, which carries baggage for many Jewish people. Though your new friends don't know Him yet, Jesus proves to be the perfect Messiah and has a plan to bring a completely new world with perfect righteousness and peace. Find ways to talk about life concerns and values; then bridge to how Jesus can relate to those areas. Try questions like:

1. What's most troubling to you about the world we live in?
2. Do you think it's possible that God is preparing a better, fuller life and

world than this one?

3. What's your perspective on suffering? Could/does God ever suffer?
4. Could I share why learning about Jesus changed my whole view of God?
5. Could I share how I believe Jesus has brought me into God's new family?

① SECULARIST//POSTMODERN WORLDVIEW SUMMARY

Postmodernists and secularists believe a slew of different things. But these are generally consistent among them:

- Religion is mythical imagination and unimportant in understanding and living life
- God may or may not exist
- Spiritual systems and organizations are irrelevant at best, destructive to humanity at worst
- Happiness is a goal, but people do not have a reliable way to find it
- Individual authority and experience are supreme
- Ideas of morality, truth, and ethics are largely subjective and cultural
- Institutional claims on truth or authority are highly suspect
- Life's problems are highly complex and void of clear answers
- Absolutes are oppressive and should be avoided
- CORE VALUES: Do not judge, do not tell, do not prescribe, stay free and unattached, think rationally.

ACCORDING TO SECULARISTS/POSTMODERNISTS

For most secularists/postmodernists, Christians are oppressively moralistic and hopelessly brainwashed by myths. Some may also see Christians as

patriarchal and discriminatory. Because so many religious institutions have gone terribly bad, it's best to give up on the system and trust one's individual instincts or logic. Christians are woefully irrational and have allowed various leaders to twist their minds. People are essentially good on their own. Christians are creating unnecessary problems with their stories of sin, heaven, and hell.

CONNECTING WITH SECULARISTS/POSTMODERNISTS

Your new friends are likely proud they've had the self-respect to disassociate from any religious system, so be sure to associate with Jesus rather than a religious form. However, stories about your spiritual life will likely be welcomed once you've listened to their concerns, beliefs, and worries. Remember that you don't need to prove God's existence, but simply live and act like He's present in your life. Rather than arguments, your new friends are looking for evidence of the good in reality. You can develop a close friendship in which your changed life is easily a topic of discussion. Refuse to enter debates or get lost in attempting to answer challenges; you're not trying to argue—just share love and light. Lead into conversations with:

1. How do you—or can we at all—make sense of all the brokenness and hurt in the world?
2. Do you ever have existential crises? How do you handle that? Can I share how I handle it?
3. What gets you most excited about life? Why?
4. What frustrates you most about (authority) (religion) (society) (fill in the blank with their pet issue)?
5. Can I share how I found unexpected purpose through Jesus?

i CATHOLIC WORLDVIEW SUMMARY

- Two main traditions, **Eastern** and **Western** (see below)
- One God and Father of all creation
- All people sinful and need saving
- Believe Jesus is God, accept the Trinity, and venerate the Bible
- Leaders are from direct long heritage of apostles that trace back to Jesus
- People must be baptized into the Catholic family to ensure eternal life with God
- The Church as an institution and Mother Mary connect a person to salvation
- Rituals of baptism, confirmation (learning a set of teachings), and communion bring one closer to God
- Committed to community prayer and worship, fasting, tithing, and taking communion

CORE VALUES: family, authority, prayer, worship, morality, obedience to the Bible.

Catholics hold many teachings in common with evangelical Christians, but they base their relationship with God on their rituals and depend on leaders to relate to God for them. Church traditions support faith, and connection to organizational church lineage is essential for a connection to God. Praying to Mary and other dead saints and relatives is valuable for direction and the protection to live a good life. Though saved by Jesus' work, Catholics must be purified by works and prayers before they can see God.

ACCORDING TO CATHOLICS

According to Catholics, evangelical believers aren't part of the true faith. Some Catholics also see them as unnecessarily exclusive and divisive, failing to recognize Catholics as true and original Christians. It's impossible to be instantaneously saved, they say, because salvation is a lifelong process. Evangelical believers are missing the fullness of God's revelation by rejecting papal teachings, church doctrines, and extra writings that have been added to the Bible. Evangelicals should have more respect for the long heritage and tradition of the Catholic church.

CONNECTING WITH CATHOLICS

Recognize that your new Catholic friends already identify as Christians—and they maybe don't even consider you a real Christian—so trying to distinguish between your two types of Christianity will likely prove unhelpful. Because of the worldview and theological similarities, it could be more tempting with Catholics than any others to try apologetic methods and theological debate. But since your new friends already accept the Bible as true, Jesus can open their hearts through His Word. Find ways to pray and read together, inviting the Holy Spirit to guide your time. Again, remember that your new friends have their own brands and takes on their faith, and have personal stories you should seek to understand.

What's more, it's possible your Catholic friend is genuinely born-again, and only "Catholic" in their upbringing rather than through their own conviction. So don't assume all people who call themselves Catholic believe the same things about the Pope, Mary, church history, etc. When engaging Catholics in spiritual conversations, try questions like:

1. When have you felt closest to God? Why that particular occasion? Could I share what has brought me close to God?
2. What currently makes you most fearful in life? Most hopeful?

3. What does it take to live a truly good and meaningful life?

4. Could I share how God gave me new purpose in life?

Eastern Catholics recognize Pope in Rome as leader, includes Coptic, Armenian, and Chaldean Catholics.

Western Catholics often have denominational bishops, includes U.S. American and some European Catholics.

*Section***Mark 6:6-9:13****Pray**

Lord, help me trust in You for all things. Father, would You lift my eyes to see where my help truly comes from? May I live in such a way that I forsake the things of this world and whatever hinders my fruitfulness in Your kingdom. Help me, as I open Your Word, to see the things You desire to teach me. Give me a heart to respond to Your Word, Lord. Amen.

Read and Learn**Read Mark 6:6-9:13**

Mark 6:6–29 The opening scene of our passage depicts Jesus commissioning and sending out His disciples. He commanded them, as they went, to take with them only things that were absolutely necessary for enabling them to fulfill their call to preach the gospel.

In these first few verses, we see a clear distinction between John's simple and sacrificial lifestyle and the hedonistic and flamboyant lifestyle of Herod. John, in a worldly sense, seemed to have nothing. He was not a man who lived for riches or comfort or to sit back and enjoy his fame. The very fact that he was arrested shows he didn't live for the affections of man or what this world could offer.

However, his life came to a terrible end. Even in today's world, faithful Christian witnesses find themselves languishing in prison cells or at the end of an executioner's axe. John was one who, as Mark 9:35 says, lost his life because of the gospel, but in doing so he actually saved it.

Mark 6:30–44; 8:1–21 God always provides what we need. He's already gone ahead of us to provide for our needs before we're even aware of them. Jesus miraculously fed the 5,000 and then, not long after, fed 4,000. Despite this, we see in Mark 8:16 that the disciples still fretted over their daily bread.

SUFFERING

Remember, [Following God May End Badly!](#) (2 minutes)



Video posted under Standard YouTube License.

Mark 8:34–38 Jesus predicted He would suffer. His path of obedience was a path of suffering. As His disciples, we're also called to take up our cross and follow Him. However, as we saw earlier in His miraculous provision of bread, we can trust He'll provide for all our needs.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Mark 8:35-36

35 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. 36 For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?

Reflect and Change

1. Would you take time to prayerfully consider if there are things you're holding onto that are inhibiting the gospel's growth in your life? The things we hold onto are the things we cherish. They could be a treasured possession, high-speed internet, a hobby, or even a relationship. Be mindful that we worship and serve a good God who gives good gifts. He's not asking you to get rid of all the things in your life that bring you joy. However, He may be asking you to at least give thoughtful attention to why you refuse to let some things go. We should be careful not to worship and cling to the gift with a tenacity that should be reserved for the Giver.
2. Are there moments when you seek to insulate your life from pain and suffering? Do you move toward comfort and away from stress? Are there times when you're guilty of worshiping the God of comfort and stability?
3. Do you really trust that God is your provider? In times of trouble, do you run to Him and His Word for comfort and peace? Do you remind yourself of the many ways He has cared for you in your past? Do you keep a prayer journal of God's faithfulness in your life? (If not, you will begin one in Go and Do.) Are there people in your life with whom you can be open and accountable about the things in this world you may be holding onto for the wrong reasons?

Go and Do

- The call of discipleship is a call to suffer. There's a cost to following Jesus. The world lies to us every day about what's truly important and the things we need. The truth is we deserve nothing from a good and holy God except His wrath—and yet, He has given us everything! Jesus walked the path of suffering that led Him to take up a wooden cross and die for our sins. Evaluate your life to see if you live a life prepared to suffer for following Jesus.

- Begin a prayer journal and record God's faithfulness in your life. Live a life of daily thankfulness toward God for His rich provision, and trust Him for the days ahead.

Discipleship Activities

- Invite a believer and an unbelieving friend into your home. Remember these [25 Ideas on being missional in your neighborhood](#). [[Making Disciples](#)]

Section

Mark 9:14-13:37

Pray

Lord, would You help me cling to the hope of the gospel? Lord, thank You that You came to conquer sin and death. Help me have faith to believe the power of the gospel. Help me trust fully in the gospel and not be lured by lesser hopes. Help me, as I open up your Word, to see the things You desire to teach me. Give me a heart to respond to your Word, Lord. Amen.

Read and Learn

Read Mark 9:14-13:37

Mark 9:14–50 Jesus commented on the fact that He is ministering among a faithless people. Even His disciples lacked faith. The father of a demon-possessed boy confessed his weak faith.

All of us come to Jesus spiritually weak and in need. All of us should come to Him with the attitude of the boy's father. We should ask Jesus for a growing faith because even our faith is a gift from a faithful God. A mark of a true believer is someone who demonstrates not a perfect faith, but a growing faith.

WHAT IS FAITH?

Re-read Hebrews 11. Reflect on what happened to these men and women of faith.

The disciples were still confused about the kind of messiah Jesus would be. Because they expected Him to be a powerful and glorious messiah, they continued to measure greatness in the same way the world measures greatness. Jesus, however,

made it clear that He would be a messiah who was also a suffering servant.

Mark 10:1–52 As Jesus made His way to Jerusalem, He continued to teach His disciples. He had an encounter with a rich young man. The rich young man was depending on his own wealth and self-righteousness to attain acceptance before God. But Jesus made it clear these things simply hid his hostility toward God. He worshiped his wealth and depended on his good works.

FOR ALL NATIONS

Did you notice why Jesus was angry with the merchants in the temple? (11:17) They had taken over what should have been ‘a house of prayer for all nations.’

Mark 11:1–13:32 By now, Jesus was entering Jerusalem. When He arrived at the city, He was welcomed by a crowd crying “Hosanna.” They believed their conquering messiah had arrived, the one who would overthrow the dictatorial regime they found themselves living under. But these Jews were focused on the wrong enemy and thought of Jesus as the solution to the wrong problem. The real enemy was Satan, and the real problem was sin.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Mark 12:30-31

30 And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.31 The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.

Reflect and Change

1. As Christ’s disciples, we should serve others, even when it’ll cost us dearly. Are there ways in which you seek greatness here on earth rather than delight to serve or even suffer anonymously for the sake of

the gospel?

2. Are you trusting in the gospel alone for your salvation? What are the things in your life that you're prone to lean on to make you acceptable to a holy God, apart from the blood of Christ? Maybe it's faithfulness in evangelism, fruitfulness in ministry, obedience, approval of others, positions, or titles. Who are there people in your life who can lovingly point out areas in your life that either have become or may become idols? Find at least one person who can speak lovingly into your life about these things.
3. Jesus spoke lovingly to the rich young man. Do you lovingly point out sin in other people's lives with a desire for them to repent and be made whole? Or do you speak with harshness and a tone that doesn't image the Christ you seek to represent? Do you allow others into your life to speak lovingly to you about the sin in your life?
4. Are you fighting the wrong enemy and using the wrong weapons? Our enemy is not the world or governments or corruption or poverty. Our enemy is sin. The solution is the gospel. Our section today ends as Jesus moved closer to delivering the final victory over this enemy.

Go and Do

- Jesus is calling us to a life of faith. Faith is a gift from a good God, so we need to ask Him to give us faith. But our faith must be placed in the right things: in Christ alone, not in ourselves or others. Take time now to pray and ask God to give you faith in Him and confess any areas where you are relying on yourself or others.

2 Corinthians 4:1-2, 5

1 Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. 2 But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. . . .5 For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake

Section

Mark **14-16****Pray**

Lord, would You help me cling to the hope of the gospel? Lord, thank You that You came to conquer sin and death. Help me have faith to believe the power of the gospel. Help me trust fully in the gospel and not be lured by lesser hopes. Help me, as I open Your Word, to see the things You desire to teach me. Give me a heart to respond to your Word, Lord. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn**Read Mark 14-16**

Mark 14:1–72 Jesus moved relentlessly to the cross. The weight of the cross was already weighing heavily on Him. He paused to pray and ask God to take the cup of suffering away; however, even if the cup wasn't removed, He was willing to do God's will. He trusted God's ways are always good.

This scene of peace in which Jesus prayed and the disciples slept was soon disrupted by His betrayal and arrest. Chaos and confusion set in as a soldier's ear was cut off by Peter and a young man fled—probably Mark, the author of this Gospel. Following the arrest of Jesus, Peter found himself out in the courtyard being harangued by the crowd. He instantly moved to protect himself and denied Jesus, the One he loved. He was quick to betray his Savior, but he was also quick to weep over his sin.

Mark 15:1–47 The scene moves quickly now to the crucifixion. Pilate, giving in to the demands of the crowd, released Barabbas and had Jesus sent away to be scourged and crucified.

The whole scene is saturated with injustice. The crowd condemned Him to death; they were so consumed with sin they were blinded to the reality that their Savior stood in front of them. Yet the whole time, Jesus, the innocent One, remained silent. Amidst the loud accusations, He remained silent.

The pain was real. The mocking was relentless. The insults hurt. But His thoughts never turned to Himself; they remained fixed firmly on His good and loving Father who will never fail. He knew the One whom He could trust completely.

Keep in mind, our sins led to this moment. Our sins caused this travesty. As Jesus was nailed to the cross, so too were our sins, each and every one of them. Jesus experienced not only great physical trauma but also the worst kind of spiritual agony: being forsaken by God.

But He was forsaken so we could be forgiven. In this scene, we see a marvelous picture of grace. The centurion who witnessed and even took part in the murder of Jesus had the scales removed from his eyes. He saw how Jesus died and declared that surely He was the Son of God. Mark seemed to have recorded this man's testimony as an indication of his faith, and also as a vindication of Jesus. Even one who participated in the murder of Christ could be saved.

Mark 16:1–20 As we see in our passage, Jesus was buried and on the third day He rose again. He victoriously defeated death. The work of Christ wouldn't be complete without the resurrection. If the resurrection hadn't happened, death wouldn't have been defeated.

But Jesus did rise from the dead. He did appear to the women at the tomb, and to the disciples in Galilee. The voice of the angel is the declaration of victory: "He has risen." As we share the gospel with others, we have to be sure we're communicating the full gospel. Jesus declares in Mark 16:15–16 that we must now go into the whole world and make known the glorious gospel.

Jesus fulfilled His mission and calling. He willingly went to the cross. He died for the forgiveness of sins and then victoriously rose from the grave. The gospel is the good news of victory that can be found in Christ alone. We, as His disciples, are called to proclaim this gospel to all nations.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Mark 14:22-25

22 And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, 'Take; this is my body.' 23 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. 24 And he said to them, 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. 25 Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.'

Reflect and Change

1. In the midst of your suffering and pain, are you quick to go to God in prayer? Are your prayers marked by a desire for God's will to be done in the midst of your suffering, or are they merely peppered with thoughts of self?
2. Are there moments in your life when you're prone to deny Jesus? Are there certain people with whom you find it dangerously easy to betray your Savior? When this happens, are you quick, like Peter, to grieve over such sin?
3. There will be days when we're insulted and mocked for what we believe. We'll face injustice and work with those on the receiving end of a persecutor's clenched fist. But in those moments we don't need to fall back into fear. We need to run to the cross and consider it great joy to share in the sufferings of our Savior and Lord.
4. Do you pray for the salvation of those who persecute the church? Do you pray that they too will have their eyes opened to the truth of what

they're doing and the fact that they, too, can be saved?

Go and Do

- Pray that the Father will give you the opportunity to share the gospel with at least one person this week. Set aside time to go out and share.

Galatians

Introduction to Galatians

Everyone desires to be in the right. We want to be considered righteous and have others approve of our actions. We either accuse others of wrong so we might appear superior or make excuses for our shortcomings so we might be accepted.

Everyone is also prone to think they're justified by good works. There's something in all of us that tells us we're ultimately justified because of the good we've done or the bad we've avoided. Ask the average person on the street if he's going to heaven when he dies, and his answer will most likely be based on his good works, or lack thereof.

The book of Galatians was written to a group of Christians who were tempted to believe that, in order to be justified before God, they needed to place their faith in the finished work of the crucified and risen Jesus and perform certain good works. After Paul planted this church, it appears a group of Judaizers (people trying to impose Judaism on Christian converts) came in and stressed that Christians needed to obey certain aspects of the law (e.g., circumcision) if they were to be justified.

In response to this threat, Paul wrote to deliver the Galatians from the spiritual danger they'd bring on themselves if they indeed accepted and believed the Judaizer' teaching. His main thesis is simple: we're justified by faith in Christ alone, not by works of the law.

The book can be outlined as follows:

1. The gospel belongs to God and cannot be altered. (Galatians 1-2)
2. Trying to be justified by the law only leaves one cursed. (Galatians 3)
3. Realize that God has made you sons through faith, so do not be enslaved again. (Galatians 4)
4. Christ has freed us from condemnation and given us the Spirit so that we might pursue holiness. (Galatians 5)
5. Pursuing holiness by the Spirit means loving others. (Chapter 6)

Father, we pray that you would help us to trust that we are justified by faith in the finished work of Christ, not on the basis of our works. Amen.

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer.¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Section

Galatians 1-2

Pray

Father, help me focus on the good news of Christ so that I might not abandon the gospel nor give in to the temptation to alter this glorious message in any way. Give me the grace to believe that my only hope of being acceptable to You is the perfect righteousness You credit me through faith in the finished work of Your crucified and risen Son. Help me rest in the good news that Christ is enough. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read Galatians 1-2

Galatians 1:1–10 After his opening greeting, Paul expressed astonishment that the Galatians had so quickly turned away from the gospel and the understanding that we're justified before God through faith in Christ. This is a reminder that even good churches and godly individuals can quickly go astray if we remove our focus on the gospel.

THE GOSPEL

[Re-read this definition of the gospel.](#)

Paul stressed that the other “gospel” they’ve turned to is no gospel at all. What’s more, he commands them that if anyone begins teaching another means of salvation than the one Paul has preached, then it must be ignored and considered to be under God’s judgment. Clearly, altering the gospel is no small matter before the Lord.

Galatians 1:11–2:14 Paul stressed the reason we are not free to tamper with and change the gospel message, even if another message seems more palatable to our culture. The gospel isn't man's but God's. Paul wasn't preaching some message he came up with but the message given to him by the risen Christ.

Interestingly, Paul had never spoken to any of the disciples. Instead, he received the good news through an appearance of Jesus Himself. But when Paul went to Jerusalem with the other apostles, it became clear that the gospel message he preached was the exact gospel message they themselves preached. Again, this is confirmation that the good news is God's, and we must never give in to the temptation to alter that message in light of our circumstances or our audience.

Peter acted hypocritically when he left the table where he was eating with Gentiles because he saw men come from Jerusalem. He was worried his suggestion that Gentiles were perhaps acceptable before God. But Paul quickly and publicly rebuked Peter so the gospel message might not be misunderstood.

JUSTIFIED BY FAITH!

[In Christ – His Righteousness, His obedience – is counted as ours!](#) (5min)



By John Piper. © Desiring God Foundation. Source: desiringGod.org. Used by permission.

Galatians 2:15–21 Paul's word to Peter is one of the most precious reminders in all of Holy Scripture. We're declared righteous before God not on the basis of our good works but through faith in Christ and His redeeming work. In fact, the main purpose of God giving His Law in the old covenant was to show people they needed a righteousness they couldn't provide for themselves.

The Law pronounces us guilty and applies a death sentence, but through faith in Christ, we indeed have "died to the law," are "crucified with Christ," and now live unto God. We now no longer have to stand with a sentence of condemnation but can rest in the glorious truth that we've been approved by God, even declared righteous before Him, through faith in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ. This is a truth worth celebrating, one that should cause us to abound in praise to our gracious and glorious God.

Again, the gospel is God's message, not man's. Therefore, we must not tamper with it but believe and rest in it.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Galatians 2:15-16

15 We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; 16 yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

Reflect and Change

1. Why does Paul emphasize the gospel came from God and not man? Have you ever been tempted to alter the message of the gospel ever so slightly, so that it might sound more acceptable to those you're attempting to evangelize? The fact that we're not creators but merely stewards of the gospel reminds us this is not an option for us.

2. Why are we so tempted to think God accepts us on the basis of how good we are? What are some truths we might use to fight the temptation to think we're approved by God on the basis of works?
3. What are some things in our day—even good things—that could distract us from our focus on the gospel?
4. Are there times, even with our fellow Christians, that we need to take a clear stand if the gospel message is at risk of being compromised?

Go and Do

- Exercise the discipline of reminding yourself daily that your only hope of righteousness before God is faith in the finished work of Christ (Gal. 2:15–16). This is indeed a discipline, and Paul makes it clear that Christ is our only hope, that He is enough (Gal. 2:17–21).

Discipleship Activities

- When introducing yourself to someone, take opportunities to include something that identifies you as a follower of Jesus. Pursue conversation with those who seem open. [[Making Disciples](#)]

Section

Galatians 3

Pray

Lord, I give You thanks today for Your Law and its demand of perfect obedience. By showing me I am hopeless in myself and my good works, You graciously point me to Christ, His penalty-bearing death, and His perfect life of righteousness. Help me never lose sight of that glorious truth but to live each day resting in Your grace and striving to live honorably. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read Galatians 3

Paul reminds the Galatians that just as they were initially saved, so now they must continue to rest by faith in Christ's redeeming work, not trusting in the Law and its impossible demand for perfect obedience. In Christ, the Galatians have One who both paid their penalty for their disobedience and perfectly obeyed on their behalf.

Galatians 3:1–9 Still astonished that the Galatians have so quickly abandoned the truth of justification by faith alone, Paul began asking questions in order to drive them back to this truth. He first asked if they became believers on the basis of keeping God's Law or by hearing the gospel and believing. The answer, of course, is that they became believers through faith, not by having obeyed the Law perfectly. Because of this, they should understand the Lord didn't save them by faith in order to have them now seek righteousness on the basis of their good works.

THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW

See an [Animated Explanation of the Law](#). (6 minutes)



Produced by the Bible Project. The Bible Project content is available for free at www.thebibleproject.com.

Galatians 3:10–14 Paul then showed why relying on good works as the basis for justification is hopeless and will only leave us condemned. The reason all who rely on good works are under a curse is because God demands perfect obedience. That is, if we seek to be justified on the basis of our good works before God, then we must understand God demands absolute perfect obedience. Otherwise, we're cursed. Paul thus concludes: "all who rely on works of the Law are under a curse."

If God demands perfect obedience, what then is our hope? The answer is found in Christ. On the cross, Jesus "redeemed us from the curse . . . by becoming a curse for us." He took the penalty we deserved for our disobedience to God so we might trust Him and receive His righteousness. This is the heart of Christ's atoning work: He pays our penalty as our substitute. This should lead to us boasting not in ourselves but in Christ's gracious and powerful work for us.

Galatians 3:15–29 If God did not give the Law to us that we might obey it and be saved, then why did God give us the Law? This is the question Paul asked and answered in the final verses of Galatians 3. God's plan was always to justify us by

faith. Paul showed this by noting that Abraham was justified by faith 430 years before the Law was even given.

This doesn't mean, however, the Law is bad. God gave the Law to us as a teacher so that its demand of perfect obedience might show us we are hopeless in ourselves and need to look to the One to come—Christ. Therefore, the Law is good, because it shows us how hopeless we are. At the same time, it points us to the answer in Christ, and if we trust in Him, then we're not only forgiven, cleansed, and credited with Christ's perfect righteousness, we're also made sons of God and heirs of the promise. Because of all this, it's good for us to pause and thank God for his Law. Without it, we might have thought ourselves sufficient for righteousness and found ourselves empty-handed before God and condemned on the last day.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Galatians 3:10-14

10 For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.' 11 Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for 'The righteous shall live by faith.' 12 But the law is not of faith, rather 'The one who does them shall live by them.' 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree'—14 so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

Reflect and Change

1. Paul noted astonishment that the Galatians turned from the message of justification by faith to a “gospel” of works. Have you ever noticed a tendency in your walk with the Lord to revert back to thinking you are right with God on the basis of your good works? In those moments, we can ask ourselves the questions Paul asks the Galatians, hopefully jarring our hearts back in line with the truth.

Go and Do

- The truth that God demands perfect obedience can actually be a weapon against Satan's attacks. When the Devil points us to our failures, saying the Lord wants nothing to do with us, or points us to our successes, saying we've finally earned the Lord's favor, we can point to God's demand for absolute obedience, reminding ourselves that our only hope is the perfect righteousness of Christ credited to us by faith. This week create a plan on how to fight Satan's attacks by reminding yourself of God's demand for absolute obedience and His provision for that righteousness in Christ. We need to cultivate this discipline in our lives. Think of someone who might be struggling to believe that faith in Christ is enough; encourage them by reminding them of Christ's work for us (Galatians 3:10–14).

Discipleship Activities

- For the passage you chose last week, prepare the "Reflect and Change" section. Think about how to ask questions to get to personal applications of the text, not inductive study type questions. Share it with your friend again and get their input. [[Teaching Simply](#)]

Section

Galatians 4

Pray

Father, help me today to realize that I'm Your child. Give me the grace not to put myself in a place where I try to merit Your acceptance on the basis of my good works; that would be submitting myself again to the hopeless enslavement I knew before I became your child. Rather, let me rest in faith, delight in the fact that I'm Your child, and cry out to You faithfully today as a son cries out to his father who loves him. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read Galatians 4

God intends for us not to return to the slavery we knew before we were believers, where we were always working but never able to achieve righteousness before God. Instead, He calls us to trust in the finished work of His Son and to know the freedom from condemnation God intends for all His children.

Galatians 4:1–11 In these verses, Paul reminded the Galatian believers that they used to be enslaved to the “elementary principles of the world.” That is, they used to be slaves of a mentality that says, “I must do this-or-that work in order to merit a right standing before God.” The sad reality is that, having been freed from that hopeless enslavement, the Galatians were tempted to enslave themselves once again if they turned back to the Law as their hope of being justified. Exasperated, Paul asked them, “How can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?”

The reality the Galatians were missing, however, is that they already had everything

they could want. They didn't need to enslave themselves to a principle of works-righteousness; they didn't need to try and make themselves right with God. God had already made them His sons. In fact, God had not only made them His sons, He'd sent His Spirit into their hearts so they felt in their very being that they were His sons, even crying out "Abba! Father!"

Galatians 4:12–20 Just like finding an oasis in the desert moves you to alert others to your joy, knowing the freedom from condemnation found in the gospel should move us to want others to know that freedom as well. The Galatians had once shown that degree of love toward Paul, even being willing to give him their own eyes if that were possible. Now, however, he wondered what had happened because they no longer listened to him. He asked, "Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?" The reality is, the truth he wanted them to see would bring them greater joy and freedom than they had known. We must make sure our hearts burn like Paul's to see others know true freedom in Christ.

Galatians 4:21–31 In these verses, Paul looks at Hagar—the servant and mistress of Abraham—and Sarah—Abraham's wife—as symbolic of two realities. God had promised Abraham a son who would be the product of what God alone can do. That son, Isaac, would come through Sarah. Abraham, however, tried to bring about God's promise himself, and by sexually uniting with Hagar, he brought about a son, Ishmael. Ishmael thus represents the product of man's labor. Isaac, however, represents what God does when we trust in His promise.

Paul's point is obvious. If we attempt to be justified on the basis of what man can do (good works), it will only result in our being enslaved, unable to achieve the righteousness we so desire. However, if we simply place our faith in the work God has already done through the crucified and risen Christ, then we can know the freedom from condemnation God intends for all His children. Let us therefore not live as slaves but as who we truly are, children of God.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Galatians 4:4-7

4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

Reflect and Change

- Do you know and feel that you are a child of God? This is your Father's desire for you, that you will delight in Him as your Father and cry out to Him as a son.
- Paul wants believers not to act like slaves but to rest as sons by faith in Christ. Do you think of yourself as a child of God who is loved by his heavenly Father? Why do we sometimes struggle to feel that God is our Father and loves us?

Go and Do

- Sometimes, loving our neighbors means saying things they might despise. By telling the Galatians the truth, Paul risked making himself their enemy. Nonetheless, we need to make sure we're warning the individuals we love of the danger that awaits those who reject the gospel. We must not replace true love with a kind of sentimentality that fails to speak the truth. Is there someone you love who is in danger because of his or her rebellion against the Lord? Pray about how you might speak to that person in love, fighting for him or her to know the freedom from condemnation that Paul so desperately wanted the Galatians to know?
- As you pray today, remember you are crying out not merely to the God of heaven and earth but also to your Father who has made you His son and given you His Spirit so you might know you belong to Him (Gal. 4:1-7). Fight the temptation to think the Lord is holding you at a distance in light of your past or until you get a number of things in your life together.

Discipleship Activities

- Continue to pursue relationships based on what you learned from [Tips for Reaching Internationals](#), and be encouraged by watching this brief video: [Why Reach Internationals?](#) (2:30) [[All Peoples](#)]

Section

Galatians 5

Pray

Father, I know You have not only justified me through Christ but You've also given me Your Holy Spirit so I might desire righteousness in accordance with Your will. Give me grace today and empower me by the Holy Spirit to turn away from envy and arrogance and turn to my neighbor in love. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read Galatians 5

Christ has set us free and given us the Spirit so we might, from a place of security, love our neighbor as we submit to the desires of the Holy Spirit within us.

Galatians 5:1–12 In these verses, Paul returned yet again to his main theme: if one attempts to be righteous on the basis of obedience to God's Law, then that person is obligated to keep the whole Law. Either we're righteous on the basis of Christ's work alone, or we're severed from Christ and must stand in our own (lacking) righteousness. Those attempting to sway the Galatians toward the Law were doing themselves no favors. In fact, Paul spoke harshly against these men, telling them he wished they would simply emasculate themselves!

Galatians 5:13–26 What Paul wanted for the Galatians was not to put greater burdens on them, but for them to know the freedom from condemnation that was theirs in Christ. One reason he longed for the Galatians to know this freedom was because he understood that when we rest secure in the gospel, we're freed to love others. When we try to justify ourselves on the basis of our good works, we become

like a drowning man who must push down those around us. But when we rest secure in Christ, we're like a man with a life preserver, able to reach out, lift up, and love our neighbors.

PURSUE JOY

[Sanctification by pursuing joy in Christ](#) — a 2-minute video that will encourage you to fill your life with joy in Jesus.



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Paul wanted the Galatians to see this desire to love one's neighbor comes from the Holy Spirit. He wanted them to understand that though they were justified by faith alone, this didn't mean the Lord was sending them out to live in accordance with the desires of the flesh. Rather, the Father gives the Spirit to all those whom He declares righteous through faith in Christ. The Galatians, then, needed to submit to the desires of the Spirit, turn away from the desires of the flesh, and love one another as they bore the fruit of the Spirit.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Galatians 5:16-24

16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17

For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Reflect and Change

1. Use the truths in the Galatians 5:1–12 today as another weapon Paul has given you in your fight to trust in the finished work of Christ as the basis for your justification.
2. Paul made it clear that knowing we're justified by faith alone isn't a motivation for sin but for holiness. What are some evidences of holiness in our lives that show we've been justified by faith?

Go and Do

- When you hear that others have good things happen in their lives, do you react with envy and jealousy? This may be an indication that you're trying to be justified by your works and always falling short. Instead, realize that through faith in the gospel, you've been united with Christ, and you have all you need. You can delight in the glory your neighbor receives, for you are not in a competition for glory. You're secure in Christ, and a fellow heir of the world. Additionally, the Lord has given you His Holy Spirit so that all who are justified desire to walk in righteousness. Therefore, this week, ask for the empowerment of the Spirit, remember your security in the gospel, and love your neighbors by rejoicing with them when you hear of good things in their lives.

- Think of someone who might be struggling to believe that faith in Christ is enough; encourage that person by reminding him or her of Christ's finished work (Gal. 3:10–14). It might help to remind the person that the alternative to trusting in the sufficiency of Christ's work is to trust in his or her own works, which are never enough (Gal. 5:1–12).

Discipleship Activities

- This month, fast one day a week. Try a 24-hour fast, or skip one or two meals. Remember these [helpful hints](#) and [good reasons](#) to fast. [[Spiritual Disciplines](#)]

Section

Galatians 6

Pray

Father, You are so gracious to save me and equip me by Your Spirit to pursue holiness. I realize the pursuit of holiness is a pursuit, in large measure, to love my neighbor as myself. Help me today, therefore, to seek after others' good and your glory in all I do. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read Galatians 6

The pursuit of holiness is by definition a pursuit to pour ourselves into other believers, restoring them when they've fallen, bearing their burdens, doing them good, and pointing them to the reality that they're new creatures in Christ.

Galatians 6:1–10 After exhorting Galatian believers to submit to the Spirit and walk in holiness, Paul reminded the Galatians that holiness isn't something we exercise in isolation from others. Rather, as he made clear, holiness involves restoring our brothers when they fall into sin, bearing one another's burdens, and caring for those who labor in teaching the Word.

At the same time, however, we must not be deceived into thinking that simply because our neighbor is living a God-honoring life, we are too. Each individual is expected to pursue holiness, and as we do, we should be characterized by a desire to do good to others, especially to our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

REAP AND SOW

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. Galatians 6:7

Galatians 6:11–18 In these final verses, Paul reiterated his message. He wanted the Galatians to understand that even these false teachers who were telling them to be circumcised in order to be justified were themselves breaking God's Law. These men didn't have holy desires but wanted simply to boast that the Galatians were following their desires. Paul, however, had no desire to boast in himself but only in Christ. May we all be the kind of people who desire not our own glory but the good of others and the glory of Christ.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Galatians 6:1-5

1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.³ For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.⁴ But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor.⁵ For each will have to bear his own load.

Reflect and Change

Do you think of holiness in terms of what you do in isolation from others? Perhaps you feel most holy when you're by yourself, before the Lord. These are glorious moments, but biblical holiness requires we love our neighbors, restore those caught in sin, and bear one another's burdens.

Go and Do

This week, write down some ways you want to pursue holiness by loving others. Seek to follow through with these as you glorify the Lord who has saved you.

Discipleship Activities

Watch [The Prophet's Story](#) and pay particular attention to all the languages it's been translated into. Look also into these apps: [2 Ways to Live](#), [2 Ways to Live Android](#), and [The Story \(both iPhone and Android\)](#).

Section

Titus, 1 Timothy (Part 1)

Introduction to Titus

The Apostle Paul wrote this letter, the third of his “Pastoral Epistles,” probably around A.D. 66. He addressed it to the Greek convert Titus, one of his most trusted co-workers, “my true child” as Paul affectionately calls him in 1:4. Titus assisted Paul in Jerusalem and Corinth. Later, he took the lead in establishing a church on the island of Crete, where he went with Paul between the apostle’s first and second imprisonments.

Paul’s main aim in the epistle is to guide Titus in bringing order and sound leadership to the budding churches of Crete. In Titus 1 he sets out clear qualifications for church elders and overseers. They must be devout and self-controlled, not given to drinking, evil deeds, or seeking riches. They must hold to sound doctrine, holding firm to God’s Word. They must also be able to teach and correct others. Paul reminded Titus that those who profess to believe, yet live as though they deny Christ, remain unfit for any good work. All believers are called to make disciples, and that includes teaching new disciples to obey God’s commands.

In Titus 2, Paul broadens the scope to include standards for everyone in the church: the old and young, men and women, masters and bond-slaves. Older men should be sound in faith and self-controlled. Older women should both be reverent and train younger women to love their husbands and children. Older men should urge younger men to be self-controlled.

In the final chapter, Paul turns to the believers’ relationship with the wider culture. He urges Titus to remind the church that members of the body of Christ are to be

ready for every good work. We should speak evil of no one, avoid quarreling, and show courtesy to all people.

Why? Because we, too, were once foolish and disobedient. Yet God, rich in mercy, sent His Son Jesus that we might be saved. True salvation will produce changed lives and changed behavior. We must choose behaviors that are excellent and profitable, avoiding foolish controversies and worthless arguments. We must have nothing to do with a person in the church who has been warned yet continues to stir up division, because this behavior is warped and sinful. What's more, the advance of the gospel is at stake.

Mark 10:42-45

42 And Jesus called them to him and said to them, 'You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.43 But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,44 and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.45 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'

Section

Titus 1

Pray

Father, help me hold firm to Your trustworthy Word as I have been taught. Help me stay sound in the faith so I will be fit for every good work. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read Titus 1

Titus 1:1–4 Paul's ministry was purposeful and sound. He planted churches purposefully. He worked so closely with Titus in these endeavors that he called him his child. Even after he and Titus were separated physically, Paul led and influenced both Titus and the churches they'd planted by writing a letter with clear directions. It was now Titus' job to bring order and sound leadership to the budding churches on the island of Crete.

Titus 1:5–9 Not only was Paul purposeful in his church planting, he also spoke boldly when he set clear qualifications for elders. For the sake of sound ministry, he knew this must happen. In these verses, it's clear that Paul, the same author who wrote the "Love Chapter" (1 Corinthians 13), was not afraid to speak bluntly and honestly; he was not afraid to address those in the church whose character needed to be rebuked.

Why is this? Paul believed that in order to give instruction in sound doctrine, church leaders must hold firm to God's Word and even be able to rebuke those

who contradicted it. God's plan for His church is too important to allow disorder or unholiness of any kind to continue unaddressed. Therefore, Paul purposefully and rightly set the bar high for those in the role of elder/overseer. The proper handling of both the Word and mission of God requires our humble and holy lives.

Titus 1:10–15 After Paul emphasized the importance of holding firm to sound doctrine, he reminded Titus that those who profess to believe, yet live lives that deny Christ, remain unfit for any good work.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Titus 2:7-8

7 Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity,⁸ and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us.

Reflect and Change

1. Elders hold serious responsibility, and Paul clearly wants godly church leadership to be a priority for these churches. Paul gave similar direction to Timothy as he was left to work with the church in Ephesus. Properly understanding God-given roles is important.
2. Not all believers are called to be an elder/overseer. Those who aren't, however, are called to be under an elder/overseer and should know what the qualifications are for those roles. Watch this six-minute video on [Elders and Deacons](#). The leaders of the church must be exemplary, modeling for a congregation sound conduct and sound doctrine. All believers are called to make disciples, and that includes teaching these new disciples to obey all of God's commands. Giving instruction in sound doctrine is a serious task that comes with serious responsibility.
3. Does your character reflect one who can give instruction in sound doctrine? Do you idly give counsel or teach Scripture without humbly acknowledging the responsibilities that comes with it?

4. Consider your approach to conflict. Are you purposefully standing up for sound doctrine? Are you willing to lovingly rebuke those who contradict it, or do you let things slide for the sake of political correctness, laziness, or even fear?

Go and Do

- Make a list of habits you need to start or stop this week to ensure that your character aligns with that of one who is able to give instruction. In what areas are you not living above reproach? Share with a friend one specific thing you will do this week to move your habits and lifestyle to be more in line with the purposes of Christ.
- Ask someone who knows you well to help you evaluate your ability to give or receive rebuke. Do you have passive-aggressive tendencies? Are you afraid to speak truth if it means offending others? Do you speak the truth without love? Do you understand when it's appropriate to rebuke and when it's appropriate to overlook an offense? Do you bristle when others speak truth to you? For the sake of sound purposeful obedience to Christ, give permission for honest and uncontested feedback in this area from someone who knows you well. Ask this person to hold you accountable where you fall short.

Discipleship Activities

- Think through and prepare the "Go and Do" sections for the text you chose to write on. Are there any clear next steps the text calls for? It could be to praise God for something, or it could be some action step required. Share it with your friend to get their input. [[Teaching Simply](#)]

Section

Titus 2

Pray

Father, I long to better understand the roles You've given me. I want to be a model of good works in all respects. Help me daily conform more and more into Your likeness so that in everything I do and say Your doctrine will be made more beautiful. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read Titus 2

In the first chapter of Titus, Paul emphasized the importance of elders/overseers in the church, while listing the skills and character traits those in that role should have. Titus 2 shows that this godly character in the church directly reflects upon the Word of God. Paul then broadened the scope to include standards for everyone in the church. So, if you felt Titus 1 didn't apply to you, then today you'll reconsider.

Titus 2 Paul first addressed Titus himself and said what he taught must reflect sound doctrine. He told Titus what to expect from older men and older women, as well as what to expect from younger men and younger women. Paul made it explicitly clear that, although the high expectations for character in Titus 1 were referring to elders, God has set expectations high for everyone in the church. The character of the believer should "in all respects" be a model of good works.

We read that godly character has direct implications on how the Word of God is received. We should seek to live lives that are holy and blameless so the Word of God will not be reviled. We should try to make sure everything we do presents both

the Word of God and the doctrine of God as beautiful.

Therefore, older men are to be sound in faith and self-controlled, while older women are to be reverent, teaching and training younger women to love their husbands and children. Older men should urge younger men to also be self-controlled. In the body of Christ there should be an intermingling of teaching, such that sound doctrine is not taught just from the elder/pastor/overseer but from all members of the body of Christ as they encourage each other to live godly lives fit for good works.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Titus 2:11-14

11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, 13 waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

Reflect and Change

1. How do you think Titus felt when he read that he, a young church planter, was to give strong instruction to the older men and women in the church? Paul knew it wouldn't be easy, yet he told Titus to "declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you."
2. Are there times when you know you should speak up but don't? If so, this could be an indication you don't fully understand the importance of this mandate. Pray to God for strength with this.

Go and Do

- Ask yourself, “Do those who spend time with me see the gospel and the Word of God as more beautiful because of the way my character reflects Christ?” What can you do this week to make the Word of God and the doctrine of God more beautiful to someone new? This week, find one person with whom you cross paths and intentionally be a reflection of God’s glory to him or her.

Discipleship Activities

- Continue to take opportunities when introducing yourself to someone to include something that identifies you as a follower of Jesus. Keep track of those who seem open to conversations about the gospel. [[Making Disciples](#)]

Section

Titus 3

Pray

Lord, help me understand the gospel in a fresh way. Help me continue to develop a deeper understanding of what You did for me when You sent Your Son to die for my sins. Build in me habits and patterns of good works that are both excellent and profitable. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read Titus 3

Titus 3:1–8 Paul began Titus 3 by asking Titus to remind the church that members of the body of Christ are to be ready for every good work. We should speak evil of no one, avoid quarreling, and show courtesy to all people. Once again, it's all about the gospel. We weren't always capable of this. We were foolish and disobedient. Yet God, rich in mercy, sent His Son Jesus to renew us through the power of the Holy Spirit so we might be saved. Through the grace of God, we can live differently than we once lived. Paul was careful to communicate that true salvation will produce changed lives and changed behavior. Doing what's right and good is excellent and profitable for everyone. It's what the church needs.

Titus 3:9–11 Paul didn't stop there. Right before closing this letter, he took time to make it clear that after salvation we can choose behaviors that are either excellent and profitable or unprofitable and worthless. Foolish controversies and arguments are worthless. Dissensions and quarrels about the Law are worthless. We're told to have nothing to do with a person who has been warned yet continues to stir up division because this behavior is warped and sinful. There's just too much at stake.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Titus 3:4-8

4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared,5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.8 The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.

Reflect and Change

1. We've now read Paul's entire letter to Titus. We see Paul, a church planter, pouring out his heart and giving counsel to a young fellow minister. Paul's message is consistent and clear. God has granted us salvation through His Son and this salvation must bring change to the life and character of believers. Our character will directly reflect upon the Word of God and whether or not sound doctrine will be passed down through the church.
2. Salvation changes us. Because of God's grace in our lives and through holding fast to sound doctrine, the body of Christ should learn to do good deeds. Through both theological truth and the changed character of God's people, God's name is shown to be great and the Word of God is shown to be beautiful.

Go and Do

- Paul tells Titus that Christians can learn to devote themselves to good works. These habits and lifestyles can be developed and encouraged through the church. This is extremely encouraging news. What can you do this week, as a member of the body of Christ, to disciple or mentor another believer to learn

to do good deeds? What is a specific good deed or character trait that you could encourage someone to learn or develop?

Discipleship Activities

- Continue learning [Creation to Christ](#). Begin learning lessons 10–12, and practice lessons 1–9 with your accountability partner or someone else. [[Teaching Simply, Making Disciples](#)]

Section

1 Timothy 1-2

Pray

Father, thank You for loving me and for saving me though I, too, am a great sinner. Help me to love deeply those around me. Help us as a church to bless our neighbors and to lay down our lives so they might be saved. Please help our leaders and rulers work for justice and peace so the gospel can spread. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read 1 Timothy 1-2

1 Timothy is an intimate letter between close friends. Timothy traveled extensively with Paul when churches were established and strengthened throughout Asia Minor. Timothy learned about Paul's burden for healthy churches. When a church needed help, Paul trusted Timothy to serve in his place.

The need to remain faithful to the gospel is one of the greatest needs of every church. All church activity should teach and display the gospel so that every church member grows in expressions of love—for God and for others. Sometimes, learning about the Bible and God results in arguments and unending speculations. Paul called these “useless discussions” (1:4). Instead, increased knowledge about God should help purify our hearts, cleanse our consciences, and remove hypocrisy so that God's love for us can overflow to those around us. Love is always the mature growth of the gospel in the lives of men and women.

God wants even difficult parts of the Bible, like the Law, to result in acts of love that display the gospel. In fact, Paul said that he was saved to prove a great truth: Christ

Jesus is more than capable to save even the worst of sinners!

The gospel that transformed Paul also transforms entire communities. Christian communities are orderly, submissive assemblies who gather not to complain against oppressive governments, but to pray for the peace, blessing, and salvation of their neighbors. They pursue godly living and are well-ordered before God.

Paul sent Timothy so that he would challenge others, even the entire church, to gospel living. What challenges might Timothy have faced? If you were Timothy, what would be your biggest fear?

Here's the big question Paul addressed in 1 Timothy 2: What does a church ordered around the gospel look like? A gospel-centered church includes praying on behalf of all, holiness, submitting to God's rule, and living peacefully with others.

What keeps churches from looking like this? How can you help Christians around you live like this?

Daily Verse for Meditation

1 Timothy 1:5

5 The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

Reflect and Change

What area of your life is most keeping you from praying with "holy" hands (2:8)?

1. Have you ever thought about why you study the Bible? Why do you want to know more about God? What are some good reasons to study the Bible? What are bad reasons to study the Bible?
2. Gospel living is love on display (1:5). Answer these questions: "Who can I love right now? How can I love them?" It is always appropriate to ask

and answer these questions.

3. What roles of service has God specifically established for you (1:18–19)? How can you pursue these roles with greater conviction? God Himself has called you to these! You can trust that He will help you.

Go and Do

- Pray for the welfare of your city (2:1–2). Pray for the salvation of the leaders of your community.
- Think back to your own salvation and thank God for His mercy to you (1:16). Tell an unbelieving friend about God’s mercy.

Discipleship Activities

- Continue meeting regularly with your accountability partner and assess progress in your growth plans. [[Being a Disciple](#)]
- Research and learn more about the faith of your cross-cultural friend. Here are some places to start: [Buddhism in Southeast Asia](#), [Hinduism Resources](#) and [witnessing to Muslims](#) (a 5-minute video). [[All Peoples](#)]

Section

1 Timothy 3

Pray

Father, thank You for all the ways You've changed me through Your gospel and Your Spirit. Please help me bless the pastors and elders of my church. Please help us as a church to safeguard the truths of the gospel and to proclaim them with clarity in our city. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read 1 Timothy 3

Paul wants Timothy to remember the importance of strong character. The gospel rightly believed always results in strong character, and strong character should mark those in Christian community.

God's people form a great family with a great Father who is God Himself. He has assembled them out of the world to be His church, a distinctive people who are changed by the gospel, and who will protect and proclaim that gospel. Our Father cares greatly about the behavior of those in His household.

ELDERS AND DEACONS

[What's remarkable about the list of qualifications for an elder overseer?\(6-min\)](#)



Video posted under Standard YouTube License

What's more, God has gifted His church with men and women who will promote His purposes in the church. They should exemplify living that's shaped by the gospel. Overseers are those whose character demonstrates gospel change. In short, they should be above reproach, that is, they should be without glaring moral deficiencies as Christians. Additionally, they should be able to "take care of the church of God" (3:5) by faithfully teaching God's Word to His people.

One great way to tell whether a man will be a good elder is to look at his household. Ask the question: "How has he done managing his own family and household?" The answer will help illuminate whether such a man could take care of God's household, the church.

In the same way, those who are recognized servants (deacons) in the church should be those whose behavior and character have been affected by the gospel. Gospel-shaped living was an important concept for Paul, flowing out of and intimately connected to our daily worship (1 Tim. 3:16). Anything less is inappropriate for the church and unworthy of the great gospel of our great God and Savior.

Daily Verse for Meditation

1 Timothy 3:15

15 If I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.

Reflect and Change

1. Whenever we read about the church or church leaders in Scripture, we should keep from thinking, "This passage is not for me." All Christians should be an active part of a local church. How might these passages be important to you even if you're not an elder/pastor?
2. What are some key ways a church protects the gospel (3:15)? As you walk with Christ, how can you be a truth protector in your role as a Christian and in your relationships?

Go and Do

- Make a list of ways God has changed you. Ask others in your church who know you well to evaluate and add to your list. Then prayerfully write down ways you haven't changed yet, even though you know you should.
- Explain the gospel to a friend, believing or not, especially focusing on how thankful you are for how God has transformed you.
- Paul was quick to worship, quoting a Christian hymn in this text. End your day by singing a simple hymn of praise to God.

Discipleship Activities

- Call and set an appointment to meet with a mature believer to seek counsel on Scriptural principles that guide healthy relationships: conflict, forgiveness, encouragement, giving feedback, etc. [[Healthy Relationships](#)]

Section

1 and 2 Timothy

Introduction to 1 Timothy

1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus comprise the three “Pastoral Epistles” of the Apostle Paul. Some modern scholars have raised questions about whether Paul actually wrote these letters, but significant evidence supports his authorship of 1 Timothy—and the other two letters—between A.D. 62–67, after the events recounted in Acts 28.

1 Timothy is an intimate letter between close friends: Paul, the great teacher and mentor; and Timothy, his disciple and “true child in the faith” (1:2). A native of Lystra and the child of a Greek father and a Jewish Christian mother, Timothy traveled extensively with Paul after being led to faith in Christ (probably by Paul himself). As he saw churches established throughout Asia Minor, Timothy learned about Paul’s burden for strong churches. During Paul’s fourth missionary journey to Macedonia, he asked Timothy to watch over the Ephesian church. In this first letter to Timothy, he urged the younger man to counter false teachings and guide the expanding Ephesian flock.

In the first two chapters of 1 Timothy, Paul stresses the need to remain faithful to the gospel. All church activity should teach and display the gospel so that every church member grows in expressions of love—for both God and for others. Sometimes, learning about the Bible or God results in arguments and unending speculations. Paul called these “useless discussions” (1:4).

But, according to Paul, increased knowledge about God should help purify our hearts, cleanse our consciences, and remove hypocrisy. 1 Timothy 3 addresses the

character of those who lead and serve the church: overseers (elders) and deacons. They should serve in an orderly fashion and should exemplify living that is shaped by the gospel.

1 Timothy 4 warns of enemies inside and outside the church who will work hard to lead believers away from following Jesus. Deception and falsehood are real possibilities that carry eternally grave consequences. Paul already had addressed false teaching that fails to yield tangible fruit. In this chapter, he discusses false teaching that emphasizes outward displays of religion, yet fails to flow from a sincere heart of worship and reverence. We shouldn't waste our energy with speculations about religion and fruitless discussions. Instead, we should help protect believers around us against the dangerous and inevitable onslaught of doctrinal deception. One of the best ways we can do that is by being a godly example.

In 1 Timothy 5, Paul shows how the gospel shapes the way churches should relate to both widows—because God cares for the needy—and elders—because God has placed them in authority over the church for her good. As a result, churches should care for the needy, yet do so in a way that adorns the gospel. Similarly, churches should generously honor their leaders, especially if they work productively in the ministry of the Word.

Paul closes the letter in by warning again about “morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words” (6:4), abusive arguments, and the love of money. The true servant of God flees these and pursues “righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness” (6:11). Goodness and good works will flow from the pursuit of God, who richly supplies all our needs. Paul exhorts Timothy—and the Ephesian church—to teach and observe these things, and avoid “worldly and empty chatter” (6:20) that only leads believers astray.

Introduction to 2 Timothy

This short letter contains the “last words” of Paul, the great apostle, to his beloved co-worker Timothy. Writing from a Roman military prison around A.D. 67, Paul is alone and senses the end is near. Indeed, his martyrdom at the hands of the Romans would soon follow. But he wants to deliver one last set of challenges to Timothy and all the believers: Be strong. Do not fear. Hold to sound doctrine. Suffer hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. Preach the gospel. Fight the good fight.

He begins by thanking God for Timothy and for the uncommon blessing of Timothy's spiritual heritage, experiences, and gifts. “Fan those gifts into flame!” Paul urges, for the Spirit that God has given us is powerful for boldness, love, and self-discipline. Knowing this, Paul tells Timothy to be ready to suffer disgrace for the sake of the gospel. But he challenges his young friend not to be ashamed. Paul knows that a prison cell was not an honorable setting from which to write a letter, yet he isn't ashamed of the gospel or being imprisoned for it.

One measure of faithfulness is how we handle God's Word. We shouldn't approach God's Word to engage in fruitless debates; instead, we should recognize it as an explanation of how to walk rightly before Him and abstain from wickedness. By fleeing selfish desires, God's people can position themselves to be useful to Him. At the close of 2 Timothy 2, Paul tells Timothy to patiently and gently persuade his opponents to submit to God's Word, even though difficult times were coming in these last days as men and women love what they shouldn't—themselves, money, pleasure, etc.—and fail to love what they should, namely, God and His wisdom.

In addition to the power of the indwelling Spirit, Timothy had two additional advantages to guide him: the conduct of Paul that was worth imitating, and Scriptures he could believe. Paul promised that as Timothy followed Jesus, he would suffer persecution because suffering is normal for Christians. Yet, as evil people go from bad to worse, believers in Christ are to be transformed by the Word of God and equipped for every good work.

Paul closes his last letter with passionate urgency, charging Timothy in the presence of God and Christ Jesus to preach the Word. He exhorted him to be ready in season and out of season—to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with great patience and instruction (4:3). Paul told Timothy that he (Paul) had fought the good fight and kept the faith. Finally, he passed the baton on to Timothy and gave him an important charge: hold firm to the faithful preaching of the Word.

Galatians 5:16-24

16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Section

1 Timothy 4

Pray

Dear God, help me not waste my time on fruitless endeavors. Rather, help me work hard and train myself for godliness. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read 1 Timothy 4

The Bible warns us that when the gospel is believed, God's enemies work hard to deceive believers away from following Jesus. God's enemies hate Jesus, they hate the gospel, and they hate any fruit that comes from following Jesus. Deception and falsehood are real possibilities that carry eternally grave consequences.

The most dangerous doctrinal deceptions are close enough to the original to look like the real thing, yet just different enough to ruin those who believe them. Paul already addressed false teaching that fails to yield tangible fruit. In this chapter, he discussed false teaching that emphasizes outward displays of religion, yet fails to flow from a sincere heart of worship and reverence.

This type of faith is false because it suggests God is only interested in superficial religious activity. But God is interested in heart change that overflows in good works. Further, the basis of God's good pleasure toward us is Christ's righteousness only, not actions we can perform. The point is this: when Christ is truly Lord, every aspect of our lives is affected. Even food is to be received with thankfulness—as an act of worship.

We shouldn't waste our energy with speculations about religion and fruitless discussions (1:4; 4:7). Instead, we should help protect believers around us against the dangerous and inevitable onslaught of doctrinal deception. Paul says this act of service will help both ourselves and those around us, for we will be constantly "nourished" with the good teaching of the gospel (4:6).

One of the best ways we can help those around us is by being a godly example. This will require single-minded attention, which Paul describes as hard work! According to him, a disciplined life of godliness[1] requires striving, teaching, exhorting, being exemplary, taking pains, being absorbed, and persevering.

But here's the good news: If we labor like Paul described, we'll have no energy left for speculative endeavors. So, let us be an example in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity (1:5). By persevering in these good things, we can secure spiritual health for us and those around us.

Daily Verse for Meditation

1 Timothy 4:16

16 Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

Reflect and Change

There is a beneficial example in this passage of how believers can prioritize their time. If Timothy spent time on the things of God, he wouldn't have time for trivial or useless matters. This can be a key lesson to learn in the life of a believer.

1. How are you filling your time this very week with things that are empty in terms of eternal value? What could you do to be more intentional about how you spend your days?
2. When is the last time you entered into a worthless debate about speculative things?

Go and Do

- Discuss with someone who knows you well: How hard do you strive to be an example in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity? If you were completely absorbed in these things, how might your life look different?
- Keep a list today of things you are thankful for. Thank God for the blessings in your life you often overlook. When you thank Him for your food, be truly thankful!

Discipleship Activities

- Now that you have prepared the “Read and Learn,” “Reflect and Change,” and “Go and Do” sections for your text, teach your text to your family or another group this week using this structure. Get feedback from them and adjust.
[\[Teaching Simply\]](#)

Section

1 Timothy 5

Pray

Father, thank You for the gift of elders that You have given to the church. I pray for _____ and pray that You will help him to walk with You faithfully. I pray that You will help him to dedicate himself to sound doctrine. Preserve him in his faith. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read 1 Timothy 5

The idea of godliness is a key concept in 1 Timothy. It includes the idea of letting the gospel bear fruit; after all, the gospel should transform both our hearts and our behavior. Godliness also involves living submissively under God's established order. Paul had already discussed how the gospel should shape the lives of men (2:1–8), women (2:9–15), elders (3:1–7), and deacons (3:8–13) in the church. Here in 1 Timothy 5, Paul showed how the gospel shapes the way churches should relate to widows (because God cares for the needy) and elders (because God has placed them in authority over us for our good).

As a result, the church should care for the needy, yet do so in a way that adorns the gospel. For example, churches should not relieve believers of the responsibility to care for their own needy family members; this would be unwise (5:4) and bring reproach to the gospel (5:8). At the same time, the church should regularly aid needy persons, as long as:

- It has determined they have devoted themselves to gospel purposes.

- Aiding them does no harm to wisdom and brings no reproach to the gospel.

Failure to observe these principles can bring serious consequences. Some become idle, some fall into patterns of sin, and some have even left the faith. We must be careful how we order our lives so God's enemies have no occasion to accuse us of anything that isn't honoring to God.

In the same way, the church should generously honor its leaders, especially if they work productively in the ministry of the Word. This means joyfully caring for their needs (5:18) and not nitpicking everything they do (5:19). However, those who persist in sin should be rebuked openly. This wisely discourages further sin and honors the gospel by putting an end to possible reproach.

This charge extends to Timothy and all of us: let us keep ourselves free from sin! Let's model this pursuit to others.

Daily Verse for Meditation

1 Timothy 5:17

17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.

Reflect and Change

1. Paul gives very specific instructions when he counsels the church on how they should care for widows. But he does so after first stating they should encourage and love them as family. Setting boundaries for service is not about refusing to care for those who don't really need it. It's about helping those around us set priorities and life patterns that encourage godly living and discourage distracting life patterns.

Go and Do

- Choose one of the first two below and do the third one.
- What can you do to care for someone in the role of elder? In the Western world, elders are often cared for financially. However, are they cared for emotionally, spiritually, and maybe even physically as well? What can you do this week to show “double honor” to someone who labors in preaching and teaching the Word of God?
- Draft an email, write a letter, or send a text with a specific and true word of encouragement for someone serving in the role of elder.
- Stop and take time to pray for this person and their family. Ask them if there’s a need in their life that you could help meet.

Section

1 Timothy 6

Pray

Father, help me live so Your name and teaching are attractive to me. Guard me from empty arguments about religion. Instead, help me grow in godliness. Give me grace to labor for eternal treasures today! In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read 1 Timothy 6

In all our relationships, we should love and serve so that both God's name and the gospel are protected from disgrace. God wants us to treat all our Christian brothers and sisters with the same honor Christ extends to us. By relating well to those in our lives, particularly our brothers and sisters in Christ, we will avoid straying from godly principles.

Paul has three main objectives in this letter, and he concludes by reiterating them. Broadly, these objectives are:

1. To encourage Christians in the church to live gospel-shaped lives with godly, loving, and sincere relationships;
2. To encourage Christians in the church to protect the integrity of doctrine in every way;
3. To praise and worship God.

One way the teaching of the church can be compromised is through men and women who illegitimately thrust themselves forward as teachers over God's people.

Paul says there is a better way than pursuing riches. But it requires us to flee our longings after wealth and, instead, absorb ourselves with pursuing godliness, righteousness, faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness. This occurs by God's good grace in our lives. The great gain of Christ is available to everyone who pursues Him without distraction. Beautifully, there is nothing to lose when we devote ourselves with all solemnity, sternness, sobriety, and steadfastness to pursue single-minded devotion to Christ until He comes again!

Daily Verse for Meditation

1 Timothy 6:11

11 But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.

Reflect and Change

1. Paul told us that godliness is gain, but godliness with contentment is great gain. Now, pause and read Philippians 4:11. There, Paul said that by God's grace he learned to be content! This is extremely encouraging because it means with God's help we can do something about our contentment problem.

Go and Do

What is an area in your heart where you're experiencing discontent? A missionary named Ella served the Pygmies in Africa for more than 50 years. She said, "Their living conditions were extremely primitive in the scorching heat and the humidity of the African bush." Ella's own daughter, Mimi, wondered how her mother had managed to live such a life and yet never complained.

Mimi discovered the answer in her mother's diary where Ella laid out her prescription for contentment:

- Never allow yourself to complain, even about the weather.
- Never picture yourself in any other circumstances or place.
- Never compare your lot with another's.
- Never allow yourself to wish this or that had been otherwise.
- Never dwell on tomorrow—remember that tomorrow is God's, not ours.

After reading Ella's list, write your own list. What would you need to stop doing to better live a life of contentment?

Discipleship Activities

Practice telling all of [Creation to Christ](#) with your accountability partner or someone else. Then get feedback from them. [[Teaching Simply, Making Disciples](#)]

Section

2 Timothy 1-2

Pray

Father, thank You for all who shared the gospel with me and for those who shared the gospel with them. May your Spirit be powerful in me today, and give me grace to be useful to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read 2 Timothy 1-2

2 Timothy is the second letter the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, his spiritual son. Because Paul was nearing the end of his ministry and life (4:6), his tone was personal and resolute.

He began by thanking God for Timothy and for the uncommon blessing of Timothy's spiritual heritage, experiences, and gifts. When God entrusts us with any gift, it should be developed through useful service. "Fan those gifts into flame!" Paul said, for the Holy Spirit is powerful for boldness, love, and self-discipline.

The Holy Spirit is so powerful that God's enemies could never hope to overpower Him. Instead, they try to disparage God's people through shame. When God's people are ashamed, they can become silent or inactive. Knowing this, Paul told Timothy to be ready, in the power of God, to suffer disgrace for the sake of the gospel.

Paul boldly and repeatedly challenged Timothy not to be ashamed. Honor and shame were very important concepts in first-century Roman culture, and Paul knew

a prison cell was not an honorable setting from which to write a letter. But he wasn't ashamed of the gospel, and he wasn't ashamed to be imprisoned for the gospel.

When we proclaim the gospel, some people will mock and try to shame us. Those who resist the gospel may have Christians imprisoned or worse. For our part, we can expect these responses and, by God's powerful Spirit in us, refuse to be ashamed. Instead, we can see the gospel as a vehicle not of shame but of glory to those who believe. Those who preach the gospel receive glory and honor, in spite of the shame the world heaps on them, because people are saved when the gospel is preached. **Paul was a prisoner because of his faithfulness; he was a prisoner because he had joined God's mission to save all people.**

GENDER ROLES IN CHURCH

[Read Thabiti Anyabwile on 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 11.](#)

We should be on the lookout for faithful men and women who can carefully teach others. Paul intentionally reminded Timothy of the importance of multiplying faithfulness. Just as Paul benefited from a spiritual heritage passed on through faithful men in Israel, Timothy also had a rich heritage shaped by the sincere faithfulness of multiple generations of God-worshippers. In turn, Paul wrote, Timothy had a responsibility to teach those who would be faithful to teach others.

Daily Verse for Meditation

2 Timothy 2:24-25

24 And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, 25 correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth.

Reflect and Change

1. One measure of faithfulness is how we handle God's Word. We should

use God's Word not to engage in fruitless debates but to walk rightly before Him, which includes abstaining from wickedness. By fleeing selfish desires, God's people position themselves to be useful to Him. Usefulness means being kind, able to teach, patient when wronged, and correcting with all gentleness.

2. What are other measures of faithfulness?
3. For Paul, there was a correlation between his faithfulness to God and his suffering. His discipling of Timothy included preparing Timothy to suffer. How do you feel about sharing the gospel with people knowing their belief in Jesus could lead to persecution or suffering?

Go and Do

Choose one of the following:

Just as faithfulness can be multiplied, unfaithfulness can be multiplied.

- Set aside some time today to search the Scriptures for biblical measures of faithfulness.
- Pray with another believer for an opportunity to be faithful by boldly sharing your faith.
- Make a list of some gifts God has entrusted to you. Think of one way you can use those gifts for God's people or mission this week.

Section

2 Timothy 3

Pray

Lord, I praise You for giving us Your Word so we can truly be equipped for every good work. Help me not to leave my Bible on the shelf, neglecting this precious gift. Help me to hide Your Word in my heart so I can be equipped for Your mission. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read 2 Timothy 3

At the close of 2 Timothy 2, Paul told Timothy to patiently and gently persuade opponents to return and submit to God's Word. But not everyone will be won this way. After all, Paul said plainly that difficult times are coming because these are the "last days." In these last days, men and women love what they shouldn't—themselves, money, pleasure—and fail to love what they should—God and His wisdom. While the moral fiber of our culture (and all cultures) goes from bad to worse, Christians will increase in godliness by the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.

In Acts, the Holy Spirit is associated with power for Christians to live as witnesses to the truth about the gospel of the kingdom (Acts 1:8). Paul reminded Timothy of this when he connected power for living with the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 1:7). In time, those who truly belong to Christ will be clearly differentiated by their holy lives. There will even be people associated with the church who seem to be godly, but who do not have "power" to live as citizens of Christ's kingdom. These people will need to be "avoided" (3:5) because they oppose the truth and can harm the church. The good

news is that God expects us to be different and provides the means to do so by equipping us with His Spirit.

In addition to the power of the indwelling Spirit, Timothy had two additional advantages to guide him. He had the conduct of Paul that deserved imitation, and he had been taught to believe Scriptures. With the Spirit of God helping him, the Word of God guiding him, and the people of God encouraging him, Timothy just needed to keep following Jesus.

THE SCRIPTURES

[Read more about the Scriptures from the BFM.](#)

Paul promised that as Timothy followed Jesus, he would suffer persecution because suffering is normal for Christians. All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. Yet, as evil people go from bad to worse, believers in Christ should continue in what they've been taught as they're transformed by the Word of God. After all, every bit of Scripture is profitable for Christians, and God's Word is given to us so that we may be "complete," that is, equipped for every possible good work.

Daily Verse for Meditation

2 Timothy 3:16

16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.

Reflect and Change

1. Paul showed how the "Big Three" help the Christian live a godly life. The Spirit of God gives us power, the people of God model godly living to us, and the Word of God tethers our hearts to truth. Which of these three do you need more of in your life today?

- Is the Holy Spirit empowering change in your life?
- Are you growing in godliness?
- Are you following the example of godly brothers and sisters?
- Are you diligently studying God's Word, allowing it to "teach, reprove, correct, and train" you for righteousness?
- Reflect on the balance or unbalance of the "Big Three" in your life. What adjustments do you need to make?

Go and Do

- Study a passage from the New Testament. Discuss this passage with other Christians until you can find someone who has obeyed it in a particular way. Obey it like they did, and then teach what you have learned to another Christian.

Discipleship Activities

- If you don't regularly use public transportation, take public transportation somewhere this coming week. Talk with others seated near you; learn where you can and can't get to with public transportation in your city. [[All Peoples, Making Disciples](#)]

Section

2 Timothy and Ephesians

Introduction to 2 Timothy

This short letter contains the “last words” of Paul, the great apostle, to his beloved co-worker Timothy. Writing from a Roman military prison around A.D. 67, Paul is alone and senses the end is near. Indeed, his martyrdom at the hands of the Romans would soon follow. But he wants to deliver one last set of challenges to Timothy and all the believers: Be strong. Do not fear. Hold to sound doctrine. Suffer hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. Preach the gospel. Fight the good fight.

He begins by thanking God for Timothy and for the uncommon blessing of Timothy’s spiritual heritage, experiences, and gifts. “Fan those gifts into flame!” Paul urges, for the Spirit that God has given us is powerful for boldness, love, and self-discipline. Knowing this, Paul tells Timothy to be ready to suffer disgrace for the sake of the gospel. But he challenges his young friend not to be ashamed. Paul knows that a prison cell was not an honorable setting from which to write a letter, yet he isn’t ashamed of the gospel or being imprisoned for it.

One measure of faithfulness is how we handle God’s Word. We shouldn’t approach God’s Word to engage in fruitless debates; instead, we should recognize it as an explanation of how to walk rightly before Him and abstain from wickedness. By fleeing selfish desires, God’s people can position themselves to be useful to Him. At the close of 2 Timothy 2, Paul tells Timothy to patiently and gently persuade his opponents to submit to God’s Word, even though difficult times were coming in these last days as men and women love what they shouldn’t—themselves, money, pleasure, etc.—and fail to love what they should, namely, God and His wisdom.

In addition to the power of the indwelling Spirit, Timothy had two additional advantages to guide him: the conduct of Paul that was worth imitating, and Scriptures he could believe. Paul promised that as Timothy followed Jesus, he would suffer persecution because suffering is normal for Christians. Yet, as evil people go from bad to worse, believers in Christ are to be transformed by the Word of God and equipped for every good work.

Paul closes his last letter with passionate urgency, charging Timothy in the presence of God and Christ Jesus to preach the Word. He exhorted him to be ready in season and out of season—to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with great patience and instruction (4:3). Paul told Timothy that he (Paul) had fought the good fight and kept the faith. Finally, he passed the baton on to Timothy and gave him an important charge: hold firm to the faithful preaching of the Word.

Introduction to Ephesians

Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians from a Roman prison in the early 60s. He wrote to the believers who lived in Ephesus (3:1, 4:1). Ephesus was a port city. Some of its economy was dependent on the worship of idols (Acts 19). Ephesians 1–3 unpack the glories of God’s mystery and His plan to overcome disunity and bring peace through Christ. This plan will culminate when heaven reunites with earth in Christ, Paul wrote, but even now Paul saw glimpses of it unfolding. Christ exercised His power to reconcile sinners to God and to one another in the church. The news of His victory spread to more and more people through servants like Paul who engaged the unreached.

In Ephesians 4–5, Paul urged believers to live as servants of Christ. It takes hard work to live together in unity, and our unity with Christ and as believers is best displayed to the world through our closest relationships: husband and wife, parent and child, employer and employee. The manner in which we live out our closest relationships will influence and affect our relationships with those in the church and the world. Preserving unity with one another in the church and promoting disunity

with the world's ways of relating and thinking embody faithfulness to God's plan. Through its unity and love, the church showcases the glory of Christ's reign to the world.

Understanding this, Paul concluded the letter in Ephesians 6 by calling the Ephesians to be strong in Christ. As believers in a world at war, we must prepare ourselves for spiritual battle, Paul wrote. Our "enemies" are not necessarily the unbelievers who cross our paths; instead, they're "victims of the enemy." By outfitting ourselves with the spiritual "equipment" we need to face the battle, we gain understanding of the true forces of evil at work in our world and can stand firm against those forces while reaching out in love to those who need the gospel.

2 Timothy 2:1-2

1 You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus,² and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

section

2 Timothy 4

Pray

Father in heaven, I long to prepare myself to teach and preach the gospel in season and out of season. Help me today to prepare both my heart and mind so I can be ready for every opportunity You place around me. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read 2 Timothy 4

We come to the end of Paul's second letter to Timothy, which he closes with seriousness and urgency. Paul gave Timothy a strong final charge, in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, to preach the Word. He exhorted him to be ready in season and out of season to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience. In other words, Timothy was to teach when fruit comes naturally and easily (in season) and when fruit seems unnatural or even impossible (out of season).

Paul knew this might be one of his final charges to Timothy. Paul was near the end of his life and ministry, so he took this opportunity to communicate a final heartfelt and urgent exhortation to his beloved friend. He told Timothy that he, Paul, had fought the good fight and kept the faith. So it was time to pass the baton to Timothy, so long as he first gave him this important charge: hold firm to the faithful preaching of the Word.

It's interesting to note that even as Paul wrote these things, he asked for his books and parchments. He was sitting in a cold prison cell and knew he was at

the end of his life. But he didn't stop fighting. He intended to spend and be spent until his last hours (2 Cor. 12:15).

Daily Verse for Meditation

2 Timothy 4:2

2 Preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

Reflect and Change

1. Someone once said that Christians are to preach the gospel in "out-of-season cultures." It's easy to share Christ boldly with someone who is primed and ready to hear. It can be easy to reprove, rebuke, and exhort a fellow believer who tries to walk a life filled with the Spirit of God. But believers are called to go to the ends of the earth and be witnesses (Acts 1:8). That means we are to be ready to preach and teach in cultures that are ready to hear (in season) and cultures that do not seem ready to hear (out of season.) This "being ready" involves preparation. So how are we preparing ourselves for this?

Go and Do

- Who has God strategically placed in your life from an out-of-season culture? Do you have a Muslim neighbor? Is there a family who speaks broken English at your child's school? Think about people who work at stores you frequent. Chances are very slim that God hasn't already placed other cultures around you. A first step toward being ready to preach or teach is meeting people! Make a plan to introduce yourself to someone from an out-of-season culture by the end of this week. Write it down, and commit to following through.

Discipleship Activities

- Plan an extended time of solitude and silence this month. Consider one of the following: a morning or evening 2–3 hour period, a personal retreat day, or combining it with a time of fasting. [[Spiritual Disciplines](#)]

Section

Ephesians 1-2

Pray

Father, thank You that in Christ there remains no blessing for You to give me! Thank You for coming to my rescue when I had earned everything but Your grace. As an act of thanks and worship today, help me to display every good work You have prepared for me. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read Ephesians 1-2

REMEMBER HONOR AND SHAME, FEAR AND POWER

We are “adopted as Sons” and are “members of God’s household”! We have honor and a new family, and there is “great power” for us who believe!”

Read some helpful thoughts on Honor & Shame, Fear & Power below

Ephesians 1:1–14 After a brief greeting, Paul praised God for all He was accomplishing through Christ for redemption (1:4) and restoration (1:10). Paul’s praise recounted God’s grace to choose a people from before the foundation of the world and to redeem this people through the forgiveness granted through Christ’s blood. All of God’s activity flows through Christ and is found in Christ. History itself is being guided to its appointed end where things in heaven and things on earth unite in Christ (1:10). This plan is unfolding through the Spirit of promise who keeps the saints for that day. Three times, in verses 6, 12, and 14, Paul expressed the “why” behind all of this gracious activity of God: “to the praise of His glory.” God’s lavish grace awakens songs of lavish praise like those Paul expressed here.

Notice how these believers were included in this grace in 1:13. They heard the gospel, they believed the gospel, and the Holy Spirit allowed them to partake of the gospel. Who around you needs to hear?

Ephesians 1:15–23 Praise, especially when it orients us to God’s massive plan of redemption and restoration, also leads to prayer. Therefore, Paul transitioned to prayer in verses 15–23 with the words “for this reason.” Paul’s first request was that the Ephesians would know God for who He is. He then went on to pray they would know the hope to which they’re headed and the privilege it is to be the church. He also hoped that God would give them spiritual strength.

PAUL’S PRAYERS

[Pray with Paul using his prayers for the churches in his letters.](#)

The strength Paul described flows from Christ who has conquered all and is risen and reigning over all (1:20–23). Christ died and was raised and now is seated above all. He has no ultimate rival and so we have no ultimate threat as the church. He is everything the church needs.

DEAD?

[What does total depravity mean? \(1:35min\)](#)

Ephesians 2:1–10 The ascension of Christ to the right hand of God was the turning point in a spiritual battle that every person has been a part of since birth. Some had chosen sides with Christ’s opposition and were actually delighting in their defiance, yet they were spiritually dead in their desperate condition (2:1–3).

But God, in His great mercy, made His people alive together with Christ and seated them with Him in the heavenly realm. The Holy Spirit graciously made them partakers of Christ’s victory through no merit of their own (2:8–10). As a result, the

Ephesians could give witness to the heavenly realms that God's plan to redeem and restore was underway through Christ.

Christ brought about reconciliation to God (2:1–10) and reconciliation to brothers and sisters (2:11–22). This is God's design in the gospel: "In Him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit" (2:22).

GOD'S PURPOSE OF GRACE

[Read more about what we believe about God's Purpose of Grace.](#)

God's grace has set in motion a plan to redeem a people for His Son and restore creation to its original design for His Son. God's plan to restore—His "mystery"—is now underway. Christ ascended and is now rescuing rebellious sinners from their enmity toward God and one another. Believers in Christ are made right with God and are being built together as the church on earth. The coming peace is foreshadowed on earth through peaceful churches that are created by the cross.

① HONOR/SHAME, FEAR/POWER, AND GUILT/INNOCENCE

THREE ASPECTS OF CULTURE: THREE RESULTS OF SIN

Each culture has its own personality. Some people even call it a culturality! That said, cultures are usually a mixture of these three types:

1. Guilt/Innocence
2. Shame/Honor
3. Fear/Power

Each of these somewhat determines the different ways a person will initially hear the gospel.

It's important to be aware that people from **honor/shame** or **fear/power** cultures may initially hear the gospel differently than those from **guilt/innocence** ones.

Of course, the gospel is good news to all, to those overwhelmed by shame or fear as well as those who feel guilty. In Genesis 2 and 3, we read that sin affects societies in all three ways, not just one. Likewise, Christ's life, sacrificial death, and resurrection addresses all three of these aspects—not just one. Once aware of this, we begin to see how God's gospel is beautifully designed to address all the effects and problems of sin.

The gospel addresses the effects of sin in animistic or folk religious communities (usually fear/power cultures) as well as shame/honor societies. It's good to pay attention to these three dimensions of sin's effects so that when we read Scripture we don't miss how the gospel speaks to each of them. Similarly, as we share the gospel, we should be alert to proclaim the good news as it applies to every result of sin and not just one.

Warning: A gospel presentation that ONLY addresses guilt, shame, or fear is missing something. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection solves the sin problem and addresses the effects of sin for anyone who turns from sin and believes.

3 ASPECTS OF CULTURES, 3 RESULTS OF SIN

Guilt – Innocence: This is present in more individualistic societies (mostly Western) where people who break the law are guilty and seek justice or forgiveness to rectify a wrong.

Shame – Honor: This is present in more collectivistic societies (common

in the East) where people are shamed for not fulfilling group expectations and then seek to restore their honor before their community. In these cultures, the loss of identity and being cast out brings shame. Conversely, inclusion restores honor.

Fear – Power: This is present in more animistic societies (typically tribal or folk religious) where people who are afraid of evil pursue power over the spirit world through magical rituals, superstition, and magic.

We can see how the gospel addresses all three of these in the book of Ephesians.

- “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins . . .” (1:7). “God made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in our transgressions . . .” (2:5) Our **guilt** is forgiven!
- “In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ . . .” (1:5). “You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household” (2:19). You have **honor** in God’s household! In Christ, your **shame** is covered.
- “That power is like the working of His mighty strength, which He exerted in Christ when He raised him from the dead and seated Him at his right hand in the heavenly realms . . .”(1:19–20) Christ has **power** over **fear** and death!

Can you think of other examples in the Word?

MORE IN-DEPTH EXPLANATION

[Honor/Shame Resource](#)

Daily Verse for Meditation

Ephesians 2:8-10

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Reflect and Change

1. Praise isn't merely a byproduct of receiving such wonderful grace. It's the purpose. Spend a few moments writing your own praise to our triune God for specific graces He has shown you in Christ. Like Paul, share your praise with another believer to encourage him or her.
2. There is one command in Ephesians 1–2: “Remember” (2:11). Remember what it was like before Christ came and brought peace. Remember what it was like before we believed and had no hope and were “without God in the world” (2:12). Take some time to reflect on your life before Christ and praise God for the reach of His mercy.

Go and Do

- Weave [Ephesians 2:1–10](#) as a part of your testimony to share with an unbeliever this week. Note the change from what you were (2:1–3) to who you are now in Christ (2:4–10).

Discipleship Activities

- Read this brief page on [storying](#). Choose a story to learn, and do three things: 1) pick out central truths, 2) discern the different “scenes” in the story, and 3) write out the story in your own words. Then choose questions to ask afterwards. [[Teaching Simply, Making Disciples](#)]

Section

Ephesians 3-4

Pray

Father, give me strength so that Christ can live richly in me today through my attitudes and actions. Help me understand how great Your love is for me and for all disciples of Jesus everywhere. Help me to live in humility and submission with other disciples, and help us to love and forgive one another. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read Ephesians 3-4

Ephesians 3:1–13 Christ's ascension was the game-changer for God's plan. The realization that God's "mystery" had been unveiled through Christ led Paul in Ephesians both to pray (1:15) and take action (3:1). So Paul begins Ephesians 3 by describing how his life was an instrument in God's plan of redemption and restoration. Paul aligned his life with God's agenda to bring the good news to all peoples who were "fellow-heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (3:6). The church that has been created by this preaching of the good news confounds the heavenly enemies of Christ as God's wisdom is displayed through her unity (3:10).

Ephesians 3:14–21 This led Paul to write another prayer for the believers in Ephesus. His prayer centered on two requests for the church: strength through the Spirit and knowledge of the extent of Christ's love. For believers, this knowledge becomes corporately accessible as believers are "rooted and grounded in love." But in one sense, this love always remains incomplete because there are always more dimensions to explore.

This love of Christ “surpasses knowledge” (3:19) but God is able to “do far more than we ask or think” (3:20) so that it may bring Him glory. May our churches be filled with the “fullness of God.”

Ephesians 4:1–16 The tone of the book changes in the last half of the book. Now that the mystery has been unveiled (Ephesians 1–3), it’s time for it to be unleashed into a world that desperately needs to see it lived out in our churches (Ephesians 4–6). To preserve the unity Christ has created in the church, Christians must walk worthily, according to the calling outlined in the book’s first three chapters.

We protect unity by pursuing proper heart attitudes like humility and gentleness (4:2–3) and by recalling our identity that God Himself has acted to establish (4:4–6). Notice the “assumed” commonalities of the church: faith, baptism, hope, and calling. What’s more, further dimensions of unity are possible because, even now, the ascended and glorified Christ is using His limitless resources to fuel the church’s growth on earth. This means each member has been gifted to help the church grow as they “speak the truth in love” to one another and use their gifts in service (4:7, 4:14–16).

Ephesians 4:17–32 The transformation Christ brought involves a radical shift away from former ways of thinking and darkened understandings. In response to this, Christ now seeks to enlist people in proper service (4:17–19). Christians have been freed from dungeons of deceit and are being recreated in God’s likeness, in “true righteousness and holiness” (4:24). This new self puts off deceit (4:25), unrighteous anger (4:26), greed, stealing (4:28), unwholesome speech (4:29), and every manner of harsh heart attitudes that threaten relationships in the church (4:31).

Christians are indwelt by the Spirit and live together in the shadow of God’s forgiveness in Christ. Because of this, Paul wrote, they must be kind and quick to forgive. The “me” that once dominated has been replaced by the “we” of the church.

Service to others has replaced enlisting others to serve us.

The message is out, and the world needs to hear. Paul had been entrusted with bringing this news to the nations. What's more, our peace-creating Christ has transformed our local churches. So we must walk in unity, unleashing the power of the mystery into a world of enmity and division.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Ephesians 4:1-3

1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Reflect and Change

1. Like Paul, some of us may be involved on the frontiers of gospel ministry. Some of us may have a different role, but all of us must ask this question: How is my life aligned with God's agenda to bring good news to the world? Where am I particularly fueling His mission on the edges and in our local churches? This won't be easy, but it was a non-negotiable for Paul, even to the point of embracing suffering (3:12b) and becoming a prisoner (3:1, 4:1). What can we sacrifice in order to bring the gospel to the nations, to our neighbors, and to our church family?
2. Prayer oriented Paul to the limitless resources of strength and the depth of Christ's love for the church. He included two prayers in this short letter (1:15–23; 3:14–21) that work as a useful model for us. Using Paul's prayers as a guide, reach out to a fellow member of your church and pray with them for your church.
3. Are you eager about maintaining the unity of your church? There may

be believers who need encouragement in your life. Take some time and consider specific ways you can encourage them this week and do it.

Go and Do

- Find an unreached people group with whom your church has a relationship, and engage someone who works with that group. Ask that individual or family for specific prayer requests. Learn about the people group and the family, and meet together with some believers to pray for them specifically.

Section

Ephesians 5-6

Pray

Father, thank You for saving me from a life of sin to a life that can truly please You. Help me reflect Your greatness in all of my relationships—as a spouse, parent, child, sibling, neighbor, church member, and employee. Give us strength to stand firm against the onslaughts of those who are Your enemies. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read Ephesians 5-6

Ephesians 5:1–16 A new way of life, or in Paul's language, a new "walk," had replaced the Ephesians' old walk of disobedience (2:1–3). The Ephesians used to live in opposition to God, but now, as followers of Jesus, they are called to walk in a way that conforms to God.

In other words, churches should reflect God's character. As He loved them in Christ, so should believers love one another (5:1–2). As Jesus is light, so the church should be an instrument of light in a dark world (5:8–9). The distinction between the church and the world must be kept crisp and clear. This translates into pure ways of relating and talking to one another (5:3–7). Discernment and diligence will be needed as the church navigates the path that is "good and right and true" (5:8–16).

Ephesians 5:17–6:9 Time is precious, Paul wrote, so the Ephesians shouldn't waste time in drunkenness. The church must give itself to understanding the will of the Lord and "addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs," with thanksgiving in each individual's heart (5:17–20). The Spirit saturates the church's

time together in these spiritual songs and produces a way of relating to one another that seems foreign in this world. Instead of domineering over one another, the Ephesians should submit to each other out of reverence for Christ as Lord.

MARRIAGE

[Read what we believe about the Family from the BFM.](#)

RAISE THEM IN HIS IMAGE, NOT YOURS

Watch Melissa Kruger, Jen Wilkin, and Kristie Anyabwile discuss [paradigm-shifting moments in their experience as moms. \(6:37 min\)](#)



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This submission takes shape in three particular relationships: wives to husbands (5:22–33), children to parents (6:1–4), and employees to employers (6:5–8). Marriage, family, and work become avenues to display our reverence for Christ. Those in authority don't abuse their authority but lead as Christ did, putting others' interests before their own. Husbands serve their wives sacrificially (5:23–28), fathers nurture (6:4), and bosses don't enforce their authority but engender it through humble leadership (6:9).

When we submit to God's design and seek to serve in our leadership roles, we give the world a glimpse of how good submission to Christ is. Paul spends time unpacking the marriage relationship more thoroughly because it specially illustrates God's activity in the mystery of two becoming one (5:31–32).

Ephesians 6:10–24 Paul begins his conclusion with the word “finally” in 6:10. Our war isn't over, and the church finds itself in the middle of a struggle “not with flesh and blood” but cosmic forces of evil in the heavenly places (6:12). By being “strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might” and taking “up the full armor of God,” Christians will be able to stand against the devil's scheming (6:10, 11, 13, 14).

This armor imagery originated in the Old Testament; it includes images of how the Messiah will be clothed in God's armor and emerge victorious from battle. Taking up His armor, the church is assured of victory because He has already won (1:20–23). In Him, the church is strong and will triumph. Christians, therefore, take up this armor prayerfully (6:18) and in faith as they claim God's promises, which are theirs in Christ (6:16).

Because the evil one is losing ground, Paul encouraged the church to pray for the “troops” on the front line. Like Paul, these troops are taking the “mystery of the gospel” to places and people who hadn't heard yet it. The Ephesians should pray for these servants' boldness and clarity as they proclaim the good news. After all, as Paul wrote, Christian workers are messengers of peace during this war.

The line between the church and the world must be kept clear, which is why Christ created a new way of relating to one another in love and submission. As we are conformed to God's character, we will look increasingly odd to a world at war. Though the church still faces opposition, we can be confident she will emerge victorious, as believers depend on the strength God supplies.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Ephesians 5:1-2

1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Reflect and Change

1. Conformity to the world both blurs the line between the church and the world and dilutes the potency of our witness to Christ through the church. Are there ways we need to repent of impurity in speech or practice? Turning from these sins may require us to seek help from others in the church. Whose help do you need? Who can you help? Do you need a resource like Covenant Eyes to help you stay pure?
2. Where can you seek to be more submissive in your daily life? If you're in a leadership role, how can you bless those who have been entrusted to your care?
3. Do you know anyone who is on the frontier of gospel ministry? How can you pray for them? What people group has God placed on your heart? If there isn't one, talk to your church leaders and begin praying!
4. To stand against the devil, we need to take up the armor of God. What promises are you actively relying on to enable your stand against the devil's schemes? What promise can you encourage someone else with today to help them be strong in the Lord?

Go and Do

- Ask two people close to you if they see ways your life is conforming to the world and is not in line with God's Word. Ask them for help and prayer.

Discipleship Activities

- Plan a time with your community group leader, pastor, or someone who knows you well to seek their evaluation of your gifts. Let them know ahead of time so they can prayerfully prepare. [[Being a Disciple, Local Church](#)]

Section

1 John 1-2

Pray

Father, thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus, to be the incarnation of You. Through Your Word, please shape my understanding of Christ so that I may walk in His light. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read 1 John 1-2

1 John 1:1–4 Rather than address the false teaching about Jesus by saying, “Hey guys, Jesus was fully God and fully human!” John begins his letter by establishing the Son’s “God-ness.” Obviously, no mere man has been “from the beginning.” He goes on to remind his readers that the divine nature of Christ wasn’t something Christians made up; Jesus was revealed to us as the eternal “Word of life.”

1 John 1:1–10 John quickly outlined how sinful human beings can be in a right relationship with God; in short, they must consistently ask for forgiveness and “walk in the light.” Not only does this establish our connection to God, it’s the foundation of our connection to God’s people. Jesus is the pathway that gives us access to God and to the fellowship of His church.

DO NOT LOVE THE WORLD!

Hear a 3-minute encouragement to [not love the world](#).



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1 John 2 So we see that life in Christ is more than just an internal attitude; it always affects our behavior. This means our relationship with God is demonstrated through our obedience. The challenge comes from the world, which threatens our relationship with God and His people by enticing and distracting us. If we see things through the world's eyes, we won't see things from God's perspective. John reminds us of the simple truth that we must remain in Christ and be faithful to Him alone.

Daily Verse for Meditation

1 John 1:6-7

6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

Reflect and Change

1. What does it mean to be “in Christ” (2:5–6)? Are you in Christ? How would anyone know whether or not you are?
2. In what ways do you “love the world” (2:15)? How is Christ the antidote for the world’s fleeting attraction?

Go and Do

- Spend an extended time with God today. Meditate on 1 John 1:5–9, confessing personal sin and expressing gratitude for God’s forgiveness.
- It’s been said that sin is the result of believing lies. On a piece of paper divided into three columns, list in the left-hand column any of Christ’s commands that you struggle to obey. In the center column, beside each item in your list, write out the lie you’ve been believing that has led to your disobedience. In the third column, write out God’s truth from Scripture that addresses this sin.

*Section***1, 2, 3 John****Introduction to 1 John**

This letter is attributed to John, Christ's beloved disciple, and it bears his unmistakably simple and pastoral style. It was likely written sometime between A.D. 80–85 to churches in Asia Minor. John wrote to address influential false teaching that was plaguing these early churches. In short, some Christians were starting to question whether Jesus had truly been both God and man.

John begins his letter with Christ, who "was from the beginning." He wants his readers to remember that Jesus is the Son of God; he also wants to establish John's own credibility to testify about Jesus, the man. John was a dear friend of Jesus, the disciple "whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23). It was John's personal relationship with Jesus that qualified him to set the record straight about Jesus' divinity and humanity. Sent by the Father to redeem the world from sin, the Son remained fully God, yet also fully human.

John begins his letter by establishing the Son's "God-ness." Obviously, no mere man has been "from the beginning." He reminds his readers that the divine nature of Christ wasn't something Christians made up; Jesus was revealed to us as the eternal "Word of life." John outlines how sinful human beings can be in a right relationship with God: by asking for forgiveness and "walking in the light."

In 1 John 2, we see how life in Christ is more than just an internal attitude; it always affects behavior. This means our relationship with God is demonstrated through our obedience in a world filled with temptations.

1 John 3 continues John's defense against false teaching by equipping his audience to discern who is in Christ. Genuine brothers and sisters will exhibit certain characteristics: purity, righteousness, obedience, and, ultimately, love for God and others. If we're to be known for the kind of love Christ demonstrated for us, then we ought to lay down our lives for each other. We should expect the world to misunderstand and even hate us for being in Christ, yet we should also demonstrate God's love with actions.

In 1 John 4, John returns to the deity and humanity of Jesus by reminding readers that the key to faith is knowing God.

In 1 John 5, John makes it clear that Christians are able to relate to God through Jesus, who being both fully God and fully human, provides the way for us to be reconciled to the Father. If we don't believe Jesus is the Son of God, then we don't have access to His power, which overcomes both the world and the sin in us. But when we do abide in Christ, then we can pray with confidence, knowing our prayers align with God's will. We can also correct one another in love and prevent ourselves from falling for the lies of the enemy. False teachings will come and go, but our standing with God is sealed in Christ, not our knowledge. God gives us the understanding we need in order to be in Christ (5:20).

Introduction to 2 John

What role does discernment play in the desire of Christians to cooperate with and encourage others engaged in missions? In John's second letter, he reminds his readers how truth and love must walk together. Unswerving devotion to Christ and His teaching should guide us in our missionary cooperation and support. In this most brief of letters, the apostle counsels a friend or local church, described as "the elect lady," about how to evaluate fellow workers. Through it all, one theme stands out as both our guide and goal: the truth.

John teaches that a right concern for truth leads not to legalism but to obedient

love. In a fallen world, however, only “some” who claim the name of Christ actually walk in the truth. So John warns about the “deceivers” who deny the nature of Christ and go beyond Christ’s teaching, finally declaring that such a teacher “does not have God” (1:9). John instructs the church not to welcome or support such teachers; in fact, he says that anyone who does support these teachers “shares in his evil work” (1:11). After these stern warnings, he closes with warmth and affection toward his “children,” noting that only when he sees them face-to-face will his “joy be complete.”

Introduction to 3 John

As in his prior letter, in 3 John the apostle continues to instruct Christians about how they should relate to and support missionaries. And again, John tells us that the test for whom we should encourage and support revolves around one thing: truth.

But where 2 John tells us whom we should NOT to support, 3 John tells us whom we OUGHT to support—both why and how. As he discusses this, John introduces us to three people: Gaius, Diotrephes, and Demetrius. With each person, John is at pains to discuss how their lives relate to the truth—for better or worse. For example, Gaius loves others because of the truth (1:1–8), Diotrephes loves himself more than the truth (1:9–10), and Demetrius rejects what is evil and chooses the truth (1:11–12).

Again, John ends his letter with warm affection and a desire to see his friends face-to-face. While some of the words in the letter are stern, they serve as a useful reminder that through it all, love is the apostle’s guiding motivation and spiritual good is his goal.

2 Timothy 4:1-5

1 I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom:2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.3 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions,4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.5 As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Section
1 John 3

Pray

Lord, You alone are worthy of our love and devotion. You bless us with Your righteousness, and You love through us. Protect us from the evil in our own hearts as we pursue life in You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Reflect and Change

Read 1 John 3

John continued his defense against false teaching by equipping his audience to discern who is in Christ. He didn't set up Christians to judge one another, but rather to look at the love we have for one another as evidence of living in Christ (3:14). Genuine brothers and sisters will exhibit certain characteristics: they'll be given to purity (3:3), they don't continue in sin (3:6), and they keep God's commandments (3:24).

HABITUAL SIN

Believers sin, but they don't continue in habitual sin without repentance. (3-min)



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Ultimately, the fruit of remaining in Christ is love for God and love for others (3:10–11). God’s people ought to be known for the kind of love that Christ demonstrated for us, such that we lay down our lives for one another (3:16). John set the love we have in Christ against the hatred the world has for Him and us, God’s people. In fact, John says, we should expect the world to misunderstand us (3:1) and even hate us for being in Christ (3:13). Nevertheless, we demonstrate God’s love with actions and truth (3:18).

LOVE IN TRUTH

Watch a short video encouraging us to love in actions and truth. (3:30 min)



Video posted under Standard YouTube License.

Daily Verse for Meditation

1 John 3:16

16 By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

Reflect and Change

1. In 1 John 3:8, John writes, “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.” How has Jesus destroyed the devil’s work in

your life?

2. In your life, how are you loving others? How are you laying down your life for brothers and sisters in Christ?

Go and Do

Prayerfully look for physical needs around you. Find a way to apply 1 John 3:17 by providing for the immediate needs of someone else. Expecting nothing in return for your loving actions, note the response of the person you help. Evaluate how your actions affect you and record your response in your journal.

Discipleship Activities

- Practice telling the story you learned last week to your family or community group. Ask questions about the story, and see if they remembered the main points and understood it. [[Teaching Simply, Making Disciples](#)]

1 John 4-5

Pray

Lord, thank You for sending Your Son to be the way for us to know You. I confess my faith in You and ask You to help my unbelief. May I learn from Your Word with an open heart, and may the knowledge I gain only serve to conform me more to the image of Jesus, Your Son. In His name, amen.

Reflect and Change

Read 1 John 4-5

1 John 4 John began the last chapter of this letter about the deity and humanity of Jesus by reminding the reader that the key to faith is knowing God. It's through our close connection to God and His people, through Jesus, that we're able to discern God's truth from the world's lies (4:6).

THE GOD-MAN, JESUS CHRIST

Watch this 3-minute video on [the incarnation](#).



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When we abide in Christ, we can pray with confidence, knowing our prayers align with God's will (4:14). We can also correct one another in love, and prevent ourselves from falling for the lies of the enemy (4:9–21). In this way, God's people identify with the Son (4:12).

You might imagine the confusion this teaching may have caused in the early church. In conclusion, John comforted believers with truths we can depend on. Sure, false teachings will come and go. But our standing with God is sealed in Christ, not our knowledge (4:13). God hears us when we pray (4:14), and though life is full of spiritual danger, God keeps His people safe from the evil one (4:18). To be sure, there is some mystery to our faith, but God gives us the understanding we need in order to be in Christ (4:20).

Daily Verse for Meditation

1 John 4:9-11

9 In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Reflect and Change

1. How can we identify false teachers? What does John mean when he writes that we should "test the spirits" (1 John 4:1)?
2. 1 John 4:18 says, "There is no fear in love; instead, perfect love casts out fear." What are you afraid of? How does God's love combat those fears in your life?
3. In 1 John 5:14, we read that God hears us when we ask in accordance with His will. What should you ask of God? How do you know this is "in accordance with His will"?

Go and Do

- The fullness of God in the person of Jesus is difficult to understand and even more difficult to explain. Yet the doctrine of incarnation (that Jesus was God in flesh) is essential to our faith. In Colossians 1, Paul wrote that “God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile everything to Himself.” Using what you’ve read about the incarnation in 1 John and in Colossians, meditate on both the divinity and humanity of Jesus.

Discipleship Activities

Research and learn about available evangelism tools like [The Story](#) app. Or go to these helpful resources: [Getting2Gospel Buddhism](#), [G2GHinduism](#), [G2GIslam](#), and [G2GSikism](#). [[Making Disciples](#)]

2 John

Pray

God, please help us love all Your true children simply because they, too, are in Christ. And help us be wise as we test all teaching and teachers by their faithfulness to Christ and His revealed Word. By this, may our love for You and Your children be made evident to all. In Christ's name, amen.

Reflect and Change

Read 2 John

What role does discernment play in the open-hearted desire of Christians to cooperate with and encourage others engaged in missions? In John's second letter, he reminded his readers how our unswerving devotion to the truth about Christ and His teaching should guide us in our missionary cooperation and support.

In this brief letter, the apostle John reminded a friend or local church—"the elect lady"—how to wisely evaluate itinerate missionaries. As you read, consider what John encouraged, what he warned about, and how he advised that missionaries be tested. Through it all, one theme stands out as our guide and goal: the truth.

1. Truth: the basis for gospel cooperation (v. 1–3)
2. Truth: the source of loving obedience (v. 4–6)
3. Truth: worth defending from falsehood (v. 7–11)
4. Concluding greetings (v. 12–13)

John is clear that regardless of what Christians may or may not have in common, our unity is built not on worldly commonalities but on the truth we share. John wrote with evident love—he and his readers were all “in the truth,” and they all “know the truth” which “remains with us forever.” In fact, without shared Christian truth, there’s no such thing as distinctly Christian love.

Moreover, that truth isn’t merely in our minds; it impacts the way we walk and live. Notice how John teaches that a right concern for truth leads not to legalism but obedient love. Like two dancers who clasp hands and joyfully spin faster and faster, truth and love together in the lives of God’s “children” produce a synergy of godliness that warms the heart of the old apostle. Notice how serious attention to truth, obedience, and love work together as friends, not enemies.

But in a fallen world, only “some” who claim the name of Christian actually walk in the truth. So, John warned next about the “deceivers” who deny the nature of Christ and who innovate, going “beyond” Christ’s teaching, finally declaring that such a teacher “does not have God.”

Consider what a warning this is to us to stick closely to the Scriptures in all we do and say. Also, note John’s instruction not to welcome or support any teachers who are guilty of such things, saying that anyone who does “shares in his evil work.” These are words of warning to all who would wander “beyond” what God has written. But they’re also words of comfort to all who cling tightly to the truth revealed by Christ through His apostles in His Word.

Finally, note the genuine warmth of John’s conclusion. All his talk of “truth” and “commands” and “obedience” doesn’t blunt the sweetness of John’s love for his “children.” In fact, only when he sees them face-to-face will his “joy be complete.” May the same affectionate harmony between truth and love be evident in us all.

Daily Verse for Meditation

2 John 6

6 And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it.

Reflect and Change

1. John's love for other Christians is fundamentally rooted in shared truth, about and through Christ. Are there ways you are tempted to try to build unity and love among Christians on anything less than shared love for gospel truth?
2. John seems convinced that keeping God's commands must involve loving others and that love motivates us to walk according to His commands. Are there ways you are tempted to think of obedience and love as somehow at odds in your life? How might reflecting on the gospel help you think better in this regard?
3. The false teachers in John's letter seemed to have denied the incarnation of Christ and developed teaching that literally "ran ahead" of Christ's teaching. What test does he give us to determine if a teacher falls into this category of falsehood? How would you apply that test?
4. In 2 John 10, John sternly commands the elect lady not to welcome false teachers, give them a platform for teaching in the assembly of Christians, nor support them. Do you think this means we should never welcome a non-Christian (who holds to false teaching) into our home? (Hint: The answer seems clearly to be "no.") How else, then, might we err by welcoming and assisting false teachers, especially in our churches and ministry relationships?

Go and Do

- Resolve this week to spend time talking to someone in your church with whom you don't have much in common other than a shared love for Christ and what He's done for you in the gospel.
- Pray for God to help you better integrate your love for the truth, your love for His commands, and your love for other Christians.
- Spend some time considering if there are ways you're tempted to minimize important gospel truths in the name of love. Or, perhaps you too often handle truth in ways that are harsh and unloving. Ask a couple of trusted Christian friends what they think about you in this regard.

3 John

Pray

God, help us desire that You would be honored—and not merely through us, but through all people. Protect us from the evil desire that is only excited about gospel fruit when it comes through our lives or our ministry. Help us to richly support others who labor for the truth, for Your name's sake, not for ours. In Jesus' name, amen.

Reflect and Change

Read 3 John

As in his prior letter, 3 John continues to instruct Christians about how they should relate to and support missionaries. And, again, the apostle John tells us the test for whom we should encourage and support revolves around one thing: the truth. But where 2 John helped us know whom not to support, 3 John tells us whom we ought to support—including the why and how. In so doing, John introduces us to three key persons: Gaius, Diotrephes, and Demetrius. As you read, consider how each person relates to the truth and how that shapes everything else about their lives—for better or for worse.

1. Gaius loves others because of the truth. (v. 1–8)
2. Diotrephes loves himself more than the truth. (v. 9–10)
3. Demetrius rejects what is evil and chooses the truth. (v. 11–12)
4. Concluding greetings (v. 13–14)

Consider Gaius, whom John loves in truth. John is confident that Gaius is doing well spiritually. Why? Because for the sake of the truth, Gaius is willing to support

missionaries he doesn't even personally know, merely because Gaius knows they were sent by someone he trusts (John's church). Such support of gospel workers isn't merely a good thing to do, but something we "ought" to do.

And notice the two tests of support-worthy workers that John mentions: 1) those who have gone out for gospel reasons, "for the sake of the Name"; and 2) those who aren't motivated for the sake of gain from the pagans. As Gaius inconveniences himself for such men, notice how John describes him: "faithful" and a "coworker with the truth."

None of this, unfortunately, is the case for Diotrephes. He, we're told, "loves to have first place." In stark contrast, notice what hellish fruit comes from his misplaced love and pride. In the end, it seems he's willing to openly oppose legitimate gospel work merely because he won't get the credit for it.

Most disturbingly, John doesn't mention any theological error in Diotrephes. He may well have stated all orthodox positions. But because of Diotrephes' pride and competitive spirit, John pronounces that his work is "evil."

And then there's Demetrius, an example of one who rejects evil and chooses what is good. Perhaps Demetrius was the bearer of John's letter or an example from a nearby church. In any case, he's clearly a model to be imitated as one who has seen God and lives a life in keeping with the truth. Demetrius, not Diotrephes, is the kind of man John hopes Gaius will model his life after.

Yet again, John ends his letter with warm affection and a desire to see his friends face-to-face. While some of the words in the letter are stern, they're also a reminder that through it all, love is the apostle's guiding motivation. Both in warning and in encouragement, John's motive is love, and his goal is spiritual good for all who would read and heed his words.

Daily Verse for Meditation

3 John 7-8

7 For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. 8 Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

Reflect and Change

1. John lays out a two-part test in 3 John 7 for the missionaries we ought to support. An old British pastor commented regarding this verse: “There are many good causes which we may support; but we must support our brothers and sisters whom the world does not support.” How do those two factors influence the priorities in your own giving and the giving of your local church?
2. John also lays out the high biblical standard for our missionary support—“in a manner worthy of God,” he writes. Similarly, in Titus 3:13, the Apostle Paul instructs Titus that his goal in supporting two particular gospel workers should be “so that they will lack nothing.” Is this kind of abundant provision characteristic of your own support for missionaries or that of your local church? If not, why not?
3. Consider your own heart. How would it change if you prayed and labored for years for the gospel to take root and flourish among a particular people or place? Then how would you respond if, after years of prayer and labor, God decided to cause the seed of his Word to spring up, resulting in an amazing harvest of souls and churches planted? Conversely, how would your response change if God did all that through the ministry of another church on the other side of town? What if you or your church weren’t really a part of the harvest at all? Would you be like Diotrephes or Gaius?
4. Notice the importance of good examples. Demetrius is commended as one whose conduct is worthy of imitation. Consider whom you are

imitating and why.

Go and Do

- Resolve this week to pray daily and by name for another Bible-believing, gospel-preaching church in your community. Pray that God would bless their ministry and bring in a wonderful harvest through them. And pray for God to help you really mean what you pray.
- Evaluate your own support for missionaries, either individually or church-wide. Is your goal for abundant provision consistent with what we've read in 3 John? If not, consider what might need to change to make that more of a reality.
- Look for godly examples of this kind of big-hearted love and obedience in your own local church. Consider the practices or traits that you should imitate in order to become more like the Christ they're seeking to imitate, too.

Discipleship Activities

- Schedule a time to begin teaching [Creation to Christ](#) to another disciple. Teach the first three lessons. [[Teaching Simply, Making Disciples](#)]

Section

Review

Pray

Lord, help me as I reflect on what I've learned these past six weeks. Thank You for all I've seen in Your Word. Thank You for how You have helped me—and help me not forget how You've challenged me. Thank You that You are always with us. May I live for Your glory. In Jesus' name, amen.

Review

1. Think back to your reading from the Word these past six weeks. What specific things has God shown you? What about from your memory work? Stop now and take notes, if you haven't already, on any truths you want to remember from this time.
2. Reflect on what you learned from the “Reflect and Change” questions. Again, stop and note anything you want to remember, pray about, or continue to work on. What have you learned from other people?
3. Review the two sections: “Go and Do” and “Discipleship Activities.” How did you see God help you? Were there any new activities you want to continue? Anything you want further help on? Any new relationships to keep pursuing?

Celebrate

1. Celebrate how the Lord has helped you these past six weeks! Celebrate the truths He's shown you in His Word. Celebrate any new acts of obedience He's helped you cultivate, as well as any areas of growth. Celebrate new relationships you have made.
2. Take notes of these things to celebrate with your Deepen Discipleship

group; celebrate together what the Lord has done.

Pray

1. Stop now and pray, thanking God for His Word, for His people, and for His Spirit that works in us.
2. Pray for any new relationships that have begun during these six weeks. Pray for God to work in their lives and for you to continue to have the boldness, opportunities, and ability to share the truth of the gospel with those who do not believe.
3. Pray for the other people in your Deepen Discipleship group. Pray also for the ones they've met and shared truth with. Pray for God's continued work in their lives.
4. Pray for yourself—for God's continued work in your life, for any specific areas of growth you want to pursue, and for continued faithfulness in discipleship routines.
5. Pray for your church, for those both leading and following.

Plan

1. Deepen Discipleship continues! Make plans with your leader to keep persevering.
2. Prayerfully plan how you will continue to follow up with new relationships.
3. Prayerfully plan any habits or routines you should start, stop, or continue.

Section

John (Part 1)

Introduction to the Gospel of John

The Gospel of John explains who Jesus is, appeals to the reader to respond in faith, and highlights the benefits a life of faith in the Son of God. Interestingly, the book begins and ends with statements that Jesus is God (1:1, 20:28).

Date and author: The fourth Gospel was probably written by John, the beloved disciple who is mentioned but not named in the book. John also wrote the book of Revelation and 1, 2, and 3 John. John the Apostle was apparently a Christian overseer in Ephesus and likely wrote the book between 80–100 A.D. John had been an eyewitness of Jesus, and he had also seen the Holy Spirit work mightily in the first century to establish churches amidst the Roman Empire. It's perhaps these perspectives that cause him to include material that is nowhere to be found in the other Gospels :Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In fact, over 90% of the material in John's Gospel is unique to John.

Purpose: John seems to have a very specific purpose in mind as he writes this gospel. He seems to be making an appeal to his readers urging them to do three things:

1. Understand that this Jesus of Nazareth is the Promised Christ, the Son of God.
2. Believe in Jesus and find a life abundant.
3. Be born again from above so that you are equipped to live the genuine life God intends.

In John 20:30–31, he makes one thing clear about his purpose in writing: “These (things) are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ; and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

In John, we read that Jesus is the Son of God sent into the world by the Father to accomplish the Father’s purposes and then to return to Him in glory. John organizes his Gospel so readers understand Jesus as the sent One who is also the Good Shepherd promised in the Old Testament. Behind all this is the Father’s glorious and wise rule over every event in history including Jesus’ life, death, and return to glory.

The Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit work together to accomplish God’s mission and purpose. In his final speech to his disciples, Jesus gathers the new community and commissions them as agents and representatives of Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit (John 14–17)

John sought to lead men to eternal life by first convincing them that Jesus was the Divine Savior. Jesus’ miracles were recorded as “signs” to confirm His deity, that He was Jehovah God, the incarnate Word made flesh. John called Jesus the Bread of Life, Light of the World, the Good Shepherd, the Way, the Truth, the Life, and the True Vine; each of these titles carries Old Testament significance, indicating Jesus was no ordinary man. John points to everything in Jesus’ life and teaching as a sign that Jesus of Nazareth was truly the eternal Word of God who “became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). John highlights Jesus as the teacher and the doer of signs or miracles which validate his teaching and show His claims are true: He is equal with God, and He is God in the flesh.

Clearly, John’s book is no mere biography; it’s a theological argument. John wants to convince his readers that Jesus of Nazareth is God the Son. Then he wants to show us how that fact will change our lives in amazing ways. After all, it’s by believing in Jesus Christ as the Son of God that we find life—real and eternal life.

Every event John records is designed to show Jesus as God. John pulls specific incidents from the life of Jesus that demonstrate his majesty and deity. Of particular interest to John are the signs/miracles of Jesus. In the first 12 chapters of his book, John records seven miracles. These miracles were not performed simply to alleviate human suffering or meet human need. The miracles were “signs,” which means they pointed to the truth of Jesus’ claim to be the Son of God. Both Jesus’ “I am” sayings and His signs/miracles are central to understanding the Gospel of John and the life of Jesus.

John’s Gospel seems to have been written both to encourage existing believers and to clearly demonstrate Jesus’ identity as the Son of God to those who had yet to believe. Additionally, John’s original readers are both Jews and Gentiles, so look for statements like the one he records in perhaps the Bible’s most famous verse: God so loved “the world” that he sent Jesus so “whoever” (Jew or Gentile!) believes in Him would have eternal life (3:16). As you read John, also watch for large sections where Jesus seems to be teaching true believers, like when He instructs His disciples about the Holy Spirit. But in other places, John aims to hold out Jesus’ true identity as the Christ, the Son of God, the Light of the World, the Living Water, the Bread of Life, and the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep.

One way John seeks to convince skeptics is by detailing how the rulers and authorities all judged Jesus wrongly and thus rejected Him. John urges his readers not to repeat that mistake. But John also writes to encourage true believers. To the persecuted believer, Jesus’ rejection at the hands of ruling authorities presaged their own experience as first-century followers of Jesus. They, too, would face much ridicule and official opposition from the Romans and Jews. When John records Jesus teaching about eternal life, he emphasizes that in Him, God’s rule has already begun for believers, that their eternal life begins now. Especially in John 13–17, there is much of Jesus’ teaching that seems aimed at Christians, not skeptics.

The Gospel divides nicely into two parts: John 1–12 which contains the signs Jesus performed, and John 13–21 which shows His path through rejection to glory. John has recorded for us in his Gospel many of Jesus' teachings, even though, rather curiously, there's not a single parable.

There are also patterns in the way John writes. Often, he will present a sign or miracle and then immediately follow up with Jesus' teaching concerning that sign. Then John describes the response of the people, as well as Jesus' own explanations for what His signs/miracles meant.

Ephesians 6:10-18

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. 14 Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and, as shoes

for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. 16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; 17 and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, 18 praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.

John 1-2

Pray

Father, may Your Holy Spirit be so present in our lives that we immediately recognize the Lord Jesus, and like John and His disciples, we leave our agendas and plans to follow You faithfully as beloved children. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read John 1-2

THE WORD BECAME FLESH

[Reflect more by reading 5 Biblical Truths About the Incarnation.](#)

John 1:1–28 In the same way that God created the world by speaking words, Jesus is the embodied Word of God. He clearly reflects God in both His character and His purposes. What's more, the text makes it clear that Jesus actually participated in creation. As the divine Word, He entered the world as a Galilean Jew to introduce and represent the new creation, and also to make possible a second birth. All this is confirmed when the prophet John the Baptist says Jesus not only revealed and represented God, but is actually His Son, One fully pleasing to the Father.

JOHN IN 3 MINUTES



Video posted under Standard YouTube License

Here's something important we need to notice: though God's Word existed even before creation, the eternal Word entered space and time in the person of Jesus the Christ.

John 1:29–2:12 The prophet John was anticipating Jesus and recognized Him based on the signs God had given in Old Testament prophets like Isaiah. In fact, John himself was the last of these Old Testament prophets. He encouraged his own disciples to follow Jesus, as He fulfilled God's Old Testament promises. The next two disciples—Phillip and Nathanael—immediately believed Jesus was God's Son because they saw how Jesus fulfilled the prophets' predictions, in addition to His supernatural knowledge.

John calls Jesus "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." Why does he do this? Because John knows Jesus will be God's chosen and perfect sacrifice, the one to which the Old Testament sacrificial system pointed.

This is why some of John's disciples immediately attach to Jesus as the Messiah; they recognize him from the prophets and the Scriptures.

John 2:13–25 Jesus' first miracle—which sought to honor His mother, who was an extraordinary person, but not sinless or in any way divine—reveals Jesus as the final sacrifice, the final priest, and the final messenger from God (2:10). When He arrived at Jerusalem for the Passover, he showed His prophetic and divine authority by resisting those who had turned religion into a business, in the temple of all places! As some began to follow Him because of His miracles, Jesus is clear that it is possible to believe for wrong reasons (2:24–25).

Daily Verse for Meditation

John 1:12-13

12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Reflect and Change

1. As soon as John identified Jesus, John's disciples recognized Him as the Messiah. John's followers left him in order to follow the Savior promised by God through the Old Testament. Do we follow Jesus with similar abandon?
2. To better understand the theme and concept of a "Messiah," read Isaiah 53, Jeremiah 23:5, and Psalm 22. Then develop a brief description of what was prophesied about Jesus before He appeared.

Go and Do

Choose one of the following:

- With a fellow disciple, identify ways your religious culture might have added boundaries around following Jesus. Remember, anything more than 1) believing Jesus is who He claimed to be (faith), and 2) adjusting your life to walk with Him (repentance) is too much.
- Take stock of your language for the next day or two. If your language is violent,

critical, complaining, self-centered, or judgmental rather than reconciliatory, encouraging, affirming, or humble, then you should ask the Lord to help you change.

Discipleship Activities

- Read through the first two sections of the Baptist Faith and Message: The [Scriptures and God](#). Note any areas where you would like to learn more. [[Basic Doctrine](#)]

John 3-4

Pray

Father, we want to know how to worship in Spirit and in truth, leaving religious debates and empty rituals behind. Show us how to live so we fully honor You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read John 3-4

REMEMBER THE GOSPEL

Watch a 2-minute explanation of Why God Gave His Only Son.



By Conrad Mbewe. © Desiring God Foundation. Source: desiringGod.org. Used by permission.

John 3:1–21 The religious leaders quickly recognized that God gave authority to Jesus. How else could He perform the miracles He performed? Jesus told a prominent leader, Nicodemus, that God's kingdom is accessible only to those who

receive a new nature by God's Spirit, to those who have been "born again." Jesus is clear on this point: the kingdom of God—His rule and reign over His people—is mysterious, and only those whose hearts God has opened will understand how Jesus has fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies. Status and education offer no special insight, and only those who choose to follow Jesus and believe His words will see God.

NEW BIRTH

The New Birth is Impossible without the Incarnation! (3min)



By John Piper. © Desiring God Foundation. Source: desiringGod.org. Used by permission.

Read more on [regeneration](#) from the BFM

Notice how many people saw Jesus' miracles; however, Jesus is clear that only a few actually understood and entered the kingdom He inaugurated.

John 3:22–36 The Prophet John continued to teach and baptize, which prepared the people to follow Jesus. When Jesus Himself began to teach, John started to send his disciples to follow Him, publicly endorsing Jesus as the direct voice from God. In this way, John identifies Jesus as entirely superior to any other teacher. In fact, John was the first to assert the radical claim that Jesus is God's Son.

John 4:1–26 To avoid attention about His growing number of followers, Jesus left the religious center of Judea. Traveling throughout Israel with His disciples, He demonstrated that God is open to all who believe Him. In Samaria, He did this by talking publicly with a lower-class woman. He explained God’s kingdom to her, convincing her that He was the Messiah. This section of text provides Jesus’ first “I AM” statement in John, identifying Him as the God who revealed Himself to Abraham and Moses (Gen. 15:1,7; Ex. 3:14, Deut. 32:39).

THE JOHN FILM

Did you know that the [Gospel of John film](#) is the story of Jesus’ life as recounted in the Gospel of John, using only the words from that Gospel?



Video posted under Standard YouTube License

Notice the values of God’s kingdom: people can meet Him anywhere, spiritual life is based on internal transformation rather than racial or social identity, and worship is knowing God’s truth and transformation by God’s Spirit.

John 4:27–42 After talking with Jesus, the Samaritan woman rushed to bring her whole village so they could hear and see Jesus. Meanwhile, Jesus’ disciples were scandalized by His disregard for social, racial, and gender norms. He continued to deconstruct their religious worldviews by implying God invites non-Jewish people to follow Him and by teaching the Samaritans, who believed He was the Savior and

enthusiastically received His words.

John 4:43–54 Next, Jesus returned to Cana to heal the son of a city official. He healed the man's son without even seeing or speaking to him, and the official—along with his whole family—believed in Jesus. Jesus' miracles helped the people of Cana believe His words.

Daily Verse for Meditation

John 4:23

23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.

Reflect and Change

1. So far in John's Gospel, Jesus addresses people's misconceptions about God. Think about your own culture, life, and city. What misconceptions do you or those around you have about what it means to know God? Think about unintentional biases you and those around you might have. The disciples' ideas about social, racial, and gender norms might have prevented people from walking with God. What about you?

Go and Do

Choose one of the following:

- Becoming a believer is a work of God. It's not something a person can produce in themselves. But when a person experiences spiritual re-birth and turns to follow Jesus, they gain access to His kingdom. Throughout the week, think about how you talk about the Spirit's role in your life. Identify ways you can lead others (believers and non-believers) to ask God for faith, rather than trying to conjure up belief logically or emotionally.
- Most of the people Jesus encountered were eagerly waiting for the Messiah.

How can you better understand their expectation surrounding Jesus as the “Lamb of God,” the “Messiah,” the “King of Israel,” and the “Son of God”? Choose one or two of these to briefly read about in the Old Testament. Consider using BibleGateway.com to search the phrase you choose, and skim the relevant prophetic sections.

Discipleship Activities

- Fast another day this month. Try a 24-hour fast or skipping one or two meals/week. [[Spiritual Disciplines](#)]

Section

John 5-6**Pray**

Father, teach us to come to You simply with our needs, trusting You desire to meet them. We want to see Your power in our lives, so teach us to rely on You even for the things we think we can solve on our own. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn**Read John 5-6**

John 5:1–30 Back in Jerusalem for a holy day, Jesus healed a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years by simply speaking to him. Though the man didn't know who Jesus was, he obeyed His command to pick up his mat and walk. On a holy day, even this small thing—carrying a mat—was considered “work” by religious leaders; therefore, they forbade it. So when religious leaders saw the man, they accused both him and Jesus of breaking God's law. It's true that Jesus often challenged the religious establishment's particular understanding of the Scriptures, while at the same time demonstrating His own nearness to God. He did so by performing miracles and claiming to be God's Son.

Notice, too, that Jesus addressed the healed man's sickness and then his spiritual habits (5:14). Jesus is kind to sinners—this is good news! But He urges them to turn their lives toward God—and this is even greater kindness.

THE SON OF MAN

Jesus' favorite title for himself was 'Son of Man.' We find this term in the Old Testament in Ezekiel (2:1–3; 3:1–4) and in Daniel (7:13–14). In Jesus' day, people

likely associated the Son of Man with the Messiah, but Jesus used Son of Man language to communicate His divine authority, His suffering, His death and resurrection, and ultimately His glorious second coming. Jesus was both Isaiah's Suffering Servant-Savior and Daniel's Son of Man-Messiah.

When He talked to religious leaders, Jesus claimed to be God's equal. He explained that anyone who received His words would be accepted by God, that His words could raise the dead, and that His work was establishing God's kingdom.

John 5:31–47 Jesus offered evidence to validate the claims about His identity: the prophecies about the Messiah, the testimony of the prophet John, and His own miracles. All of them authenticated His claim to be God's Son. Meanwhile, the religious leaders were offended by Jesus because they valued titles and positions. Therefore, they couldn't tolerate someone who claimed special endorsement from God without the appropriate title.

Notice, however, that Jesus could have dismissed the religious leaders for their unbelief; instead, He points out that the religious systems they trust will condemn them.

John 6:1–40 A large crowd followed Jesus. When He performed a great miracle and fed several thousand people, the crowd's excitement grew to a fevered pitch; after all, Israel hadn't experienced these kinds of miracles since the days of Moses. But when Jesus saw they intended to force Him to be their political king, He withdrew so He could spend time in prayer with His Father. The next day, Jesus told them they desired to eat the food He could give them more than they desired to partake of Himself. What they needed, however, was not physical food, sustenance that would last mere hours; what they needed was to believe Jesus' words and work, because in Jesus God had provided the "Bread of Life," that is, the full and eternal life that would meet all needs. As the people choked on these words, Jesus told them that only those God chooses can receive Him.

Jesus says that in order to live with God forever believers must eat the “Bread from Heaven.” Here, Jesus is calling Himself God’s final peace offering; He’s offering the Father’s invitation to His family table, an offer no one can afford to reject. (In this text, see also Jesus’ reference to Exodus 16.)

John 6:41–71 People around Jesus recognize His “I AM” statements (6:35, 41, 48, 51) are identifying Himself as God; they are also deeply confused. Jesus explains that God Himself must make these mysteries clear.

John’s point is clear: Jesus is superior even to God’s manifestations to Abraham and Moses because their connection to God was merely physical and temporary. Jesus, on the other hand, brings permanent spiritual life with God. Jesus’ words create new spiritual realities that are deeply connected to the Jews’ heritage while simultaneously superseding it.

Daily Verse for Meditation

John 5:25

25 Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.

Reflect and Change

1. In John 6:60, the disciples say Jesus’ words about eating the Bread of Life is a “very hard teaching.” Take time to read through this section again and grapple with its implications. Remember that, contextually, eating at someone’s table always involved the host breaking bread and offering it to guests with a blessing; then the host would sit and eat with his guests. Refusing to eat that bread—and thus receive the hospitality, the blessing—would break the relationship with the host.
2. How can believers adopt Jesus’ identity and sense of purpose in John 6:38, which is also reflected in John 7:16, 5:19, and 4:34? Believers

should be open to God's Spirit and Word as they seek to align themselves with God's kingdom and character.

Go and Do

- Evaluate your plans, lifestyle, and sense of purpose; pray about ways the Spirit might make your mindset more like Jesus'. Identify one ritual or habit that would begin to foster that mindset. What will this look like? It could mean changing your morning prayers from asking God to bless your plans to asking God to simply show you His work in the day ahead.

Discipleship Activities

- Continue to meet with another believer and teach them the next three lessons from [Creation to Christ](#). Practice telling the whole story yourself. [[Making Disciples, Teaching Simply](#)]

Section

John 7-8

Pray

Father, it's clear that Your way is entirely better than any lifestyle we would have chosen on our own. Thank You for making us your family, and teach us to bear well the responsibility of representing You faithfully in the world. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read John 7-8

John 7:1–24 As a result of His teaching, rumors were swirling about Jesus. He even faced death threats from religious authorities. Nevertheless, Jesus continued to attribute His power and wisdom to God, reiterating that He and He alone is the way to a right relationship with God. Jesus broke religious leaders' idea of the Sabbath by challenging their values; He sidestepped their religious rituals to heal a broken person's life and then challenged them to stop judging nearness to God by mere surface behavior.

Notice that those who opposed Jesus did so mostly because His behavior and teaching didn't line up with their religious systems and presuppositions. They expected the Messiah to work within their limited understanding of the Law.

John 7:25–53 Jesus repeatedly called God "Father." He pointed the Jews to their own prophets and religious fathers to explain who He was. Here, during a key religious feast, Jesus announced Himself as the source of spiritual life. He said anyone who believes He is God's peace offering can start a new life with God. Yet

again, John records Jesus' use of an "I AM" statement, reminding listeners of God's Old Testament name (YHWH). Jesus' teaching causes conflict over whether or not He is the Messiah. But Nicodemus, the man who met Jesus in John 3, defended Him before the other leaders. After encountering Jesus in person, Nicodemus had been transformed!

Notice that Jesus is asking people to believe He is the way to a reconciled, peaceful life with God. He is clear that believers are those who view Jesus as the Son of God and the only path to reconciled relationships with God and others.

John 8:1-11 Jesus has authority to render appropriate judgments. He demonstrates this by preventing the stoning of an adulterous woman. How does he do this? By suggesting that the sinless person can throw the first stones. Clearly, the religious leaders wanted to trap Jesus into disregarding Moses' law, but Jesus was able to secure the woman's release even as He encouraged her to live God's way.

Notice how Jesus flips their understanding of their religious system. According to the religious leaders, people tried to live God's way to avoid judgment. But according to Jesus, it's actually the opposite: people whom God saves from judgment are freed to live His way.

John 8:12-59 Because Jesus is endorsed by God the Father, His teachings are validated. But Jesus chooses neither to prove Himself nor to pass judgment on those who reject Him. Instead, He emphasizes that those who choose to follow Him will have a direct relationship with God. Jesus is clear that those who reject His words and refuse to live God's way identify themselves as the enemies of God. True, the Jewish leaders claimed Abraham as their father. But by rejecting Jesus, they abandoned both Abraham's clan and God's family; they've forsaken the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12.

John's point about Jesus is extremely clear: people can only enter God's family

through Jesus. Those who reject God's message as revealed in the Messiah are slaves to rebellion and sin.

Daily Verse for Meditation

John 8:12

12 Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'

Reflect and Change

1. Though Jesus could have proven His power and authority, He repeatedly turned to His Father for endorsement, saying that those who know God will know Jesus—and vice versa. Jesus plainly taught that an earnest seeker of God will accept Jesus' teaching. This is why He continually points people back to God, rather than proving Himself to them.
2. Jesus continues to call Himself the Bread of Life—that is, God's offer of reconciliation that will bring people into His family and sustain their lives. Based on John 7–8, how does Jesus say people can experience spiritual life and reconciliation with God?
3. Thinking about this section's discussion of mankind's spiritual family line (Abraham's, God's, and Satan's), consider the weight of being known as a member of God's family. Consider the weight of this, especially in light of your previous opposition to Him. How can you reframe your life to center around God as your Father?

Go and Do

- Jesus flipped the religious mindset of His day on its head. Believers shouldn't try to earn peace with God through their lifestyle or obedience. Freed by Jesus from a life of rebellion, believers now represent and embody God's character;

they should conform themselves to honor and express His perfect way. Are there ways you have sat in darkness (8:12), ignoring the freedom God gave you? How could you actively adopt God's ways now that you've been enabled by God's Spirit? Think about specific ways you could follow Jesus by doing the works God gives you (5:36).

Discipleship Activities

- Continue to pursue new relationships with someone who is ethnically different. Consider bringing a younger disciple along with you. Explore Honor/Shame and Fear/Power issues. What brings shame in their culture? What are they fearful of? Here are some [Suggested Starter Questions](#). [[All Peoples, Making Disciples](#)]

Section

John 9-10

Pray

Father, open our eyes to see You clearly in the Word, in our lives, and in the world. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read John 9-10

John 9 Jesus told His disciples He is the light of the world, yet another "I AM" claim. Then He demonstrates His power by healing a blind beggar. The healed man became a witness to Jesus' divine power. Though the religious leaders claimed Jesus couldn't be from God because He broke their Sabbath laws, the healed man immediately trusted that Jesus had come from God because He supernaturally changed his life. Jesus distinguished between those who accept God and see clearly from those who reject Him and remain blind to His kingdom.

Notice that the Pharisees rejected the blind man, assuming his blindness was the result of being unclean or some kind of personal sin. But God loves to reconcile with anyone willing to believe. By contrast, Jesus rejects those who claim they can see God but ignore His peace offering in Jesus.

John 10:1-21 According to Jesus, while others have tried to lead people along alternate paths, He alone offers a legitimate way into God's family. God's people recognize His voice and see His commitment to them in Jesus. Since death had the power to harm God's people, Jesus willingly put Himself in death's hands to end its hold on them.

Notice how Jesus reveals God by defining and explaining who the “I AM” is (v. 7, 9, 11, 14). With Jesus, a relationship with the God who always has been is now possible.

John 10:22–42 Rather than choosing to defend Himself with explanation, Jesus continually pointed to His deeds as proof He was the Messiah. God’s people believe Jesus’ claims and are therefore held safe from death by God’s supreme power. Jesus angered the religious leaders by claiming to be God in the flesh, a claim they considered to be blasphemy. It’s clear they recognize the implicit claim behind Jesus’ “I AM” language; it’s also clear they cannot accept it. But Jesus told them His life and works prove His words are true.

Daily Verse for Meditation

John 10:38

38 But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.

Reflect and Change

1. Jesus rejects people who can see God but fail to follow His ways and receive His message. He comes to heal the sick, raise the dead, and give sight to the blind. In God’s kingdom, it’s better to acknowledge your hopelessness and accept the gift of Jesus than to pretend you can figure out everything on your own. For more on this topic, read this short article: [How Good Are Your Eyes?](#)
2. Jesus likes to use people’s weaknesses or difficulties as opportunities to display God’s power. He even used a healed beggar to teach the religious leaders! How could you reframe your view of difficulty and status in light of this section of John’s Gospel?

Go and Do

Do you take seriously your responsibility to be an active witness of Jesus' power in your life? In John, many people directly experience Jesus' power in their lives. Like them, believers should often and energetically speak about the ways God has changed and healed them. Commit to keep better track of the ways you hear and see God's work. Note especially answers to prayers. Then develop stories of key moments in your life that you can use at any time to tell others about God's wonderful work on your behalf.

Section

John (Part 2)

Introduction to the Gospel of John

The Gospel of John explains who Jesus is, appeals to the reader to respond in faith, and highlights the benefits a life of faith in the Son of God. Interestingly, the book begins and ends with statements that Jesus is God (1:1, 20:28).

Date and author: The fourth Gospel was probably written by John, the beloved disciple who is mentioned but not named in the book. John also wrote the book of Revelation and 1, 2, and 3 John. John the Apostle was apparently a Christian overseer in Ephesus and likely wrote the book between 80–100 A.D. John had been an eyewitness of Jesus, and he had also seen the Holy Spirit work mightily in the first century to establish churches amidst the Roman Empire. It's perhaps these perspectives that cause him to include material that is nowhere to be found in the other Gospels :Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In fact, over 90% of the material in John's Gospel is unique to John.

Purpose: John seems to have a very specific purpose in mind as he writes this gospel. He seems to be making an appeal to his readers urging them to do three things:

1. Understand that this Jesus of Nazareth is the Promised Christ, the Son of God.
2. Believe in Jesus and find a life abundant.
3. Be born again from above so that you are equipped to live the genuine life God intends.
4. In John 20:30–31, he makes one thing clear about his purpose in

writing: “These (things) are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ; and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

In John, we read that Jesus is the Son of God sent into the world by the Father to accomplish the Father’s purposes and then to return to Him in glory. John organizes his Gospel so readers understand Jesus as the sent One who is also the Good Shepherd promised in the Old Testament. Behind all this is the Father’s glorious and wise rule over every event in history including Jesus’ life, death, and return to glory.

The Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit work together to accomplish God’s mission and purpose. In his final speech to his disciples, Jesus gathers the new community and commissions them as agents and representatives of Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit (John 14–17)

John sought to lead men to eternal life by first convincing them that Jesus was the Divine Savior. Jesus’ miracles were recorded as “signs” to confirm His deity, that He was Jehovah God, the incarnate Word made flesh. John called Jesus the Bread of Life, Light of the World, the Good Shepherd, the Way, the Truth, the Life, and the True Vine; each of these titles carries Old Testament significance, indicating Jesus was no ordinary man. John points to everything in Jesus’ life and teaching as a sign that Jesus of Nazareth was truly the eternal Word of God who “became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). John highlights Jesus as the teacher and the doer of signs or miracles which validate his teaching and show His claims are true: He is equal with God, and He is God in the flesh.

Clearly, John’s book is no mere biography; it’s a theological argument. John wants to convince his readers that Jesus of Nazareth is God the Son. Then he wants to show us how that fact will change our lives in amazing ways. After all, it’s by believing in Jesus Christ as the Son of God that we find life—real and eternal life.

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John’s Gospel seems to have been written both to encourage existing believers and to clearly demonstrate Jesus’ identity as the Son of God to those who had yet to believe. Additionally, John’s original readers are both Jews and Gentiles, so look for statements like the one he records in perhaps the Bible’s most famous verse: God so loved “the world” that he sent Jesus so “whoever” (Jew or Gentile!) believes in Him would have eternal life (3:16). As you read John, also watch for large sections where Jesus seems to be teaching true believers, like when He instructs His disciples about the Holy Spirit. But in other places, John aims to hold out Jesus’ true identity as the Christ, the Son of God, the Light of the World, the Living Water, the Bread of Life, and the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep.

One way John seeks to convince skeptics is by detailing how the rulers and authorities all judged Jesus wrongly and thus rejected Him. John urges his readers not to repeat that mistake. But John also writes to encourage true believers. To the persecuted believer, Jesus’ rejection at the hands of ruling authorities presaged their own experience as first-century followers of Jesus. They, too, would face much ridicule and official opposition from the Romans and Jews. When John records Jesus teaching about eternal life, he emphasizes that in Him, God’s rule has already begun for believers, that their eternal life begins now. Especially in John 13–17, there is much of Jesus’ teaching that seems aimed at Christians, not skeptics.

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performed, and John 13–21 which shows His path through rejection to glory. John has recorded for us in his Gospel many of Jesus' teachings, even though, rather curiously, there's not a single parable.

There are also patterns in the way John writes. Often, he will present a sign or miracle and then immediately follow up with Jesus' teaching concerning that sign. Then John describes the response of the people, as well as Jesus' own explanations for what His signs/miracles meant.

Titus 3:4-7

4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Section

John 11-12

Pray

Father, make us witnesses of Your character and power, and believers in everything You've taught. We want to know You and live fully with You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read John 11-12

John 11:1–44 When Jesus' close friend, Lazarus, died unexpectedly, He told His disciples that He alone has control of both spiritual life and physical resurrection. Jesus explains that He contains and represents the secret of life through death (notice the "I AM" statement in 11:25). Many people blamed Jesus for Lazarus' death because he failed to arrive before Lazarus died. But Jesus was able to call Lazarus back to life, raising him from the dead by the power of His words.

Notice that after raising the dead man back to life, Jesus ordered the Jewish family to ignore their religious laws by touching a formerly unclean person and helping him remove his grave clothes.

John 11:45–12:11 Religious leaders felt both religiously and politically threatened by Jesus and the number of His followers. They called for His public arrest and even planned to kill Him. Meanwhile, just before Passover, Jesus enjoyed a feast with the recently resurrected Lazarus and his family. As they feasted, Mary washed Jesus' feet with perfume, which He then explained was a foreshadowing of His impending death and burial.

Notice the important detail about Judas mentioned here. Judas later sells Jesus' trust and helps to kill Him. Why? Because he loved money (12:6). (See also 1 Tim. 6:10; Matt. 6:4; Heb. 13:5.)

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Even as Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God, people still wanted the wrong kind of king.

[Remember the Overview of the Kingdom of God.](#)

John 12:12–26 A large crowd arrived in Jerusalem for Passover. They celebrated Jesus, even hailing Him as King. At this point, even non-Jews were interested in Jesus, and Jesus again predicts His death, explaining that without His death no one can experience true life and spiritual growth. Jesus also demands all true believers let go of their earthly lives in order to follow Him and enjoy true life with God. The crowds that have witnessed Jesus' power traveled with Him and validated His claims along the way.

John 12:27–50 Feeling burdened by His imminent death and resurrection—a public and traumatic death—Jesus accepted His Father's plan as His driving purpose (12:27; see also 6:38). Jesus rightly predicted His death would broadcast God's redemptive message to the world. In fact, the Son's obedience in death would honor the Father perfectly. Despite hearing a supernatural voice, many eyewitnesses of Jesus still couldn't believe His claims. Even those religious leaders who believed were ashamed to admit it.

Notice that Jesus equates Himself and His message with God's offer of reconciliation—there is no way to be reconciled to God without fully embracing Jesus.

Daily Verse for Meditation

John 12:24

24 Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

Reflect and Change

1. How can you better understand God's perspective on difficult or dark moments in your life? Consider Jesus' teaching about the necessity of "death" for renewal and the need for a seed to die before it brings forth fruit (12:24–26). How can this affect how we approach difficulty and spiritual growth?
2. The spiritual life God offers is fully accessible through Jesus. But it cannot be received by someone unwilling to completely reject a life of rebellion against God. True life requires death to self, where one's individual authority is totally submitted to the will and way of God.

Go and Do

- With a new perspective on difficult seasons of life, talk with a fellow Christian about meaningful ways to encourage each other during such times. Rather than offering the lie that "God never gives us more than we can handle," how could you support and remind someone of the spiritual growth and increasing faith God gives during suffering and difficulty?

Discipleship Activities

- Find out about the local places of worship for your ethnically and religiously different friends: mosques, temples, Catholic churches, etc. Are there any near you? [[All Peoples](#)]

Section

John 13-14

Pray

Jesus, You have modeled and expressed ultimate love for God and people even in incredibly difficult moments. Grow Your Spirit's presence in us, that we may better love both You and each other. In Your name we pray, amen.

Read and Learn

Read John 13-14

John 13:1–30 Jews had to wash themselves before meeting God. But now, only Jesus can properly prepare a person to meet God. This is why Jesus did the servant's job of washing His disciples' feet before their meal together. Believers should also learn to serve each other in simple, everyday ways, even if that means they get a little "unclean." Jesus predicted that Judas will betray His trust and help kill Him, bringing ultimate shame since Jesus has repeatedly fed him both spiritually and physically at His table (13:18).

John 13:31–14:17 Jesus teaches the disciples to prove they follow Him by loving and serving like He did. As Jesus talks about leaving them, the disciples are both confused and anxious, yet He assures them that if they've seen Him, they've seen God; that if they believe He's from God ("I AM" 14:6), they will have great power; that if they love Him, they will do what He asks.

Jesus Himself has demonstrated the way to God that believers simply need to follow; Jesus will prepare their future home with God. What's more, He will send the Holy Spirit to help believers and solidify their faith through obedience. And now, as

part of God's family, they're guaranteed that God will meet their needs when they ask in Jesus' name.

Notice that believers will be fully integrated into God's family. In the process, they learn to love their new family, operate in a new culture, and communicate with their Father, receiving His care. Finally, there is space in the Father's house, room at the Father's table for them.

GOD THE SPIRIT

[Read more on God the Spirit and His work from the BFM.](#)

John 14:18–31 Jesus predicts what will happen so that the disciples will believe when it unfolds. More specifically, He tells them though He must leave them, the separation will not be permanent. Why? Because when believers live Jesus' way, God's presence is with them through the person of the Holy Spirit. Those who believe and act on Jesus' words will be able to encounter God fully, even as those in rebellion can see nothing. Through God's Spirit, disciples are reminded and taught by God in Jesus' absence. He also gives them peace and fearlessness for the days to come.

At this point, it's clear Jesus is radically modeling what it looks like to love God, by doing the kingdom work required of Him.

Daily Verse for Meditation

John 14:11

11 Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

Reflect and Change

1. Jesus is the ultimate model of the value of weakness (and all of Matt. 5); He permitted subordinate powers to plan to kill Him. With God, believers have to trust fully that the arrival of God's kingdom is so solidly established that any temporary appearances of defeat are all part of the plan. Perhaps this is why believers are commanded to be at peace (14:27), even when the work God puts in front of them seems counter-intuitive to that command.
2. Notice that throughout His life, Jesus was humble and peace-seeking. As believers, we also have the responsibility to model living like Jesus: consistently taking the low road of servanthood.

Go and Do

- Jesus repeatedly teaches believers to resist worry and anxiety. Based on John 14:1–7 and 14:27–29, write 4–6 ways believers can use Jesus' words to speak truth to themselves and choose peace.
- Re-read John 14 and observe how, rather than arguing His disciples out of their doubts, Jesus often directs their attention to truths about God. Throughout John's Gospel, Jesus makes descriptive claims about God's nature with His "I AM" claims. Make a list of those claims in John 4, 6, 8, 10, and 11, and use the list to encourage and comfort yourself or others by repeating Jesus' powerful statements. Look for other "I AM" claims as you finish reading John and add them to your list.

Discipleship Activities

- Read the next sections of the Baptist Faith and Message (BFM). [Man, Salvation and God's Purpose of Grace](#). Note any areas you would like to learn more about. [[Basic Doctrine](#)]

Section

John 15-16

Pray

Lord, teach us to root ourselves in Your coming kingdom, not our present realities. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read John 15-16

John 15 Jesus uses the metaphor of a vineyard—and another “I AM” statement—to describe how believers stay in God’s protection and family: by bearing spiritual fruit. Spiritual fruit is practicing divine love, acting on Jesus’ words, and obeying His command to love each other. By doing this spiritual work, believers become actual family members and co-laborers with God. Identifying with Jesus means access to God’s power and care; it also means being misunderstood or rejected by dominant society. Though dominant society will confuse and oppress believers, Jesus sends His Spirit as a teacher, who will advocate for Christians as they walk along the path of God.

Notice that Jesus is now expounding on his “I AM” claims. He not only connects Himself to the God of Abraham and Moses and thus further explaining His role in the Trinity. Jesus is also explaining that He is the only way for people to be connected to the Father.

IF THE WORLD HATES YOU

Watch this short video on how proclaiming the Gospel will result in persecution.



Proclaiming the Exclusivity of Jesus Will Result in Persecution by Alistair Begg. Copyright Ligonier Ministries. Used by permission. All rights reserved www.ligonier.org.

John 16:1–24 Believers should expect opposition from those in the world who haven't heard or seen God. Jesus explains that He will leave the first disciples to reunite with the Father. But while He's away, the Spirit will guide believers to new levels of understanding and action. It won't always look like God's in control, but Jesus promises that after the season of difficulty and suffering, He'll bring permanent, joyful contentment. Until then, believers can use Jesus' name to ask the Father for anything they need.

John 16:25–33 When people love and believe Jesus, the Father accepts and loves them as co-heirs with Jesus. They can relate directly to God, who already has established the perfect life in His kingdom. Finally, the disciples say they believe fully, and Jesus tells them to prepare to be scattered by suffering—first Jesus', then their own.

Notice that Jesus asks the disciples to believe He's overcome the world even before His death or resurrection. Faith in Jesus' claims has to be established outside of

circumstances or appearances.

Daily Verse for Meditation

John 16:22

22 So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.

Reflect and Change

1. Jesus commands believers to go to God with all their needs and requests. Like Jesus, believers should have a holistically dependent relationship with the Father. Are there areas of your life that you still try to handle on your own? Think about what subjects might be omitted in your prayers: Finances? Certain relationships? Everyday plans? Addictions? Sexuality? Other?

Go and Do

Jesus taught the disciples to understand and have faith through difficult seasons, even before those seasons actually came. It's too late to try developing a right view of God and reality after suffering has already hit; believers need to solidify their identity as citizens of God's kingdom beforehand. Talk with a fellow disciple about how this section of John could:

- Shape your identity in the current world as someone waiting for a better reality;
- Inform your perspective on temporary opposition or suffering.

Discipleship Activities

Do you remember the [MOR faithfulness](#) report? Are you still asking God to give you opportunities to share the gospel? How have you seen your ability grow? Your boldness?

Section

John 17-18

Pray

Father, help us understand the importance of our interdependence and unity in reflecting who You are to both each other and our neighbors. Help us to value Your presence in the world much more highly than our own preferences or petty disagreements. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read John 17-18

HOW TO BE "IN THE WORLD"

What does it mean to be "in the world"? Watch a 3-minute video on How to Know You're on Mission.



By Jeff Vanderstelt. © Verge Network. <http://www.vergenetwork.org>. Used by permission.

John 17 The way to live forever is to know God through Jesus. Jesus' life honored the Father perfectly by showing people what God is like, by bringing God's people back into reconciled relationship with Him. God has given those people His name, and will use it to protect them with His Spirit until they live with Him in person forever. Jesus loved the disciples deeply and grieved over leaving them, asking the Father to keep them safe, unified, and faithful under attack and difficulty.

Notice that the disciples' growth didn't end when Jesus leaves them; it continued through the Holy Spirit of God, who speaks and works with each believer personally.

THE PURPOSE OF UNITY...

...is to show God's love. (video 1:30)



Video posted under Standard YouTube License

Believers are in God's family through Jesus. They should share love, values, behavior, and mutual commitment like close siblings. With this unified front, believers will show they truly know and belong to God.

John 18:1-27 Judas, one of the disciples, betrays Jesus to the religious leaders who then arrest and violently interrogate Him. Jesus identifies Himself to the leaders; He refuses to resist or ask the other disciples to protect Him. As he tries to follow the arrest, Peter denies being Jesus' disciple twice, just as Jesus predicted he would.

While interrogated by the high priest (top religious/political leader), Jesus refuses to defend or explain Himself.

Notice that Jesus' spoken words "I AM He" (18:6) were powerful enough to knock the soldiers and officers to the ground. Jesus' claims have gained impact as He's modeled obedience and demonstrated God's power. However, at this point, Jesus chooses to speak very little and completely surrenders to their abuse on His way to die.

John 18:28–40 After several hours of trial with the religious authorities, Jesus was dragged to the political court, where the Roman governor Pilate found Him legally innocent. The religious leaders forced Pilate to retain Him as a criminal, however, because the Jewish leaders couldn't enforce death sentences.

Notice how Jesus justifies His apparent indefensibility—it's not because He's powerless, it's because He's establishing a new spiritual kingdom—one that is not grasped by coercion or force of will.

Daily Verse for Meditation

John 17:22-23

22 The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

Reflect and Change

1. Many people have a hard time accepting Jesus' claims about Himself because of how awful and weak the end of His life looked. It's difficult to believe that Jesus could both embody the eternal, powerful God and be gruesomely killed. But John 18 (verses 4, 8–9, and 36–37) gives some insight into Jesus' perspective and how He was completely tied

to accomplishing God's plan and establishing God's invisible, counter-intuitive kingdom. (See also John 14:30–31.)

Go and Do

Choose two of the following:

- Are there any fellow disciples with whom you're not fully reconciled? Are there those you refuse to love equally because of disagreements or differences? Based on this section, believers are responsible to love and be unified with their spiritual family. Make plans this week to attempt reconciliation; act on God's love for the person you've alienated.
- Take notes about Jesus' prayer in John 17, paying particular attention to His priorities, values, and posture. How can this reshape the way you pray with your fellow disciples or family?
- Jesus prepared His disciples to keep their faith in His words and promises, even when it looked like everything was lost—like when He was killed or when suffering came after He ascended to the Father. How can you use John 18:42–43, 9:39, 14:17, 16:1–4, 16:33, 18:36, 19:11, and 20:31 to articulate your belief in Jesus' claims and power despite the apparent fallenness of the world and arguable absence of God's kingdom today?

Discipleship Activities

- Are any of your new ethnically different friends interested in reading the Bible with you? Ask someone. Consider meeting weekly with them and reading through a book of the Bible. [\[All Peoples, Making Disciples\]](#)

Section

John 19-21

Pray

Lord, we want to follow You faithfully, no matter what we see or encounter along the way. Teach us to live by Your teachings and Spirit wholeheartedly, without hesitation or distraction. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read John 19-21

John 19:1–16 The Jews demanded Pilate execute Jesus' sentence despite Pilate's protests that He wasn't guilty of anything. To satisfy the crowd on their holiday, he had Jesus flogged and publicly mocked. When Pilate objected to crucifying Him, however, the crowd threatened Pilate with treason until he handed Jesus over to them.

Notice that Pilate had a deeper fear of God than the Jews who were trying to kill Jesus. He was afraid to take responsibility for someone with claims like Jesus'; he even tried to release Him.

John 19:17–42 On the afternoon of the Passover feast, the Jewish leaders had Roman guards nail Jesus to a cross and hang Him up to die near the city limits; His cross stood between two other criminals. Down to the smallest detail, every prophecy about Jesus' death was fulfilled. As He died, Jesus entrusted His mother to a new family, a trusted disciple who received her into his home.

And with His last breath, Jesus announced He had completed God's assignment

John 19-21

and released His life. A secret disciple who was a prominent city figure worked with Nicodemus to bury Jesus honorably in a new tomb nearby.

John 20:1–18 After the Passover weekend, Mary (Magdalene, not Jesus' mother) went to mourn at the grave but found the tomb open and empty! All the disciples were upset, thinking the authorities must have stolen Jesus' body. But Mary saw two angels and then ran into Jesus—in His resurrected body, which she didn't recognize at first. She then told the disciples she had seen Jesus alive, and shared His message that He was going to now leave them and return to His Father.

John 20:19–31 Jesus supernaturally appeared in the disciples' secret meeting. He confirms His resurrection by showing them His crucifixion scars. He breathed over them the new life of the Holy Spirit and transferred His mission to the disciples, telling them to reflect God by practicing radical forgiveness.

Notice that Jesus reappeared to the disciples a second time. He did so for Thomas, who was absent in the first meeting. Jesus prioritized personally addressing the faith and needs of each disciple, even though He says there's a blessing for those who believe without seeing.

PETER DENIES THE LORD, THEN..

[Watch a short video and think about how Peter was used after he denied the Lord.](#)

(1:15)



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538

Deepen Discipleship

John 21 The third and last time Jesus appeared to His disciples, they were busy trying to fish and didn't recognize Him until He directed them to an overwhelming catch. After the disciples finished the haul, Jesus served them bread and fish and they ate together. Peter is instructed to demonstrate his love for Jesus by feeding and taking care of His people. Jesus then predicts how Peter's life will end, so that he will stay faithful through difficulty.

Daily Verse for Meditation

John 20:21

21 Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.'

Reflect and Change

1. Throughout the Gospels, people ask for signs to help them accept Jesus' claims and believe God's power. While Jesus is willing to act so that more people will accept Him, He also teaches that those who believe without miraculous proof are blessed.

Go and Do

Do the first one below and choose one out of the last three.

- After reading these chapters' gruesome description of the extreme path God took to ensure reconciliation, can you reframe your understanding of God's value on right relationships? Are there any people in your life with whom you need to seek forgiveness? Plan and commit with a fellow disciple to make that reconciliation a priority.
- Reflect also on your personal sin that made this path to reconciliation necessary. Praise God for Jesus, the perfect sacrifice, who takes away the sins of the world—just like John the Baptist said He would.

- Think back through your version of the gospel story. Are there ways you could incorporate the theme of reconciliation—both as God’s purpose for the world, and as believers’ mission after Jesus?
- Jesus celebrates believers who are able to take him at his word, without signs or confirmations. Thinking through your walk of faith—and perhaps the way you teach about God’s Word—how can you better pursue an approach that celebrates simple, accepting obedience? This is counter-cultural to many religious forms that elevate grand signs and supernatural interventions over a committed, everyday walk with God.

Colossians

Introduction to Colossians

The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to a group of Christians he had never met. He probably wrote around A.D. 60, during his first imprisonment in Rome, the same place where he wrote the rest of his “prison letters” (Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon). Although he didn’t personally begin the church at Colossae, a market city in Asia Minor, Paul was concerned when he heard about false teaching being spread in the church.

Scholars still debate exactly what that teaching was, but it seemed to mix elements of Jewish legalism with some kind of mystical asceticism. Paul heard the news from Epaphras, who had become a believer during Paul’s three years of ministry in Ephesus and had taken the gospel to Colossae, some 100 miles away. When the church he planted began to struggle with heresy, Epaphras visited Paul, under house arrest in Rome. Paul responded by writing this letter to remind the Colossian saints to hold on to—and live out—the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul encourages the church in Colossae in their growing maturity, reminds them of the beauty of Christ and the power of the gospel, and exhorts them to act like the church. Because he’d heard the Holy Spirit was working in their lives, he prays the Colossians will be full of spiritual wisdom and understanding so they can follow God appropriately. He also reminds them of the gospel: God has taken them out of the darkness of their sins and brought them into the hope and joy of Jesus. And in response to this gospel, the Colossian church has a mission: to proclaim Christ and work to present all Christ-followers mature in Christ.

Paul had never met the Colossians, but he's concerned these young believers were getting derailed by competing philosophical and religious ideas. The problem with these ideas was not that they were logical or plausible; the problem was their advocates were such good people, so the Colossians seemed inclined to believe them! But Paul is clear: these wise and spiritual people aren't connected to Christ. So Paul's encouragement to the Colossian believers is simple: "Hold on to Christ."

Notice the three commands in Colossians 3. The first step is to treasure the things of the kingdom of God. The second is to put off the old ways of sin. The third step in the cycle of growth is to "put on" the character of Christ: compassion, patience, and, above all, love. Those seeking the things of the kingdom should submit to the rule of Christ's peace. Instead of seeking their own, they are to let Christ's word overflow from them to bless others.

Paul closes by discussing relationships with other believers and with outsiders. He urges the Colossian saints not to tire of praying for one another. When it comes to people outside, they should "walk in wisdom . . . making the best use of the time" (4:5). This God-given way of seeing and understanding life enables the Colossians to stay rooted in Christ, living as His ambassadors to all those who do not yet believe.

John 15:1-8

1 I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in

me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

Section

Colossians 1

Pray

God, help me to bear fruit. May my faith in the gospel be firm. May my love for all the saints be evident. May I be filled with real hope. Grant that Your Spirit will strengthen me with all power so that I can endure whatever trials come, so that I can have patience and joy. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read Colossians 1

Colossians 1:1–11 In Colossians 1, Paul encouraged the church in Colossae for their growing maturity. He also reminded them of the beauty of Christ and the power of the gospel and exhorted them to act like the church. In the first part of the book, Paul thanked God that the Colossians had faith, love, and hope because they were grounded in the gospel. Their maturing faith was a working faith—Paul could see it, and he'd heard about it. So he applauded them for doing well.

Because Paul had heard the Holy Spirit was working in their lives, he prayed the Colossians would be full of spiritual wisdom and understanding. Why? So they could follow God appropriately, which necessarily involves bearing fruit. (See Galatians 5:22 for a definition of fruit.) He prayed that God would give them supernatural strength so they could endure with patience and joyful thankfulness. What a prayer this is! It's a nutshell explanation of what Christian maturity and growth could look like.

IN HIM ALL THINGS HOLD TOGETHER . . .

Watch a [short visual representation of Colossians 1:17](#) (1:30),



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and then watch a very short message by John Piper on the [Supremacy of Christ](#) (2:19).



By John Piper. © Desiring God Foundation. Source: desiringGod.org. Used by permission.

Colossians 1:12–23 Then, Paul reminded them of the gospel: God had chosen them to share in His inheritance. He had taken them out of the darkness of their sins and brought them into the hope and joy of Jesus. As soon as Paul

referenced Jesus, he can't help but launch into a praise poem about Him. He reminded them that Jesus is God, He was with God in the beginning, and He wanted to reconcile people to Himself. Paul was excited because he was a minister of the gospel to them and to the Gentiles.

Colossians 1:24–28 Paul then stopped to remind them of their mission: to proclaim Christ and work to present all Christ-followers mature in Christ. This is the mission of the church: teaching people about Jesus and then working to help them grow up in their faith.

FILLING UP IN MY FLESH...

Listen to John Piper explain what Paul means when he says "[filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ.](#)"



By John Piper. © Desiring God Foundation. Source: desiringGod.org. Used by permission.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Colossians 1:15-20

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created

through him and for him.17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven,making peace by the blood of his cross.

Reflect and Change

1. In 1:3–6, Paul highlighted three things that were growing among the Colossians: their faith in Christ Jesus, their love for the saints, and the gospel among them. How would Paul rate you on these three?
2. How are Paul’s words about Jesus helpful for you (1:13–22)?
3. Paul highlighted the goal of the church in 1:28. Write this verse in your own words. What does “mature in Christ” mean based on what you’ve read in Colossians 1?

Go and Do

- Using Col 1:12-23, discuss with a fellow believer the attributes of Jesus and the centrality of Jesus to the gospel message.
- Seek out a believer you know and pray the Colossians 1:9–12 prayer for them.

Discipleship Activities

- Read through the next section of the Baptist Faith and Message: [The Church, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and The Lord’s Day](#). Note any areas where you would like to learn more. [[Basic Doctrine](#)]

Section

Colossians 2

Pray

Father God, thank You for those who have labored to establish me in the gospel of Jesus Christ. I pray You will keep me from being deceived by plausible arguments about how to find wisdom and life apart from Christ. Thank You for granting me forgiveness and new life through Jesus' death and resurrection. May I cling to Jesus today as the source of my righteousness and my growth. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read Colossians 2

Colossians 2:1–3 Paul had never met the Colossians, but he was concerned about these young believers in Christ. He was concerned they not get derailed by competing philosophical and religious ideas. Remember, he told them, it's all about Christ, so don't be tricked by nice-sounding arguments or impressive spirituality that places the focus on anything other than Christ.

Even though the Colossians had experienced the power and joy of being reconciled to God in Christ, Paul still thought they were in danger of missing the entire point. On the one hand, there was no shortage of persuasive arguments on how to find the "good life" through human wisdom. These arguments were not just logical and plausible, but the people advocating for them were such good people. They were disciplined and self-denying, and they spent a lot of time in "spiritual" activities.

Colossians 2:4–15 But the only good life is life rooted and grounded in Christ. Our human reasoning alone is completely incapable of finding true wisdom, for God has

hidden His wisdom in Christ. We can only begin to be wise by trusting in Him. Our human striving for perfection and superiority is like the activity of a dead person, but Christ is the One who rules over all and has raised to life those who trust in Him.

Colossians 2:16–23 The problem with these wise and spiritual people was simple: they weren't connected to Christ! They were living in a world of shadows, when the solid substance of Christ was right in front of them. So Paul gave the Colossian saints a simple encouragement: "Hold on to Christ." Later in the letter, he explained practically what that looks like.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Colossians 2:8-10

8 See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. 9 For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, 10 and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

Reflect and Change

1. How have you been influenced by the philosophies of the day to search for the good life apart from Christ? In other words, how do you define success? What do you think you need to be happy? What does maturity look like?
2. Based on this chapter, describe the kind of teachers and mentors that Paul might encourage you to follow.

Go and Do

- Ask one of your non-Christian friends how they define "the good life." Where do they look for wisdom on how to live well? Use this conversation to learn about

your friend and to examine your own worldview.

- Contact one of your mentors this week and thank them for their work to establish you in the gospel.

Discipleship Activities

- Have you finished teaching [Creation to Christ](#) to another disciple? If not, meet up and teach them the next three lessons. [[Making Disciples, Teaching Simply](#)]

Section

Colossians 3:1-17**Pray**

Thank You, God, for raising me up with Christ and seating me with Him in victory over sin and deceit and death. Please help me today to put off my old ways of thinking and speaking and acting, and to put on the new ways of Christ. Clothe me today with love as I thankfully serve Christ. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn**Read Colossians 3:1-17**

Colossians 3:1–4 The heart of Paul's letter to the Colossians is a practical description of growth in the Christian life. Notice the three sets of commands in the first part of Colossians 3.

The first step of the cycle of growth is to treasure the things of the kingdom of God. Paul told the Colossian saints to “seek the things that are above” and to “set [their] minds on things that are above.” In other words, those who have died with Christ to sin and have been raised to new life with Him need to constantly refocus their thoughts and affections on the person of Christ, His promises, and His commands.

Colossians 3:5–10 The second step in the cycle of growth is to put off the old ways of sin. The Colossian saints must “put to death what is earthly in [them]”—everything from sexual immorality, which defiles the body, to idolatry, which defiles the soul. Paul also instructed the Colossians to “put away” things such as anger, slander, and obscenities. They should no longer lie to each other, since they had already gotten rid of the “old self” and “put on the new self.”

PUT ON . . .

Watch this brief video that explains what it might look like to to “[Put on the Real Jesus.](#)” (3:00)



Video posted under Standard YouTube License

PUT ON AND PUT OFF

Watch a visual representation of Colossians 3. (1:26)



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Colossians 3:11–17 The third step in the cycle of growth is to put on the character and habits of Christ. The Colossian saints were to “put on” characteristics such as

compassion and patience; above all, they must “put on love.” Those who seek the things of the kingdom should submit to the rule of Christ’s peace. Instead of seeking their own way, they were to let Christ’s word overflow from them to bless others. All of this is both the work of God and a gift from God. As a result, Christians should be marked supremely by thankfulness.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Colossians 3:1-4

1 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Reflect and Change

1. Think about the statements from Colossians 3:1–4: If you have died to sin, if you have been raised with Christ, if when He returns you will be glorified with Him, how does that change what you want to treasure today?
2. Examine your daily habits of repentance and confession.
3. How much is your life marked by thankfulness? Take some time today to think about God’s kindness to you in the gospel.

Go and Do

- Evaluate how you are doing in treasuring Christ, putting off sin, and putting on the character and habits of Christ. Confess your sins to a brother or sister in Christ this week and ask them to pray for you in these areas.
- Explain the cycle of growth in Colossians 3 to someone this week.

Discipleship Activities

- Continue to get to know your ethnically different friend; keep pursuing these kinds of new relationships. Have you found any people of peace? Learn more about their faith and then research it when you get home. Find out if there are any churches in your area made up of people from the country of one of your new friends. If so, try to meet with someone from that church to learn how to better engage your friend. [[All Peoples, Making Disciples](#)]

Section

Colossians 3:18-25

Pray

God, today I submit myself to Your Word as I live out the roles You have placed me in. Please help me to willingly lay my life down as I consider how You have served me. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read Colossians 3:18-25

Colossians 3:18–25 If the first part of Colossians 3 explains the cycle of growth for the Christian, then these verses give some practical examples of how to live it out. We might have expected Paul to choose an easier subject for illustrating growth, but instead he jumped right into the personal business of the Colossian saints: describing how the Christ-rooted life should look in their most intimate relationships. He begins with marriage, the central relationship in society (3:18–19), and moves outward from there. We may not have a working concept of bondservants in our culture, but we can see how this set of instructions could apply to anyone who works for another person or manages the work of someone else.

FULLY CHRISTIAN WORKERS

Watch a short video by Tim Keller on [honoring God with your job](#). (1:52)



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DO YOUR WORK HABITS COMMEND THE GOSPEL?

Watch the short video below and then reflect on your attitudes toward your work.

[Connecting our faith to our work \(2:45\)](#)

Here's a helpful question to ask when reading this section: what do these instructions have to do with treasuring kingdom realities, putting off sin, and putting on Christ's character? Paul didn't allow the Colossian saints to think about growth in the abstract. Instead, each reader of Paul's letter would be able to see him- or herself in at least one of these categories.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Colossians 3:23-24

23 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

Reflect and Change

1. Pick one of the roles listed in this passage that fits you. Are you a spouse, a child living at home, a parent, an employee, a student, or a boss? Now rewrite Paul's instructions in terms of the cycle of growth from verses 1–17.
 - Treasure:
 - Put off:
 - Put on:
 - Compare Paul's instructions to the way people around you think and talk about being a spouse, child, parent, employee, student, or boss. What's so counter-cultural or unusual about what Paul says?
 - How is the gospel illustrated in Paul's instructions? See Colossians 1:21–23; 2:9–14.

Go and Do

- Based on the role that you picked for the previous section, find a maturing Christian in that same role and observe how they're applying Paul's instructions. What did you learn from them and what changes do you need to make to exhibit the character and habits of Christ?
- These illustrations of the Christian life are not just intended to help Christians understand how to walk "rooted and built up in [Christ]." They're also illustrations of the love of Christ to those who do not yet believe. This week, make a point to talk with a non-Christian friend or co-worker about how you're growing in your relationships.

Discipleship Activities

Set aside time to watch these 5-minute "Gospel at Work" videos: [Session 1](#), [Session 2](#), [Session 3](#), [Session 4](#), [Session 5](#), and [Session 6](#). Discuss any lessons learned or challenges with your accountability partner. [[Being a Disciple](#)]

Section

Colossians 4

Pray

Thank You, Father, for those who have made the gospel clear to me, and for the brothers and sisters who have comforted and encouraged me in my times of depression, discouragement, and weariness. Please help me not to give up asking You to complete all Your purposes. Make me a blessing to my brothers and sisters this week, and give me Your divine wisdom for my interactions with those who do not yet believe Your gospel. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read Colossians 4

MAY GOD OPEN A DOOR

Be praying, like Paul, for God to open the door for our message.

[Remember the MOR Accountability Form](#)

Paul closed this section on the Christ-rooted life by discussing relationships with other believers and with outsiders. As in many of his writings, he urged the Colossian saints to persist in prayer. He highlighted the need for them to pray for people like Paul, whose special calling was to proclaim the gospel. From this example we can see the kind of things we should pray for: that God would carry out His purposes in and through people.

When it comes to people outside, the Colossian saints must “walk in wisdom . . . making the best use of the time” (4:5). The concept of wisdom appeared first in Colossians 1, where Paul described it as what we need to know God’s will and to

grow in Him. Later, in Colossians 2, Paul contrasted wisdom with human reasoning that rebels against Christ's authority. Now, in Colossians 4, Paul says this God-given way of seeing and understanding life will be what enables the Colossians to live as Christ's ambassadors to those who did not yet believe. The lesson is simple: we shouldn't use only human methods that attempt to persuade men and women to believe the gospel, especially since we ourselves have only come to believe it through divine wisdom.

It is interesting to notice in Paul's conclusion the different ways he was thankful for his brothers and sisters. Tychicus, Onesimus, and Luke were "beloved" brothers. Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus had "been a comfort" to Paul. Epaphras had "worked hard" for the Colossian saints. These words and Paul's specific greetings show he was a normal human just like us. He cared about people; he missed them; he relied on them for encouragement.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Colossians 4:2-4

2 Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.3 At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—4 that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

Reflect and Change

1. Have you grown tired of praying for your fellow believers, teachers, or mentors? Think about how other Christians have encouraged you in the past. Let these thoughts spur you to keep praying for the Christians in your life.
2. What's your strategy for speaking the gospel to people who do not yet believe? How should your strategy change based on Paul's instructions to the Colossians?

Go and Do

- Think of one or two people who taught you the gospel. Pray for them that God would help them plainly declare the gospel to others.
- Someone has said that evangelism should be thought of as intersection more than addition. Write down some ideas of how you can use your regular interactions with unbelievers more wisely, having the courage to speak gracious, yet discomfoting words. Practice using your ideas and share with another Deepen Discipleship participant on how it went.

Section

1 and 2 Peter

Introduction to 1 Peter

Peter wrote this letter around 60 A.D. to encourage Christians who were suffering and to call them to personal holiness. The central focus of the letter is persecution

1 Peter 1–2 reminds believers scattered around the world that the gospel has the power to sustain them even in difficult times. Because God has guaranteed through Christ's resurrection the future reward of all His people, believers should live differently even in times of trial and loss.

The world and Christ's enemies may try to shame believers by disowning or excluding them, but believers can be encouraged that Christ also was rejected by men but accepted by God. In the end, it's the unbelieving rebels who will be shamed because they stumble over Christ. Followers of Jesus, however, embrace lives of personal holiness. They live differently by being good people, and they do not indulge bad desires or follow evil inclinations.

In 1 Peter 3–4, Peter prepares God's scattered people to live well when persecuted for Christ. God is in control, and believers are to turn to God and rely on Him. They should continue to live well and do good to others, even as they trust God to rescue them—either in this life or the life to come.

In 1 Peter 5, Peter encouraged believers to resist the devil and be firm in their faith. God, Peter said, has called believers to a future and eternal glory in Christ Jesus. He will finally support and establish suffering Christians—during and after the time they suffer. By God's grace and power, suffering Christians can take their stand as God's

chosen, holy, beloved people whose future is secure in Christ.

Introduction to 2 Peter

The gospel transforms those who believe. We see this pattern established in the life of the Apostle Peter, the brash fisherman turned fisher-for-men in Christ. Now an old man, Peter writes his second letter (from prison in Rome) to the churches in Asia Minor to warn them against false teachings and to equip them to defend the true faith. He writes out of concern about the purity of the faith and because he knows he's reaching the end of his life. Peter was crucified around A.D. 65, during the Roman emperor Nero's persecution of Christian believers. This epistle probably was written shortly before his death.

Since writing his first letter, Peter had become increasingly alarmed about false teachers coming into the churches in Asia Minor. He denounces them as promoters of "destructive heresies" (2:1), distorters of Scripture and mockers of Christ's divinity and predicted return. The remedy: True believers must know and obey true doctrine and partake in God's divine nature (1:4), which will produce holy and fruitful lives.

Peter begins this letter with a reminder of our utter dependence on Christ. He reminds God's people that, in Christ, God has given us everything we need for life and godliness. As part of the inner circle of Jesus' disciples, Peter was an eyewitness to Christ's teachings, miracles and resurrection (1:16), so he speaks authoritatively on matters of doctrine. When false prophets infiltrate churches and begin to lead people astray, Peter confronts their lies. He warns the churches of earlier believers who had abandoned God's truth in favor of pursuing fleshly pleasures, believing something other than God's truth and even leading others to believe those same lies (2:14).

He goes on to encourage believers in the face of "scoffers" (3:3-4). The early church expected that Christ would return within their lifetimes. So when church members

died, their hope in Christ's promise to return was challenged. Peter explains that God is not subject to time as we know it; He always acts exactly when He means to (3:9). The challenge for us is to wait faithfully for Christ's return (3:12), understand God's Word and live by it.

Colossians 1:15-20

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

*Section***1 Peter 1****Pray**

Father, thank You for Your plan of salvation in Jesus Christ that gives us a living hope, as well as current and future blessings that will last forever. Remind me that in Christ my future is secure so that I may rejoice even in the midst of present sufferings. Help me live as one who has been born again for obedience to my Heavenly Father and His Word. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn**Read 1 Peter 1**

Peter reminds these scattered believers of the gospel that was preached to them and that they believed. This gospel, he reminds them, should sustain them even in the most difficult times. Often, we need to remind one another of the gospel and its benefits.

1 Peter 1:1–9 Peter and Silvanus (5:12) wrote to followers of Jesus who have been scattered throughout Asia Minor. Due to persecution, these believers seem to have lost much, including their property and their identity. To a people experiencing suffering and misunderstanding as a result of following Jesus Christ as Lord, Peter invites them to praise God with him for the new birth, the gospel, which is a living hope. Because God Himself shields His chosen ones, they may rejoice even in the midst of trials and suffering. To a people whose faith was under attack, Peter explains that endurance through suffering shows their faith in Jesus is genuine.

SUFFERING?

Watch a video that discusses [God's goodness in your pain.](#) (9:00)



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SUFFERING MESSIAH

The Old Testament prophets predicted the suffering of the Messiah.

[See Isaiah 52:13–15.](#)

1 Peter 1:10–12 The Old Testament prophets predicted through the Holy Spirit a suffering Messiah whose life pattern was suffering first, then glory. That's usually the pattern of Christian discipleship, too.

1 Peter 1:13–25 Because God has guaranteed, through Christ's resurrection, the future reward of all His people, believers must live differently even in times of trial and loss. God is the One to fear because our current troubled existence is only temporary. Those whom God has chosen have been set apart by the Holy Spirit (1:2) for obedience, that is, to live holy and transformed lives since they've been bought (and sprinkled, 1:2) with the precious blood of Jesus.

God's plan of salvation started before creation when the eternal Son of God was chosen to be the sacrifice for sins. Now, in Peter's day, God's eternal plan to bless all peoples through Jesus His Son has finally been revealed. These scattered believers have been born again through the living and enduring word of God, so they should give themselves to a sincere love for their fellow Christians, remembering that only people and God's Word will last forever. Everything else perishes.

Daily Verse for Meditation

1 Peter 1:3-4

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.

Reflect and Change

1. As we set our hope on the grace God will certainly give us in the future, we are enabled to live differently and not be conformed to wrong desires. Instead, we are set apart to fear God and love fellow believers. Loving others purifies us from living according to wrong desires. In other words, we cannot simultaneously "use" someone and love someone. Choosing to love others drives out our evil desires.
2. In good and bad times, it's easy to forget that the gospel is God's eternal plan and that its benefits and rewards are only fully realized in eternity. The Holy Spirit seems to have especially aimed Peter's gospel explanation at the particular concerns of these "temporary residents" of Asia Minor. He wants them to focus on what's eternal and enduring. During trials and hard times, we also should give this kind of counsel rather than urge fellow believers to hope in their changing circumstances.
3. Those who have been born again are to love deeply and sincerely from

the heart. There is no such thing as a born-again believer who does not love others. According to Peter, loving deeply from the heart is part of the gospel truth that was preached to them.

Go and Do

- Explain the gospel and its benefits to at least one fellow believer. Talk together about how this good news helps us obey God and love others.

Discipleship Activities

- Review your Spiritual Health and Family/Single Health. Do the below two general assessment portions again. What has changed over the last six months? Are there any new habits you would like to continue after this study is finished? Discuss with your accountability partner. Plan to put your new habits into action next week (if you aren't already) and tell your accountability partner which habit/activity you started or plan to continue and ask them to check up with you about it. [[Being a Disciple, Spiritual Disciplines, Healthy Relationships](#)]

① SPIRITUAL HEALTH AND FAMILY/SINGLE HEALTH ASSESSMENTS

SPIRITUAL HEALTH

1. Are you confident that God has transformed your heart, that you have turned from your sin and trusted in Jesus as your Savior?
2. How would you rate your overall spiritual health right now? Over the past year?
3. Make a note of your spiritual discipline habits over the past year: prayer, fasting, reading the word, giving, outreach, worship, etc.

SINGLENES

1. Describe your relationship and community with other people? Are you content with your current routines in relating to others?
2. In what ways are you stewarding your gift of singleness for God's purposes? Watch or read the [Singleness and the Next Generation](#). and discuss with your accountability partner.

FAMILY LIFE

1. Marriage: how would you rate (1-10) your marriage right now? over last year? Use the [marriage evaluation questions](#) and discuss with your spouse. Note any areas of concern.
2. Parenting: How are you encouraged in your parenting? Are there any areas needing growth? How is each child doing? Note any areas of concern.

Section

1 Peter 2:1-3:7

Pray

Father in heaven, help me to love Your Word more, to read it more, and to long to have my thoughts and actions informed and corrected by it. Make my life a good advertisement for following Jesus. Help me live for the future. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read 1 Peter 2:1-3:7

1 Peter 2:1–10 Because Christians have been chosen to live holy, obedient, loving lives, we must get rid of evil intentions and evil speech. Like babies, we should desire the milk of God's Word. That is how we grow in Christ, by drinking and digesting the Word of God often and letting it nourish our souls.

The world and Christ's enemies may try to shame believers by disowning them and excluding them. In this way, Christians need not fret, for Christ was also rejected by men but chosen by God. Scripture says those who believe in Christ will not be put to shame but will be honored. In this life, it may not look that way, but in the end it's the unbelieving rebels who will be shamed because they stumble over Christ.

Followers of Jesus are God's chosen people, like the King's own priests chosen to proclaim His praises. After all, He's made them totally new, given them a new life. Christians have received mercy from God's own hand. That's honor, not shame!

1 Peter 2:11–17 Followers of Jesus embrace personal holiness. They live

differently by being good people, and they do not indulge bad desires or follow evil inclinations, which destroy a person's soul. Because of this, Christians shouldn't try to fit into the world's lifestyle patterns. Do good works so that outsiders will glorify God for your good life.

In fact, if you do good and are submissive to human authorities, your lives will show the empty foolishness of people's lies about Christians. That's why Peter tells these believers to honor everyone, even those who shame you.

1 Peter 2:18–3:7 This gospel transforms how believers relate to other people—both good and bad.

Peter encourages household slaves to endure good and bad masters since suffering for doing good is frequently the lot of Christ-followers. Christ suffered like this also, fulfilling the Old Testament Scriptures.

As the gospel is proclaimed in pioneer areas, some wives may become Christ-followers while their husbands still refuse to believe. This is also a kind of suffering to be endured, and Peter urges these wives to have gentle and quiet spirits and to put their hope in God while serving their husbands and perhaps winning them over by living and serving well. Husbands, too, should be understanding of their wives and honor their wives who are also heirs of grace. Otherwise, a husband's prayers may be hindered by his harshness and failure to honor his wife.

Daily Verse for Meditation

1 Peter 2:11-12

11 Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. 12 Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Reflect and Change

1. The Holy Spirit enables followers of Jesus to stop being so self-centered and relate well to others, even people who make life difficult or are hostile toward Christ and His church. Prayerfully determine to respond to the difficult people in your life with Christian love.
2. There will always be opponents of Christ and His followers but the lives of Christians should not bring dishonor to the gospel. Live and speak in such a way so that you are blameless before others.

Go and Do

- Talk with a fellow disciple and plan ways to be regularly blessing the difficult people in your life. Then pray together and implement a plan to bless others.

Discipleship Activities

- What have you learned about Fear/Power or Honor/Shame areas of gospel application with your new friends? How does the gospel address these issues?
[\[Making Disciples, All Peoples\]](#)

Section

1 Peter 3:8-4:19

Pray

Father, I thank You that You watch over all things and You see those who are doing good and those who are doing evil. Help me trust that You will act justly in Your timing, just as You did in Christ's life and death. May I bless others and serve God's people faithfully, living for Your glory. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read 1 Peter 3:8-4:19

POLYCARP

Watch this short video about [Polycarp](#), an early Christian martyr (3:20).



Video posted under Standard YouTube License

Peter prepared God's scattered people for how to live well when persecuted for Christ. God is in control. Because of this, believers should turn to God and rely on Him; they should continue to live good lives and do good to others, even as they

trust their Creator to rescue them in this life or the life to come. It's easy to imagine evil people shaming and ridiculing the Christians who had lost jobs, family, homes, and the respect of the community around them.

It's easy to imagine Christ-haters chasing believers from town and shouting, "You've been abandoned by your God" or, "Hey Christian, where now is this Savior Christ?" (Look at the words to Jesus in Luke.) But according to Peter, it's at just these moments of trouble that God's Spirit rests upon His chosen ones who faithfully endure, those who continue to bless and do good even to their enemies. Such Christians can even rejoice because such suffering shows they are united with their Messiah, Jesus, and are proving to be faithful followers, enduring as Jesus did.

1 Peter 3:8–12 Even Christ-followers can tend toward pride and divisiveness, particularly under stressful conditions. Instead, the gospel enables them to be unified, lovingly sympathetic, and humble. Peter quotes Psalm 34:12–16 to demonstrate that God is watching over His people, and He will hear their prayers so there is no need to use our words or deeds to manipulate or hurt others. We should bless others with our words and actions. God is actively opposed to those who do evil and will punish wrongdoers and will judge them one day (4:5). That's His job, not ours!

1 Peter 3:13–22 Like Jesus their Lord, Christians may suffer for doing what's good and right. Christ suffered as our substitute and sacrifice, the righteous for the unrighteous, dying in our place and rising again to bring us to God. He was perfectly righteous; He always did good and right. These truths enable Christ-followers to honor Christ in the midst of unjust suffering; they can explain to observers how being born again changes people. When this happens, Jesus receives glory, and when Christ's opponents hear this, the enemies who ridicule God's people are put to shame. Christ has already been raised; He is in heaven and already enjoys the highest place of honor, rule, and authority—over angels and earthly kings and governments. The living Word will have the last word.

1 Peter 4:1–6 Christians will live very different lives from those around them. Worldly people may cause Christians to suffer, but this is to be expected since this was Christ’s experience also. At a moment of great difficulty, Jesus prayed to His Father, “not my will but Yours be done” (Luke 22:42). Like their Lord, disciples seek to live for God’s will, not human desires. Now, ungodly people may bring temporary pain and suffering upon God’s people—even killing them—but at the resurrection, Jesus’ true followers will live with God, forever free from evil and suffering.

STEWARDSHIP

[Read more about what we believe about stewardship in the BFM.](#)

1 Peter 4:7–19 The end is coming, and even though it’s not easy to follow Christ in such circumstances, Christians should keep praying for and loving one another, showing cheerful hospitality. Don’t be self-centered, Peter says, but use your gifts to serve one another and rely upon God’s strength so He receives the glory.

Daily Verse for Meditation

1 Peter 3:14-17

14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, 15 but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, 16 having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. 17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.

Reflect and Change

1. It can be difficult to trust God when evil-doers seem to find temporary success in this present age. When Christians suffer for living godly lives and making good and right choices, our faith may be tested. In order

to find the strength to persevere, we must take the eternal perspective and look ahead to God's just judgment, hanging onto our living hope in Christ's resurrection from the dead.

2. Every follower of Jesus has gifts, skills, and talents from God that should be used to bless others, not for selfish purposes.

Go and Do

- Ask some fellow believers where they've seen God use you to accomplish His purposes. Then ask them to help you think through opportunities to bless others with your God-given gifts and abilities. Finally, seize those opportunities, but remember to rely on God's strength as you grow in your ability to serve.

Discipleship Activities

- Practice sharing [Creation to Christ](#) with your community group. Continue to pray for the opportunity, the ability, and the boldness to share the gospel. [[Making Disciples, Teaching Simply](#)]

*Section***1 Peter 5****Pray**

Father, thank You for raising Jesus to the place of authority over all things. When I face evil and temptation, keep me alert and give me the grace to resist the devil always. Make me more humble like my Savior, so that I may depend fully on You and stand firm in Your strength. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn**Read 1 Peter 5**

Observe that the early local church recognized certain persons as overseers, elders, or shepherds. These were identifiable people whom the apostle could address specifically at the end of his letter.

Peter was a witness of Christ's sufferings, and he wrote at the end of this letter to fellow elders. In the persecuted church, it's often the elders and overseers, the pastor-shepherds, who suffer first and most. These local church leaders may be especially tempted under trials and trouble, so Peter encouraged them to remain eager, faithful, contented, gentle, and willing examples to the people they serve and oversee.

Young men in particular should submit to the elders, just as all God's people are to be humble as they relate to one another. God opposes the proud, Peter says, but gives grace to the humble. It is prideful to take matters into our own hands as if we're in control, not the Lord. It takes humility to trust God with all one's concerns, to wait for His deliverance. But the Heavenly Father truly cares about His suffering church!

MODERN-DAY MARTYRS

Watch this salute to [modern-day martyrs](#), and remember: “Your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings” (3:18).

WARNING: GRAPHIC IMAGES OF VIOLENCE

Finally, Peter sounded the alarm concerning the devil whom he compares to a roaring lion on the prowl looking for people to devour. Followers of Jesus must resist the devil and be firm in their faith.

When suffering persecution and hardship, isolation and difficulty, God’s people might think their situation is unusual. Not so, says Peter. Throughout the world, believers are suffering because of the devil and people opposed to Christ and His church. So, be strong and firm. God, who is full of grace and has called believers to a future and eternal glory, will finally support and establish suffering Christians—both during and after their suffering. In this life, first comes suffering, then comes glory. In the middle of suffering, God is ruling and in control, and even then, dominion belongs to Jesus Christ the Lord—not Nero, not Christ-haters, not even to the devil.

Silvanus (or Silas) is a faithful brother in Christ who helped write 1 Peter. In closing, Peter states his purpose for writing, sends his greetings, and urges them to greet one another with the holy kiss of love, an acceptable greeting of the time. His readers have been both reminded of the true grace of God’s gospel and urged to take their stand in that grace as God’s chosen, holy, beloved people, those whose future in Christ is secure.

Daily Verse for Meditation

1 Peter 5:8-9

8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 9 Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

Reflect and Change

1. Those who are in Christ have what it takes (the Holy Spirit) to resist all temptations. They never have to fear the devil; rather, they should resist him, standing firm in their faith.
2. Take the humble path, because the low road is the way to receive God's grace. Proud people put themselves in a very awkward relationship to God. We do not want God resisting us and our efforts (5:5)!

Go and Do

- Talk with a fellow disciple about your own struggles with pride and self-reliance. Confess to one another specific instances of pride in attitude, words, and deeds. Discuss 1 Peter 5:5, and consider what it might look like to clothe yourself with humility. Then go and take the low road of humility, again and again.

Discipleship Activities

- Read the next section of the Baptist Faith and Message—on [The Kingdom, Last Things and Evangelism and Missions](#). Note any questions you have or things you'd like to learn more about. [[Basic Doctrine](#)]

*Section***2 Peter****Pray**

Father, thank You for giving me, in Christ Jesus, everything I need for life and godliness. Add to my faith the goodness, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, brotherly affection, and love that make me useful and fruitful in Your kingdom. Protect me from false teachings, even as others are deceived. Come quickly, Lord, that all things will be made right for Your glory. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn**Read 2 Peter**

Peter begins this letter with a beautiful and almost poetic reminder of our utter dependence on Christ. His intention is to remind God's people that, in Christ, God has given us everything we need for life and godliness (1:3). This is a particularly foundational place for Paul to begin as he equips early Christians to identify false teachings and counter them with a right understanding of the gospel.

As part of the inner circle of Jesus' disciples, Peter was an eyewitness to Christ's teachings, miracles, and resurrection (1:16). His personal experience gave him the right to speak authoritatively on matters of doctrine. So when false prophets infiltrated churches and began to lead people astray, Peter had to confront these lies.

First, Peter wants to be clear—God punishes those who teach a gospel other than Christ's (2:1). Peter's audience would surely remember the tales of those in times past who had abandoned God's truth in favor of pursuing fleshly pleasures (2:10).

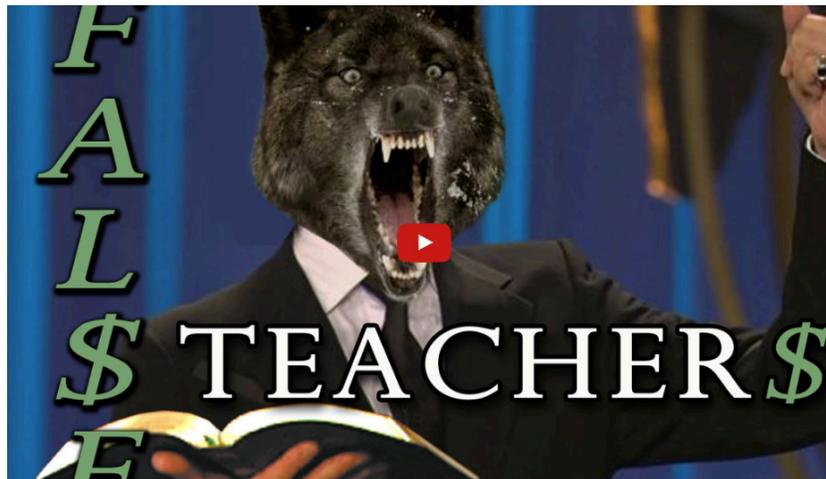
These evildoers may have started out professing Christ, but each one believed something other than God's truth and even went so far as to lead others to believe those same lies (2:14).

Peter goes on to encourage believers in the face of "scoffers" (3:3-4). It seems at least some in the early church expected Christ to return within their lifetime. So, when church members died, their hope in Christ's promise to return was challenged. Cynics began to sow seeds of doubt among them by asking, "Why is it taking Jesus so long to return?"

Peter explains that God is not subject to time as we know it. He lives outside of time. It bends to His will. The Lord isn't slow; He always acts exactly when He means to (3:9). The challenge for us, then, is to wait faithfully for Christ's second coming (3:12).

FALSE TEACHERS

Watch Shai Linne's music video on [false teachers](#). (4:00)



Video posted under Standard YouTube License.

The key to recognizing and defeating false teaching is understanding God's Word (3:18). We gain this right understanding by reading Scripture. Though 2 Peter was written before the completion of the New Testament, Peter encourages his readers

to learn even the most difficult of Christ's teachings by reading Paul's letters (3:15–16). Thankfully today, we have the whole counsel of God in the Holy Scriptures. In fact, it's our duty to know God's Word so well that impostors become immediately recognizable. This way, we won't be seduced away from Christ our Lord.

Daily Verse for Meditation

2 Peter 1:3

3 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.

Reflect and Change

1. Is there someone you can identify who might be trying to exploit Christians with "deceptive words"?
2. What passages from Scripture address false teachers?
3. Have people in your own church been deceived? What false teachings have you encountered?
4. Peter says that God's people have everything we need for life and godliness in Christ. How does this truth counter the lies false teachers spread?
5. How has God's timing differed from your expectations? How does the gospel help you wait on God's provision in His time?

Go and Do

- Write today's memory verse (2 Peter 1:3) at the top of a page in your journal. Then, under that, make a list of all Christ provides that makes life and godliness possible for those who are in Him. Here's a start:
 - Righteousness
 - Salvation
 - Love
 - Forgiveness
 - Peace
- This week, listen with discernment to all the messages you are bombarded with every day. Ask yourself, "What lies are these messages trying to get me to believe?" Then reinforce your will against the lies by meditating on 2 Peter 1:3-11.

Section

Philemon, Jude, and Revelation (Part 1)

Introduction to Philemon

Paul wrote Philemon from prison around 61 A.D., requesting Philemon to forgive his runaway slave, Onesimus, who was a new believer. Running away was a serious crime in Roman law, and as a Roman slave-master, Philemon had the legal right to punish Onesimus severely. But Paul urged Philemon to treat Onesimus as his brother rather than as his slave.

Introduction to Jude

The author of this short epistle identifies himself as Jude, the brother of James, who in turn was leader of the Jerusalem church and the half-brother of Jesus. If so, Jude also was a half-brother of the Lord (the “Judas” mentioned in Mark 6:3). Probably written sometime after A.D. 65, his letter refers to several Old Testament passages to warn Jewish Christians about spiritual rebellion, as well as false teaching and its consequences. The book shares many parallels with similar warnings in 2 Peter and the “Pastoral Epistles” (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus).

Jude urges believers to have a strong understanding of the good news so they will not distort grace and holiness, like some false teachers had. Believers cannot risk entertaining teachers who live loose or ungodly lifestyles, because they will cause division and controversy in the church. He warns the faithful to think critically about any teaching they hear and evaluate the lives and character of those who teach. Importantly, believers and teachers should stay within the knowledge and authority God has given them, being careful not to speak carelessly about the mysteries of God’s kingdom. Believers should not be surprised when false teachers appear and should work to support the clarity of each other’s faith. They should notice when

others are being convinced by false teaching and take responsibility to win them back to God's ways. Why? Because only God's Spirit can keep believers from leaving the straight path, and He will preserve His people for His glorious return.

Introduction to Revelation

The book of Revelation has fascinated people—both Christians and non-Christians—for 2000 years. And it's no wonder! With astonishing images of dragons and angels, wars and disasters, the book claims to open up to us what God has planned for the last days of history. The title of the book is actually "The Apocalypse," which doesn't mean "end of the world" or "great disaster," but rather simply "the revelation." In other words, in this book God revealed his plans to his people through a man named John.

Revelation was written in about A.D. 95, during the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian. John, one of the disciples of Jesus, had been exiled to the prison island of Patmos because of his preaching about Jesus, when on one particular Lord's Day the risen Jesus revealed these things to him.

What John saw was mind-blowing. With history soon coming to a crashing end, God's people would be pressed to the point of destruction until Jesus the Christ returned to do at least three things: end evil for good, save His people, and make a new world for them. For people under persecution and immense pressure to compromise their faith, Revelation is an enormously encouraging book. Its message? "Hold on! It may all seem out of control, but history is firmly in the hand of God, and it's Jesus who rules over all!" Just as that message encouraged the earliest Christians, so it encourages us as we strive to hold firm, press on, and remain faithful to our King, even in the face of mounting pressure from the world around us.

Colossians 3:12-17

12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, **compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,** 13 bearing with one another and, **if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.** 14 And above all these **put on love,** which binds everything together in **perfect harmony.** 15 And let the **peace of Christ rule in your hearts,** to which indeed you were called in **one body.** And **be thankful.** 16 Let the **word of Christ dwell in you richly,** teaching and admonishing one another in **all wisdom,** singing **psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,** with **thankfulness in your hearts to God.** 17 And **whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,** giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Philemon

Pray

Father, help me understand the radical impact of the gospel on all of my relationships. Give me wisdom and grace to see all fellow believers as brothers and sisters, regardless of their economic or social status and regardless of their relationship to me in the eyes of the world. Enable me to forgive and accept even those who wrong me, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Read and Learn

Read Philemon

WATCH AND LEARN

Watch a brief overview of the story of Philemon (1:30).



Video posted under Standard YouTube License.

Don't worry; it's only 25 verses long! When you're finished, read Colossians 1:1–8 and 4:7–17 and compare the names in the two letters.

From the information in the letters of Philemon and Colossians, we can piece together a general outline of the situation that Paul addresses in Philemon. It appears that Philemon is a Christian believer in Colossae (Colossians 1:1, 4:17; Philemon 1–2) who was wealthy enough to own at least one slave and who was noted for refreshing the saints (Philemon 4–7). Epaphras founded the church in Colossae, not Paul (Colossians 1:7), and Paul had apparently never been there (Colossians 2:1). At the same time, Paul clearly knew Philemon very well, and there is good reason to believe that Paul may have led Philemon to faith in Christ somewhere else (perhaps during Paul's long ministry in nearby Ephesus [Philemon 19]). Onesimus was Philemon's runaway slave. This is a serious crime in Roman law. Onesimus found Paul in prison in Rome and was converted to faith in Christ (Philemon 10–16). So here's where it gets interesting: Paul is now sending Onesimus back to Philemon. As a Roman slave-master, Philemon had the legal right to punish Onesimus severely, yet Paul wrote this letter to urge Philemon to treat Onesimus as his brother in Christ, rather than a slave.

Introduction Paul uses the standard format for the introduction of letters in the ancient world, but as always, he infuses it with rich theological content. He also prepares the way very skillfully for the appeal he's about to make on behalf of Onesimus. He identifies himself as a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and he identifies Philemon as a beloved fellow worker. His thanksgiving and prayer for Philemon stress the love and generosity that Philemon habitually shows to the people of God, and the joy and comfort this has given Paul.

Appeal Paul makes it clear that what he's asking is required of Philemon as a Christian and that Paul would be well within his rights to command what he's merely requesting. In many ways, this actually makes the outcome of the letter a foregone conclusion. However, Paul makes his appeal in the form of a request rather than a

command, and he presents himself in ways that are calculated to provoke sympathy rather than fear.

During his appeal, Paul employs a play on words by talking about the “usefulness” of Onesimus, as the name Onesimus means “useful.” He calls Onesimus his child and says that in sending him back to his master, he’s sending his own heart. The core of Paul’s appeal is the changed relationship that now exists between Philemon and Onesimus. By Roman law, Philemon owns Onesimus as his slave, and he has nearly limitless power over him. In Christ, however, Onesimus is now Philemon’s brother, and that trumps all other considerations.

That said, it’s not entirely clear what Paul asks Philemon to do. He’s certainly asking that Philemon receive his old slave back graciously and that he cancel any debt or damage that Onesimus might owe him. He hints in verse 21, however, that he expects even more than that. This may include sending Onesimus back to Rome to tend to Paul’s needs (verses 12–14), and many have speculated it might also involve giving Onesimus his formal freedom from slavery.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Philemon 4-6

4 I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers,⁵ because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints,⁶ and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ.

Reflect and Change

Paul did not demand that Philemon set his slave free, nor did he attack the institution of slavery per se—either here or anywhere else in the New Testament. However, the claim Paul makes is still very radical and counter-cultural. Paul says fellow Christians are family members—brothers and sisters in Christ—and this new

reality completely supersedes all legal categories and social conventions. He asks Philemon to forego his legal rights for the sake of the surpassing importance of the family of Christ, to forgive someone who had legally wronged him.

Ask yourself:

1. Do you look down at some kinds of Christians because they're different from you in terms of social status? The type of job they have? Their race, nationality, or educational level?
2. If you supervise other believers at work or exercise any type of authority over them, do you lord it over them, or do you treat them first and foremost as brothers and sisters?
3. Do you insist on your rights at the expense of treating other believers graciously?

Go and Do

- Make a list of people over whom you exercise authority. Add to it any categories of people—by job type, socio-economic status, ethnicity, or any other category—on whom you tend to look down. Pray seriously through the list, asking God to show you how you treat people; ask Him to change both your heart and your behavior toward them. Ask others who are close to you to give you input on how you treat people.
- Are there people who have genuinely wronged you, whom you have difficulty forgiving? Ask God to change your heart toward them, and reach out to them in a concrete way this week to show grace toward them.

Discipleship Activities

- Review your Outreach and Evangelism habits and Your Use of Time. Do those two portions of the below assessment again. What has changed over the last six months? Are there any new habits you would like to continue after this study is finished? Plan to put your new habits into action next week (if you

aren't already) and tell your accountability partner which habit/activity you started or plan to continue and ask them to check up with you about it. [[Being a Disciple, Making Disciples](#)]

i OUTREACH, EVANGELISM AND USE OF TIME ASSESSMENTS

USE OF TIME

1. Think about where you spend your free time. Reading, ministry, outreach, studying, sleeping, shopping, social media, entertainment, recreation, other reading etc? Make general notes of what you do, when and for how long.

OUTREACH, EVANGELISM AND DISCIPLESHIP

1. How much do you interact with unbelievers? In what contexts? (ie. work, school, social clubs, recreation, neighbors?)
2. Do you have any cross-cultural relationships?
3. Do you have a particular plan for outreach and evangelism?
4. Are you currently involved in discipleship relationships? In accountability relationships?

Section

Jude

Pray

Lord, strengthen our words with the power of Your Spirit, and teach us to live up to the glory of the gospel in our daily activities and choices. Protect Your people from division, and keep us alert for anyone that might try to twist Your amazing gospel. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read Jude

Jude urged all believers to have a strong understanding of the good news so they would not teach wrong understandings of grace and holiness, like some false teachers had.

Notice Grace allows us to turn our lives over to Jesus regardless of our past, but it doesn't free believers to live any way they like. God's kingdom requires believers to live faithfully by God's standards with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Believers cannot risk entertaining teachers who live loose or ungodly lifestyles because they will cause division and controversy in the church. Jude urged readers to think critically about any teaching they heard, evaluating the lives, words, and respect of those who teach. Importantly, believers and teachers should stay within the knowledge and authority God has given them, being careful not to speak carelessly about the mysteries of God's kingdom.

Notice In God's kingdom, faith is discerned by a believer's love and lifestyle.

Faithfulness and obedience to God's way protect people for God's arrival at the second coming.

Jude's problem is that these false teachers' lives don't match the gospel's standards; their lives are unguarded by God's ways. They may know God's words, but do not have God's Spirit. Regardless of the gospel they claim, God has judgment for them.

Believers shouldn't be surprised when such people come around, and they should work to support the clarity of each other's faith. They should notice when others are being swayed by false teaching and take responsibility to carefully win them back to God's ways. Only God's Spirit can keep believers from leaving the straight path. Only He can preserve His people for His glorious return.

Notice Churches are supposed to be on alert for false teachers, so Jude did not want anyone to be caught off-guard. However, he taught that God's power is the only thing that can keep believers safe.

FALSE TEACHERS

– Listen to John MacArthur summarize how to identify false teachers (4:34).



Video posted under Standard YouTube License

– Read Denny Burk on [6 characteristics of false teachers](#)

Daily Verse for Meditation

Jude 20-22

20 But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. 22 And have mercy on those who doubt.

Reflect and Change

1. Read James 2:14–20, Galatians 5:13–14, 1 Peter 1:13–16, and 1 Peter 1:22 to deepen your understanding of the kingdom relationship between grace and faithfulness. How would you explain the word “grace” in simple, contextual words for your particular culture?
2. Revisit 1 Thessalonians 2 to see how Paul, Silas, and Timothy kept themselves above reproach by keeping their words aligned with the simple, clear words of God. By doing the same, we can protect ourselves from stumbling into false teaching.

Go and Do

- Examine your own life for ways you might be justifying an ungodly lifestyle or activity in the name of “gospel freedom,” and commit with a fellow disciple to let the Spirit change your life in that area. [These seven grace checks may be helpful to keep you from quietly slipping into perverting God’s grace.](#)
- Learn the Christian history of your city with a fellow disciple. What kind of false teachings have been spread? How can you address or train yourselves and new believers to protect against those false teachings?

Discipleship Activities

- Tell your accountability partner what you put into action from your Spiritual Health plan.

Section
Revelation 1

Pray

Lord, I praise You as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the firstborn of the dead and the Faithful Witness. I praise You, too, for your unending care for Your church. Help me to love Your church in the same way You do; help me empower Your church throughout the nations of the world to proclaim Your gospel! In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn**Read Revelation 1**

The book of Revelation begins with an astonishing vision of Jesus. In 1:10–11, John tells us he first heard a voice and then turned to see a man of enormous power and authority. He is clothed in a long robe and a golden sash—both symbols of kingly authority—and His hair, feet, and eyes shone with a bright light. John would have recognized immediately that he was seeing the Ancient of Days as described in Daniel 7:22. Overwhelmed by the sight, he falls on his face, and it's then that the man reveals Himself. He is the one who died and rose again, the conqueror of death. He is Jesus.

9 As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire and its wheels were all ablaze. 10 A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened.

DANIEL 7:9–10 ESV

What is perhaps most astonishing about the vision, however, is where the resurrected King Jesus is standing. John tell us in 1:12–13 that He is standing in the midst of seven golden lampstands, which according to 1:20 are seven churches. Now, it's important to remember that numbers are very significant in Revelation; in particular, the number 7 seems to refer to completeness. So the fact that John saw seven lampstands means that it's not just seven particular churches that are being referenced, but rather all churches.

But why are the churches symbolized by lampstands? Because God always intended His people to be a light for the world, a witness and testimony to Him. So the churches are represented here by their main mission in the world—to bear witness to King Jesus and His saving gospel!

Daily Verse for Meditation

Revelation 1:17-18

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, 'Fear not, I am the first and the last, 18 and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.'

Reflect and Change

1. The important thing to see here is the amazing fact that when Jesus reveals Himself to us in the book of Revelation, His main focus and concern are local churches. Think about that! The Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the ruler of the universe, walks among His churches and holds them in His hand. And it's not just the church in the abstract or the church universal that's the focus of His care. The lampstands—as well as the stars in His hand—represent seven particular local churches. True, they also represent all Christian churches throughout history, but it's important to remember they

also represent particular churches of the day—filled with people who weren't so different from us. And all the while, the crowned and enthroned Jesus walks among them and holds them in His hand.

2. Have you ever considered that? Have you thought about how deeply and particularly Jesus the King cares about your local church and what's happening there? Your church is not on its own; you're not flying under the radar. Jesus is intimately familiar with you and the other Christians who make up your church. And why? Because He created your church, constituted it, and made it an embassy of His kingdom in this rebellious world.
3. What does Jesus' care for His churches mean to you? Does it mean you need to commit to a local church? Does it mean you need to pray for the Lord to give you a heart for His church? Does it mean you should pause for a moment and thank Jesus for giving you a faithful church?

THE LOCAL CHURCH

Watch how much [Jesus loves the church and so should you](#) (4:35).



Video posted under Standard YouTube License

Go and Do

- Do a brief study of Matthew 16:13–20, 18:15–20, and 28:16–20. You might think of these three passages respectively as showing the creation, the chartering, and the commissioning of the church. Who builds the church? What are “the keys of the kingdom”? What mission does King Jesus give to His church until He returns? [Here are 25 simple ways to live on mission in your neighborhood.](#)
- Take a few minutes and list some of the things about your own local church for which you are grateful. Spend some time in prayer thanking Jesus for His goodness to your church, even if maybe there are even more things about your church you wish He’d fix!

Discipleship Activities

- Read the next section of the Baptist Faith and Message: [Education, etc.](#) Note any questions you have or topics to pursue. [[Basic Doctrine](#)]

Section

Revelation 2-3

Pray

Lord Jesus, thank You for caring for Your church. Help us remain faithful witnesses to You, even in the face of terrible suffering and persecution. Protect us from cowardice and compromise, and let our light shine brightly in this darkened and rebellious world. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read Revelation 2-3

At the beginning of Revelation 2, something amazing happens: Jesus the King speaks to each of the seven local churches represented by the seven lampstands. The letters are extraordinary not only because of their detail—Jesus knows everything about these churches!—but also for the themes that run through them. Even more, because these seven churches represent all churches, what Jesus says to them helps us see very clearly what He wants and expects from His churches now. It's easy to think the letters to the seven churches are just a grab bag of a hundred different exhortations. But if you look carefully, there are really two major themes—two things King Jesus expects from His churches and for which He either commends or condemns them.

First, Jesus expects His church to **faithfully witness** to Him despite the world's persecution. That theme runs through all seven letters, though it's perhaps clearest in the letter to the church at Smyrna, where Jesus says, "Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and

I will give you the crown of life" (2:10). Even in the letter to the church at Ephesus, the "first love" they have lost doesn't seem to mean merely heartfelt devotion to Jesus, but rather love for Jesus particularly borne out in witness to Him. In other words, Jesus tells them they have stopped bearing testimony to Him, even as they're bearing up under suffering. After all, Jesus introduces Himself to them in 2:1 as the One who "walks among the seven golden lampstands," thus reminding them of their purpose. What's more, He promises them in 2:5 that if they don't recover their first love, He will remove their lampstand—a fitting punishment for a church that's no longer shining its light.

Second, Jesus also expects His churches **not to compromise** with the world. So the church at Ephesus is commended for zealously defending the truth (2:2), while the church at Pergamum is warned about following the ways of Balaam, that is, the way of idolatry (2:14). The same is true in Thyatira, where the church is sadly tolerating a woman whom Jesus calls Jezebel—an infamous woman in the Old Testament who led the people of Israel into idolatry and impurity.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Revelation 2:2-4

2 I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. 3 I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. 4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

Reflect and Change

1. There's the main theme of these seven letters: In each one, Jesus gives a status update about that particular church's witness. Are they holding fast and faithfully witnessing to Jesus, or have they lost the zeal they had at first and become lukewarm and therefore useless? Are they

shining light in a dark world, or are they compromising with the world and giving themselves over to idolatry and worldliness?

2. We would do well to ask those same questions of ourselves and of our churches. Are we faithfully and zealously about the work that King Jesus gave us? Are we bearing witness and remaining unstained by the world, or have we closed our mouths to compromise with the world around us? How do you think of your local church? Is it to you a kind of heavenly retirement community, a cruise ship that will entertain you until you get to heaven? If that's how you think of your church, the book of Revelation would challenge that. The church is none of those things, but rather a military unit and an embassy of the high King of heaven. Therefore, be creative as you think about and act on ways to broaden and deepen your witness to Jesus. That's why we exist. How can we do it better?

BEING LUKEWARM

Watch whether [lukewarm "Christians" are saved](#) (2:56).



Video posted under Standard YouTube License

Go and Do

- Look through these seven letters. Where else do you see Jesus exhorting the churches to maintain their witness even under hardship and persecution? Where do you see Him warning them not to compromise with the world, or commending them for not doing so?
- How is your church carrying out the Great Commission to bear testimony to the crucified and risen King? What communities is your church seeking to reach with the gospel? How are you contributing to that effort?

*Section***Revelation 4-5****Pray**

Father, we praise You because You rule in unbreakable sovereignty over all the universe. And Jesus, we praise You because You are the Lord of history, and by Your blood You have purchased men and women from every nation of the earth to be a kingdom of priests unto Your God! In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn**Read Revelation 4-5**

In Revelation 4, John receives another vision that launches the rest of the book. It's a mind-blowing vision of heaven, of God's throne, and of God seated upon it and receiving all of creation's praise and worship. But then something begins to happen, and John realizes he's witnessing perhaps the most important moment in all of history, one that would strengthen the hearts of all Christians who are still battling for faithfulness in this fallen world.

At the beginning of Revelation 4, John sees a door standing open and is brought into the presence of God Himself. What he sees is nothing short of breathtaking, and every detail is calculated to show us that God reigns with unassailable and unquestionable authority. At the center of the vision is the throne itself, wrapped in colored light, which symbolizes holiness, purity, judgment, and mercy. Surrounding the throne are 24 "elders" who represent the whole redeemed people of God, and four living creatures who represent the "kings" of all the realms of creation: domesticated animals (ox), wild animals (lion), birds (eagle), and humankind. All creation bows down to God and worships Him.

REVELATION SONG

Join all creation in worshipping God with [the Revelation song in many languages](#) (5:48).



Video posted under Standard YouTube License

But something else begins to happen in heaven at the beginning of the next chapter. John sees in the right hand of the One on the throne a scroll, rolled up and sealed with seven seals. As Revelation unfolds, it becomes clear that what's written on this scroll is the purpose and plan of God for history. This is how God has decreed that history will unfold—in judgment of His enemies and salvation for His people. But there's even more, because the book also makes clear that history is heading toward one great climax, the proclamation and recognition of Jesus Christ as King.

Immediately, however, there's a problem. No one can open the scroll, and so John weeps. You can understand why. If the scroll contains God's purpose for history, then it has to be executed! When the seals are broken and the scroll is opened, then the universe is being governed according to God's beautiful plan for His people. But if it's not opened, then that means there will be no protection for God's people, no judgment upon the persecuting world, no ultimate triumph for believers, no new heaven and earth, and no future inheritance. So John weeps.

But then, one of the elders turns to him and says, “Don’t weep anymore. There’s One—in the entire universe—who is worthy. It’s the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David.” So John turns and instead of seeing a Lion, he sees a Lamb looking as though it had been killed. The Lamb approaches the throne and takes the scroll; He is the One who will execute God’s purposes in the world, the One who will be proclaimed King at the end of it all. As the Lamb takes the throne, heaven explodes with praises that reverberate throughout the universe.

But there’s one last question: How did the Lamb conquer? Why does He have the right to take the scroll and bring God’s purposes to fulfillment? It’s because He was slain, and thus ransomed people for God from all the nations of the earth. God’s purpose was always to redeem for Himself a people, to forgive them of their sin, and bring them into His presence. But unless the Lamb died for them that purpose would never see fulfillment. It was only through the death of Jesus that God’s purposes would be executed. Thus He alone could take the scroll of history, break its seals, and see it through to completion.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Revelation 5:9-10

9 And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, 10 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.

Reflect and Change

1. The vision of God on His throne is meant to help us persevere precisely because we see God’s authority and know He reigns with unbreakable sovereignty over the universe. The centuries may roll, and we as believers may be tossed around, but God is the One who “was and is and is to come.” He is unchanging, forever and ever through the ages.

Go and Do

- Think about some of the things in your own life that tend to cause you anxiety. Are there any details of the vision in Revelation 4–5 that give you specific comfort in the midst of those anxieties?
- Take a few minutes to analyze your heart’s response to trouble. Do you expect trouble in this life and meet it with faith and perseverance, or do you tend to get bitter about trouble, as if it were unexpected? If we are united by faith to Jesus, who was slain, how should we think about the troubles we face in this life? Are they really unexpected? Unfair? How should a Christian handle trouble?

TROUBLE

Watch David Platt on [the Christian life being costly, but worth it](#) (1:48).



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Section

Revelation (Part 2)

Introduction to Revelation

The book of Revelation has fascinated people—both Christians and non-Christians—for 2000 years. And it's no wonder! With astonishing images of dragons and angels, wars and disasters, the book claims to open up to us what God has planned for the last days of history. The title of the book is actually "The Apocalypse," which doesn't mean "end of the world" or "great disaster," but rather simply "the revelation." In other words, in this book God revealed his plans to his people through a man named John.

Revelation was written in about A.D. 95, during the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian. John, one of the disciples of Jesus, had been exiled to the prison island of Patmos because of his preaching about Jesus, when on one particular Lord's Day the risen Jesus revealed these things to him.

What John saw was mind-blowing. With history soon coming to a crashing end, God's people would be pressed to the point of destruction until Jesus the Christ returned to do at least three things: end evil for good, save His people, and make a new world for them. For people under persecution and immense pressure to compromise their faith, Revelation is an enormously encouraging book. Its message? "Hold on! It may all seem out of control, but history is firmly in the hand of God, and it's Jesus who rules over all!" Just as that message encouraged the earliest Christians, so it encourages us as we strive to hold firm, press on, and remain faithful to our King, even in the face of mounting pressure from the world around us.

Understanding Revelation

The book of Revelation presents in highly figurative and emotive language the final triumph of God, the consummation of history, and the restoration of all things under God's righteous rule.

In interpreting and applying Revelation, here are some themes to keep in mind:

1. **A spiritual war is raging, and God's people suffer as special targets of the enemy's wrath.**
2. Evil often seems to win, and evil will go from bad to worse until the final climax.
3. Jesus has triumphed, and He will win the battle against evil. Jesus is coming back, and He will bring this present evil age to a close.
4. All opposition to God will be defeated, judged, and eternally punished.
5. There will be a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells. In that place, there will be no sickness, sorrow, sin, or death, but only infinite and eternal joy.

Here are some additional considerations as you read Revelation:

- Remember that Christians have disagreed for thousands of years about exactly what Revelation means. This is not surprising, since the end of the story hasn't happened yet. Trust that it will all be clear in hindsight.
- Because there are a variety of views on how to understand Revelation, hold your interpretations with humility, and don't build basic doctrines on the debatable features of Revelation.
- Remember that the language of Revelation seems to be highly symbolic and figurative on purpose. That's how John reported what he saw.
- Recognize that there seems to be repetitive cycles in Revelation, and they may be different ways of saying the same thing rather than the presentation of a strict "first this, then that" sequence.

- Above all else, remember the purpose of all biblical teaching about the end times is to encourage and comfort the afflicted, and to warn the unconcerned and self-satisfied. All applications from Revelation should fit into one of these two categories.

1 Peter 4:12-19

12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. 15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. 16 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. 17 For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 And 'If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?' 19 Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

*Section***Revelation 6:1-8:5****Pray**

Lord Jesus, You told us that in this world we will face trouble. You told us we will face hardship and difficulty and even persecution. But You also told us to take heart, because You have overcome the world. Help us, O Lord, to take comfort in knowing You as our King, and that ultimately we will be victorious because You are victorious. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read Revelation 6:1-8:5

At the end of Revelation 5, the slain Lamb (Jesus) had taken the scroll, God's plan and purpose for history, from the Father's hand and had been recognized as the King who would bring that purpose to pass. In Revelation 6, that's exactly what begins to happen: the Lamb breaks open the seals one by one, and history begins to unfold toward its conclusion.

Christians have often wondered how to understand the structure of Revelation. It contains three main sets of judgments—seals, trumpets, and bowls, with other visions mixed in around them. So the big question through history has been, "How do those judgments fit together?" Some have said they fit chronologically, that is, they follow one right after the other. There are good arguments for understanding the book that way, but perhaps a better way to understand it is not in terms of a line but rather a kind of spiral, which describes the same time period over and over again, each time with increasing intensity and drama. The reason for this thinking is because every major section of the book ends at the same place—at the final judgment. Read 8:5, 11:15–19, 16:17–21, and 20:11. Each of those sections has

essentially the same ending: Christ is proclaimed King, and there are signs of the final judgment, the day of the Lord.

Here in Revelation 6, at the breaking of the seals, we see those judgments unleashed for the first time. The first four seals bring judgment in the symbolic form of four horsemen: red for war, black for famine, pale for death or disease, and white for the nations of the world. One striking reality, too, is that Christians are not exempt from the effects of these worldwide judgments. The fifth seal shows martyrs—which is probably not a special class of Christians but rather points to all Christians who have “taken up their cross” to follow Jesus—under the altar crying out for judgment. Then in response to their prayer, the sixth and seventh seals are opened, and final judgment falls.

Between the sixth and seventh seals, however, there is a pause in the action, and John is given another vision: the sealing of the people of God so their faith might not fail. Of course, the most pressing question is, “But who is sealed?” Revelation 6:4 tells us that it is 144,000 from every tribe of the sons of Israel.

So are these Jews who are sealed, or a special class of elite Christians? Probably not. It means that all Christians are sealed. There are several reasons for thinking so.

First, the number is clearly symbolic:

$$12 \times 12 \times 10 \times 10 \times 10 = 144,000$$

Given that 12 represents both the tribes of Israel and the apostles, and 10 is a number of completeness, 144,000 probably represents the whole people of God, both Old Testament and New Testament saints.

Second, it’s important to keep in mind that the New Testament often gives the titles and privileges of Jews to the church. Paul even calls Christians “the Israel of God”

(Gal. 6:16).

But **third**, something is happening here which actually shows up several times in Revelation: John hears something, but then turns to see something else, which clarifies the meaning of what he heard. Remember in Revelation 5 when he heard that a Lion would open the scroll but then turned to see a slain Lamb? The words, “Lion of the tribe of Judah,” were interpreted by the vision of the Lamb. The same thing happens here, where John hears the number of those sealed, but then turns and sees, not a group of 144,000 Jews but rather “a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb” (7:9).

Daily Verse for Meditation

Revelation 7:16-17

16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. 17 For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

Reflect and Change

1. Coming on the heels of the judgments poured out in Revelation 6, the vision in the next chapter offers powerful encouragement. Whatever our afflictions, whatever pressures this world exerts against us, Jesus is firmly in control of it all. He told us we should expect trouble. So we know that everything we face ultimately comes from His hand, and we know He has irrevocably sealed us if we are in Christ.
2. Even so, we should remember that until we stand before Jesus, we are a church at war—the “church militant,” as the old theologians used to put it. Think about this: Why does the angel call out the names of the tribes in Revelation 7? The answer is that the only other time this kind

of language was used—“So many from the tribe of ...”—was when Israel was being called up to war. John’s is a vision of the army of the Lamb, and those of us who are His people are numbered in it.

REVELATION 6-7

Are you living in light of [Revelation 6-7](#)? (2:33)



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Go and Do

- To be a Christian is to remain faithful in witness to Jesus, even in the face of potential ridicule or persecution. Take a few minutes to think and pray about whether you have been frightened of what the world might do to you if you bear witness to Jesus. What promises do you have from Jesus that help undercut that fear?
- Study again the image of the Lion and the Lamb in Revelation 5, and the image of the 144,000 and the victorious army in Revelation 7. At what conclusion do you finally arrive about the identity of the 144,000? Who are they, and why are they sealed?

Discipleship Activities

- Review your physical health and financial stewardship, and do the two portions of the below assessment again. Has anything changed over the last six months? Are there any new habits you would like to continue after this study is finished? Plan to put your new habits into action next week (if you aren't already) and tell your accountability partner which habit/activity you started or plan to continue and ask them to check up with you about it. [[Being a Disciple](#)]

i PHYSICAL HEALTH AND FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP ASSESSMENTS

PHYSICAL HEALTH

1. How would you describe your general health?
2. Do you exercise regularly? Eat well?

FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP/GIVING

1. Do you have a budget?
2. Do you have consumer debt? how much?
3. Do you give regularly to your church or other ministries?

*Section***Revelation 8:6-11:1****Pray**

Lord Jesus, You are the crucified and resurrected One, the One who was rejected by Your people. Help us never to expect that we as Your people should be treated better than You were treated by this world. If we must suffer so that the gospel may be proclaimed, then help us to do it well, with perseverance and courage and hope. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn**Read Revelation 8:6-11:1**

The vision of the seven trumpets actually has its origin back in Revelation 6, when the Lamb opened the fifth seal and His people under the altar cried out to God, “How long?” The answer comes back that they should wait a little longer, but then at the beginning of Revelation 8, their prayers rise to the throne, and God answers with final judgment. Mixed into that vision, however, are the seven angels being given their seven trumpets.

Through the rest of Revelation 8–9, then, six of the trumpets are blown, and judgments are thrown against the world. It’s important to remember these are not likely a second series of judgments that follow chronologically on the heels of the seven seals; rather, John’s timeline backs up to show us the same events again, but with heightened intensity. How do we know that? Because just as the seventh seal brought the final judgment (8:5), the seventh trumpet does as well (11:15–19). The seals and the trumpets end at the same place—the great and terrible day of the Lord.

In Revelation 7, there was an “interlude” between the sixth and seventh seals in which John was shown a vision of the church victorious. Here, there is another interlude in which John is shown a different vision of the church. This time, however, it’s not the church victorious he sees, but the church militant.

Revelation 10 opens with what John calls a “mighty” angel coming out of heaven. Many people have identified this angel in many ways, but the best interpretation is probably that this angel is Jesus Himself. Everything in the first three verses—from His physical description, to His dominion over earth and sea, to His voice roaring like the waters (cf. Psalm 29)—is meant to make us think of God and Jesus. This is not just any “messenger.” This is the One who took the scroll of history from God’s hand and now reigns over all.

But something extraordinary happens in 10:8–11. King Jesus offers John a “little scroll”—a smaller version of the scroll He Himself had taken from the Father’s hand! Do you remember what that larger scroll contained? It was the divine purpose for all of history, and Jesus was the One who would execute it as King. So now, just as the Father had given the scroll to the Lamb, so the Lamb now gives a scroll to us, His people, and it contains a plan God is unfolding for us.

But do you also remember what God’s plan entailed for Jesus? He was slain. And now Jesus tells John that he is to follow in His own footsteps, to take up his cross and follow. That’s why the scroll is sweet in John’s mouth but bitter in his stomach: The plan revealed in the scroll is good because it is God’s, but it’s bitter in the unfolding.

SUFFERING

Watch John Piper give the reminder that [you will suffer?](#) (9:41)



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The vision in Revelation 11 develops this idea. In Revelation 11:1–2, an angel is shown carefully measuring the temple, which symbolizes the people of God, the church. The protected inner court is the soul and faith of the church, but the outer court—symbolic of the body—is left to be trampled by the nations. Do you see the point? God promises to protect the faith of Christians but warns they will face intense persecution from the world. Finally, there’s a vision of two witnesses—patterned after either Moses or Elijah—who bear witness and are killed and mocked but then resurrected and vindicated. Again, this is the story of the church in a rebellious and hostile world.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Revelation 11:15

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.'

Reflect and Change

1. Do you see the point the Holy Spirit is making to His people through these visions? If you are a Christian, you should expect the world to reject your testimony, even to hate it—just as they rejected your King. The question is whether you'll stand firm in the midst of that rejection. As the people of King Jesus, our purpose in the world is to bear witness to Him. So are you doing that? If not, what are you doing with your life? What are you aiming for? What greater purpose are you after than to bear witness to Jesus, to tell the world He is King and that He saves sinners?
2. No, we as Christians should not expect to go from glory to glory, victory to victory, in that endeavor. We will lose; we will be shattered; we will cry to God for vindication and rescue from this hostile world. But we will bear witness; we will speak; we will tell of King Jesus. And then, at the end, the seventh trumpet will sound and the raging of the nations will be accounted as nothing. Power will be stripped from the world and given to Jesus. For "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!"

Go and Do

- Go back over the book of 1 Peter. What kinds of persecution are the recipients of that letter facing? Is it death, or is it mocking and ridicule and derision? Do you think you face persecution or hostility from the world in any way? If so, how do you respond?
- Make it a point this week to tell the gospel of King Jesus to someone even though you might be frightened for some reason. Pray and ask the Lord to help you overcome fear, to realize that as a child of the King, you should expect to be treated no differently from your Lord.

Discipleship Activities

- Read the last two sections of the Baptist Faith and Message: on stewardship

and the family. Again, note any questions or topics to pursue. [[Basic Doctrine](#)]

Section

Revelation 12-14

Pray

Father, help us to remember there is more to life than what we can see. Help us not to think the earthly details of our lives are the sum total of human existence, but help us remember that our primary struggle is spiritual. We have a great enemy who is bent on destroying us, but we also rejoice because You have promised to destroy him and rescue us. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read Revelation 12-14

This section of Revelation actually begins the second half of the book, and there's a distinct change that takes place in its focus. In the first half of Revelation, the sufferings of the church have been clearly under the sovereign control of God, but they are essentially earthly sufferings: famine, disease, war, and especially persecution. Now, though, we're shown that behind all that ultimately stands a spiritual evil who was once bent on destroying Jesus Himself, but whose rage is now turned against us!

PERSECUTION

This video, [21 Martyrs](#), reminds us that many of our brothers are still being persecuted. (2:28)



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The two visions in 12:1–6 and 12:7–12 show us two perspectives on what was happening in the spiritual realm during the life of Jesus. On the one hand, there's the woman in 12:1–6; she represents the people of God waiting in hope for the Messiah, and she is threatened by the dragon who is Satan. Satan waits to destroy the coming King, but God rescues Him, while the woman—now representing the people of God who are faithful to the Messiah—flees into the wilderness.

In 12:7, the same period of time is described again, but now the focus shifts to heaven, where because of the work of Jesus, Satan is cast out. Revelation 12:13 then picks up where both visions left off. The dragon has been thrown down, Jesus is ascended and enthroned in heaven, and the dragon is enraged. So he turns his fury against the woman—the church—and tries to destroy her.

Beginning in Revelation 13, the dragon calls on two creatures to help him in his war against Christ's people. The first is a horrible picture of a beast rising out of the

sea—the dark, watery, chaotic abode of evil. Various details show us this beast is tightly connected to the dragon, perhaps even a personification of him. The wound on his head is reminiscent of Genesis 3:15.

But what or who is the beast? Is it one person who is the Anti-christ? Probably not. The image of the beast comes from Daniel 7, where four beasts represented four different kingdoms or governments. Here in Revelation 13, aspects of those beasts are all brought together, so this beast probably represents government power throughout history.

The warning is clear: We live in a fallen world, and it is in the nature of fallen people to gather as much power and worship for themselves as they can. Therefore, insofar as we Christians continue to insist that it is not Caesar who is Lord, but rather Jesus, we are a threat. Thus the kingdoms of the world are here depicted as servants of Satan for wiping out the threat.

Revelation 13:11–17 depicts another beast in service to the first—a beast who encourages people, persuades them, and seduces them to worship the first beast. When considering the characteristics of this second beast—its religious, economic, and social features—it seems to be personifying the entire cultural fabric of the world. All of society—religion, economics, entertainment, and politics—are used to pressure Christians to give allegiance to something other than King Jesus.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Revelation 12:9-10

9 And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. 10 And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, 'Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.'

Reflect and Change

1. We as Christians face an enemy who is bent on destroying us because we are the people of King Jesus. And yet, even in the face of this assault, we're called to remain faithful and bear witness to Jesus because we know the dragon and all his allies will one day be finally and completely defeated.
2. And do you know what fuels that kind of endurance more than anything else? It's knowing that Satan's greatest weapon has been stripped away from him. Read Revelation 12:9-10 again. Throughout the Bible, Satan is given authority by God to accuse God's people. In fact, the very word for "devil" means "slanderer." And the problem is that before Jesus died, there was truth to the devil's accusations.
3. But when Jesus died and rose again, the grounds for Satan's accusations were removed. There was no more sentence of death because there were no grounds for condemnation. Thus Satan was stripped of his greatest weapon. The accuser of God's people was thrown out of court! What an incredible thought: Satan, the one who would accuse you and press the sentence of death against you, has no place in God's presence, and God the Father will not even hear his accusations against the Son's redeemed people.
4. So let the nations rage, and let them persecute. Our eternity is secure in the hand of Jesus, and we will therefore never stop bearing witness to that glorious truth!

VICTORY

Watch Don Carson remind us how we overcome the accuser. (5:32)



Go and Do

- Spend some time meditating on what Jesus has done to remove sin from His people. How does that give you courage to persevere in bearing witness to Him?
- Think more about the two beasts who are called into the dragon's service. What do you think they represent? If they represent government power and cultural power, how do you think Christians should think about government and culture? Are there other passages of Scripture that help fill out our response to them?

Discipleship Activities

Tell your accountability partner what you put into action from your Outreach and Evangelism plan.

*Section***Revelation 15-16****Pray**

O Lord God, sovereign and true, we thank You that You will not allow sin and rebellion to remain forever. We praise You because You are the great Judge of all the earth, and You will always do right. We praise You, too, because we know that we ourselves deserve to fall under Your judgment. Yet because of Jesus You have promised to save us and bring us safely home to be with You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read Revelation 15-16

Revelation 15 is one of the most solemn and dramatic chapters in the entire Bible. Here, finally, we've come to the end, to the full measure of intensity of God's judgment. The chapter opens with a vision of a sea of glass mingled with fire. Have you ever seen a sea mixed with fire? I have—once. It was the only time I've ever looked westward over the ocean, and I saw the sun set. It's an extraordinary sight. As the sun sinks beyond the horizon, the sea ignites with light and color so bright you can barely look at it at all. Then over a half-hour or so, the colors darken and everything fades into night. Do you see what this vision is communicating? It's a picture of a sunset. Everything is coming to a close; the sun is setting on human history.

There's probably another meaning, too. In the Bible, the sea often represents evil—a place of darkness and chaos. Indeed, Satan himself is associated throughout Scripture with the sea. But now, there's no chaos. The sea is like glass, completely subdued and even mixed with the fire of judgment. Not only that, but the people

of God are standing “on” the sea, singing praises to God. This is an image of the ultimate defeat of their enemy.

In Revelation 15:5–8, a hush falls over heaven. The doors of the temple swing open, and seven angels dressed in priestly garb march out from the throne room of God. They are given seven bowls full of judgment, and smoke fills the temple. Then, for the first time since the creation, heaven falls silent. There’s no singing of angels, no crowns clinking to the ground at the feet of the Lamb, no “Holy, holy, holy!” from the four living creatures. There is nothing. In fact, no one is in the temple at all. At this moment of final, irreversible judgment, God is alone.

In Revelation 16, the seven bowls of judgment are poured out. What they describe is very similar to the trumpet-judgments. That’s because, as we’ve seen, John’s visions in Revelation actually cover the same time period. Each vision starts over and describes again the time between Jesus’s resurrection and His second coming, each one in succession adding another layer of meaning and intensity to the picture. In other words, the visions are describing the time in which we live, but pressing forward toward the Last Day.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Revelation 15:3-4

3 And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, ‘Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! 4 Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.’

Reflect and Change

1. Every word in these chapters is calculated to drive into our minds the fact that God is unassailably sovereign. The angels come from His

throne room; the wrath filling the bowls is His wrath. If judgment will be executed, it is God and God alone who will do it. Even the angel in 16:5–6 says to Him, “You brought these judgments.” Look, too, at 16:7. It may seem strange at first that the altar in the temple speaks, but only until you realize that it’s actually the voice of the believers under the altar from Revelation 6. Then they had prayed, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before You will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” Now they recognize that God is answering their prayer, and they cry out, “Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are Your judgments!”

2. We, as Christians, can take great comfort in knowing God is sovereign. When crisis comes in your life, what is your heart’s first response? Is it panic? May the response of your heart be something different—perhaps recognition of God’s sovereignty and prayer. Pray the prayer of the believers in Revelation 15. History advances at your Savior’s command, and recognizing that and living in its light gives comfort and solidity to our lives. Knowing that the last word—in everything—belongs to our God helps us stand firm.

TIMES OF CRISIS

Watch [this roundtable](#) on how God’s sovereignty practically helps in the midst of pain and perplexity. (9:13)



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Go and Do

- Revelation 15 contains a wonderful picture of Christ's people, victorious and singing praises. But how does 15:2 say they got there? It is by "conquering." Read again the seven letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2–3. According to Jesus in those letters, exactly what does this "conquering" entail?
- Spend some time in prayer simply marveling and praising God for His power and sovereignty. Pray large prayers that He would act soon to judge evil, put an end to rebellion, and bring history to the end He has purposed for it.

PRAYER

Why pray if God is in complete sovereign control? [Watch Leonce Crump's answer.](#)
(1:22)



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*Section***Revelation 17-19****Pray**

Father, we praise You today because You have rescued us out of the kingdom of darkness and qualified us to live in the kingdom of Your beloved Son. Even as the world has rebelled against You and continues to lift its hand against You in sin, we rejoice to say that our allegiance is to the Lord Jesus Christ. Deliver us, O God, from evil, and help us remain faithful to You even under the greatest pressures and most alluring seductions of the world. This we pray in Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read Revelation 17-19

In Revelation 12, the Holy Spirit showed John that behind the world's opposition to Christians stands a spiritual force—the Dragon, who is also the devil or Satan. In the ensuing chapters, the dragon called on two allies to help him in his war against the church. In particular, he beckoned two beasts—one of which represented the kingdoms of the world, and one of which represented culture in all its social, economic, and religious aspects.

Here, in Revelation 17–19, we see another angle on this same reality, another ally of the dragon. This time, the point is a stark warning to Christians not to be seduced by this world, or its luxuries and pleasures. Why? Because all of it is destined finally to be thrown down.

Revelation is organized according to a series of visions—seven or eight, depending on how you count—that describe the same period of time over and over again.

Revelation 17 begins the sixth of those visions; like the others, it resets to the beginning of the period after Jesus' resurrection and runs all the way to the Last Day, the day of judgment.

But how do we know this vision spirals back to the beginning? One clue is that Revelation 17 is all about the fall of Babylon. But in 14:8—at the end of one of the other visions—Babylon's destruction was already declared. What's more, the same thing happens again in 16:19. Twice now, at the end of two different visions, Babylon is said to have fallen. And yet, here she is again, alive and well, at the beginning of Revelation 17. This tells us pretty clearly that these visions aren't chronological; they don't follow one after another. Rather, they cycle back and tell the same story over and over again, beginning with the resurrection and ending at the Day of Judgment, each one from a slightly different angle and with heightened intensity.

The great question of Revelation 17 is this: "What does this woman, Babylon, represent?" Many answers have been given, but looking through Revelation 17–18, you can see rather clearly that the woman represents the whole economic, social, and even religious culture of humanity.

Think about it: she's decked in the finest clothes, drinking wine, and offering her luxuries to the kings and merchants of the earth. In all this, she's also bent on destroying the church, not just physically but spiritually as well. She wants Christians, like everyone else, to worship her and not God. And why is she named "Babylon"? Because since humanity banded together in Genesis to build the Tower of Babel—the place that would become Babylon—that city and her luxury has been the symbol of human arrogance and rebellion against God. This woman represents the whole of human culture in league with the beast (government power)—and behind it all stands the dragon.

These chapters are full of symbolic details. Revelation 17:9–11 makes it clear that

the beast on which the woman rides represents both Rome and all the other kingdoms of the world; 17:12–14 describes other kings and kingdoms which ally themselves with the most powerful kingdoms of the world. Revelation 18 is an extended lament (or celebration, depending on which side you're on) over the fall of Babylon. And then in Revelation 19, the scene shifts to heaven where the people of God, the ones who had been persecuted and seduced by the woman and yet remained faithful, rejoice over her fall. Finally, in the second half of Revelation 19, the beast on which the woman rode (the government power which upheld her) is itself thrown down by Jesus, who returns on a white horse as the King of King and Lord of Lords. The chapter closes, once again, with another vision of the end of history.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Revelation 19:1-2

1 After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,² for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.

Reflect and Change

1. Remember first of all that culture is presented here as an enemy to God's people, not a friend. She is allied with the beast, in league with Satan, and clothed in red, the color of the beast, the dragon, and blood. Not only this, but remember that the desire of the dragon and the beast is to make war on the church, to destroy us. This is an important point. The culture around us—its beauty, its sensuality, its pleasures and glories and fun and security and excitement—are presented here as a threat to you as a Christian, a threat to your allegiance to Jesus. Certainly there are places in the Bible that say culture is good and

to be enjoyed. But too many Christians act as if this other image of culture doesn't exist. They say they're just enjoying the creation and its goodness, and then look back and realize that their "godly enjoyment" has become worship, and they're now tangled in sin.

Go and Do

- Read back over Revelation 17–18. What details do you see that correspond to various aspects of culture? What details might have been included in John's vision of the woman Babylon, if he'd had this vision in the 21st century?
- Spend some time thinking about how you as a Christian can remain faithful to Jesus even as you must live in a fallen world and culture. How must Christians be wise as serpents? How can they be gentle as doves? How can they do both at once?

WORLDLINESS

t

Watch Conrad Mbewe discuss [how to deal with worldliness](#). (5:30)

Video posted under Standard YouTube License

Section

Revelation (Part 3)

Introduction to Revelation

The book of Revelation has fascinated people—both Christians and non-Christians—for 2000 years. And it's no wonder! With astonishing images of dragons and angels, wars and disasters, the book claims to open up to us what God has planned for the last days of history. The title of the book is actually "The Apocalypse," which doesn't mean "end of the world" or "great disaster," but rather simply "the revelation." In other words, in this book God revealed his plans to his people through a man named John.

Revelation was written in about A.D. 95, during the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian. John, one of the disciples of Jesus, had been exiled to the prison island of Patmos because of his preaching about Jesus, when on one particular Lord's Day the risen Jesus revealed these things to him.

What John saw was mind-blowing. With history soon coming to a crashing end, God's people would be pressed to the point of destruction until Jesus the Christ returned to do at least three things: end evil for good, save His people, and make a new world for them. For people under persecution and immense pressure to compromise their faith, Revelation is an enormously encouraging book. Its message? "Hold on! It may all seem out of control, but history is firmly in the hand of God, and it's Jesus who rules over all!" Just as that message encouraged the earliest Christians, so it encourages us as we strive to hold firm, press on, and remain faithful to our King, even in the face of mounting pressure from the world around us.

Revelation 5:9-12

9 And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation,¹⁰ and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.' ¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands,¹² saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!

*Section***Revelation 20****Pray**

O Lord, we praise You today because we know that history and its end are not in question. Every detail of the universe and of history itself is in Your hand. We praise You because You are sovereign, and we praise You because of Your great love for Your people, the church of your Son, Jesus Christ. Our great enemy has already been defeated, and we look forward to the day when he will be fully and finally destroyed. Help us, O God, to press on in faithfulness to You until the dawn of that day. Amen.

Read and Learn

Read Revelation 20

Revelation 20 envisions the final defeat of the dragon, Satan. The chapter's message is simple: however dire things may sometimes look, God is in control of every detail of history. Not only so, but He is bringing it all to an end that He has already determined. Having been introduced as the mortal enemy of the church back in Revelation 12, here the dragon is finally and completely destroyed.

The chapter divides nicely into three sections: the binding of Satan and the reign of the saints with Jesus in 20:1–6; the short release of Satan and then his destruction in 20:7–10; and, lastly, the final judgment in 20:11–15. Most of the attention given to this part of Revelation has centered on the first six verses, and Christians have understood the meaning of those verses in several different ways. That said, however you finally understand the details, the most important thing to see is that above all, this is a promise of King Jesus's final victory over the serpent, the dragon, the devil of old, Satan.

THE END TIMES

Watch the two videos linked below on how Christians should view the end times.

- [Thoughts from Mark Dever \(2:58\)](#)
- [Thoughts from Mike McKinley \(1:41\)](#)

How He will finally win that victory is of less interest to John here than the certain fact that He will win it. The basic idea is that Satan will be bound for “a thousand years” (10x10x10, probably, as in other places, a finally indeterminate amount of time), then released for a short while to deceive the nations, and finally destroyed. And then will come the final judgment.

The question that has always surrounded this text, however, is “When does all this happen?” Is this a prophecy of something that will happen in the future, or is this a description of what is happening now? Many Christians understand Revelation 20 as something that happens in the future—a “millennial reign” (as it’s often called) that happens after Jesus returns to earth. In other words, they read Revelation 20 as following chronologically on the heels of Revelation 19. Before we go any further, we should say upfront that this might very well be the right way to read it. Many faithful Christians do read the text that way, and it’s worth acknowledging they are taking the Bible very seriously and trying hard to understand it rightly.

That said, it’s more likely the text shouldn’t be read like that. I think that, just like it has over and over again in the book, the clock “resets” at the beginning of Revelation 20, and we go back again to the time of Christ’s death and resurrection. So I think this thousand-year binding of Satan and this thousand-year reign of Jesus and His people is happening right now, in the whole time between Jesus’s two comings. Whether you agree or disagree, let me tell you briefly why I think this way.

First, reading the text this way is faithful to the structure of the book. Throughout this study, we’ve seen how Revelation is made up of seven or eight (I think eight) visions, and each one is going over the same time period, from the resurrection of

Jesus to His return. Here are the eight sections, as I see them: the letters (Revelation 1–3); the seals (4:1–8:5); the trumpets (8:6–11:19); the woman and the dragon (12–14); the bowls (15–16); Babylon (17–19); the reign of Christ (20); and, finally, the new heavens and new Earth (21–22).

Second, the reason I think Revelation 20 is going over ground we've already covered is because the battle in 20:7–10 has already been mentioned several times. For example, at the end of Revelation 16 when the bowls are poured out, and at the end of Revelation 19 just as the beast and false prophet are thrown in the lake of fire. Those are not three different battles; they're the fulfillment of the prophecy of Ezekiel 38–39, a great battle in which all the nations of the world push the church to the breaking point just before the Messiah returns. The repeated depictions of that battle in Revelation are one indication that we're seeing visions of the same time laid over each other in successive layers to create a full and complete picture.

Third, the rest of the New Testament makes it clear that the binding and casting down of Satan took place at the first coming of Jesus. In Mark 3, for example, Jesus says that the reason He has come is to "bind" the strong man and plunder his house. "Bind" there is the same word used in Revelation 20. In Luke 10, when the 72 missionaries return, Jesus rejoices and says He saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. In John 12, two Gentiles come to Jesus and He says that "now the ruler of this world is cast out"—again, the same word here as "thrown." In Colossians 2, Paul connects defeat of Satan with Jesus' death and resurrection. Hebrews 2 says that Satan was destroyed through Jesus' death and resurrection. And in Revelation 12, John has already seen a different vision of this same reality, with Satan being cast out of heaven because of Jesus' death and resurrection. All this language shows that Satan's defeat—his binding, his casting down—happened at Jesus' death and resurrection.

If this understanding is correct, then it means that Satan is currently bound, right now. Of course, John is aware that the "binding" of Satan here doesn't mean he

cannot act at all. After all, Revelation 12 says he pursues and persecutes the church during this time, and Revelation 9 even says he's given the keys to the bottomless pit so he can unleash evil in the world. Remember, these are visions and symbols, so John is not particularly worried about the inconsistencies created when the different visions and symbols are compared with one another. Each vision is communicating different realities, and therefore each one has to be taken on its own terms in order to arrive at the whole picture.

And what is that whole picture? It's that Satan is active in persecuting the church, yet in some important way he is restrained. Revelation 20:3 is specific about the nature of that restraint: Satan is restrained from deceiving the nations. In other words, he will not be able to stop the church in its mission of preaching the gospel to the nations. It is as Jesus said: "The gates [i.e., the defenses] of hell will not prevail" against the church as she carries out her mission.

Daily Verse for Meditation

Revelation 20:6

6 Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

Reflect and Change

1. The implications of this text for us, especially as those who want to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with others, are enormous. Above all, once we realize the vision of Revelation 20 isn't simply something we're waiting on, but rather something we're living even now, it gives us great courage and motivation. For one thing, it removes the sting and fear of death for us. If you're a Christian, then you have no need to fear death because to die is to be in the presence of King Jesus.

This text also encourages us to be bold in carrying out the mission Christ has given us. Why? Because we realize that God has irrevocably determined that the church will not fail in her mission. Men and women from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation will bow before the King of Kings.

Go and Do

- Decide what you think about how this text should be read. Do you think it's describing a present reality or a future one? Why?
- Spend some time meditating on God's determination that His church will not fail in her mission of evangelizing the world. How does that reality affect your heart? Does it give you courage? Does it undermine fear? Why do you think that is?

Discipleship Activities

- Tell your accountability partner what you put into action from your Physical and Financial Stewardship plan.

*Section***Revelation 21-22****Pray**

O God of Heaven, You have promised us that what You have laid up for us is more than we can ever ask or imagine. Though we sinned against You and plunged ourselves and Your creation into fallenness and chaos, in Your mercy You have acted through Jesus the Lamb of God to save all those who trust in Him, to make everything sad come untrue! We look forward eagerly to the day when You bring history to an end, and usher us into Your presence forever. In Jesus' name, amen.

Read and Learn

Read Revelation 21-22

In this final vision of Revelation, the Holy Spirit finally launches into eternity. Throughout the course of the book, we've learned that the key to understanding it is to see that its visions are not so much about showing us the future as showing us the present—the time between the two comings of Jesus Christ—and thereby to encourage us to stand fast in our faith. But today, in this eighth major vision, we finally press forward entirely into the future with a glorious vision of what's waiting for us when all is said and done.

In essence, these chapters unfold a glorious vision of the treasures that await Jesus' people in eternity. By treasures, we don't mean crowns and gold and diamonds, either. In fact, much of these chapters' imagery seems calculated to say, "Those aren't real treasures. Here we walk on gold. We build our walls with diamonds. We cast our gates from pearls." No, the real treasures of eternity are infinitely greater than pretty metals and stones. They're the kind of treasures that are worth giving

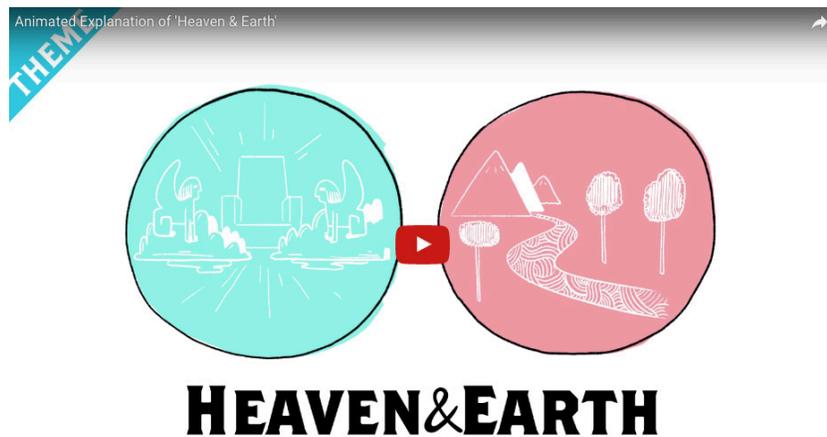
your life—even your very soul—to pursue.

We could probably spend a lifetime mining these chapters for glimpses of what God has prepared for His Son's people, but let's look at four in particular.

First, these chapters promise the re-making of everything. God promises once and for all to make everything new and pure and good, never to age or crack or rust or decay or grow old. "I saw a new heaven and a new earth," John says (21:1). That's a great and ancient promise from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, and here it comes to pass. The re-making of heaven and earth is a beautiful bookend to the whole of history, setting right everything that had gone wrong in the beginning. So Genesis tells of the creation of the world and its breaking at the hands of sinners; Revelation shows us a new creation, one unbroken and undefiled, utterly free from the ravages of sin. Genesis shows us the sun, moon, and stars being called into existence to give the world light; Revelation shows us a world that doesn't need those lights, because it's lit by the presence of God Himself. Genesis shows us the cunning of the serpent, and his victory as he tempts Adam and Eve to rebel against their Creator and plunge the world into pain; Revelation shows us the serpent crushed and defeated and cast away, and a city where God Himself guarantees that nothing evil or impure will ever enter it. Genesis shows us that awful scene of Adam and Eve cast out of God's presence, of an angel with a flaming sword closing the way to the Tree of Life; Revelation shows us, at long last, the gates of the city thrown open forever, people streaming into the presence of God, and the Tree of Life now a grove in the heart of the city, its fruit always and forever available for the taking.

WATCH AND LEARN

Watch this biblical theology of [heaven and earth](#) (6:42).



Produced by the Bible Project. The Bible Project content is available for free at www.thebibleproject.com

Second, these chapters show us the end of suffering and fear. At the center of this re-created world is the holy city Jerusalem. It's a glorious vision because it points to the end of the suffering and fear that have so marked this world and our journey in it. Every tear will be wiped away, death will be no more, and there shall be no more crying or pain or mourning. Moreover, 21:9–21 tells us the city is unfathomably large, that she is set on a high hill, and that there's no need to ever close her gates (21:25). The point is that this city—the dwelling place of God with His people—is unassailable. There is no more threat, nothing left to fear.

Third, Revelation 21–22 promises us a pure and unending life. That's almost unfathomable to us, because we are encompassed by death. Everything decays, including our own bodies. The curse of death that God pronounced in Eden slowly but inexorably works itself out in every one of us. And worse, there's no cure. The way to the Tree of Life is shut, and we're left to wander and remember and yearn and finally die. But read Revelation 22:1–5. Finally, here is unfettered, overflowing life! And it's not even merely that the way to the tree of life is opened again. The tree is all of a sudden everywhere! The water of life runs down the great avenue of the

city, and the Tree of Life offers its fruit without limit to all the nations of the earth. And notice where the river of life comes from—the throne of God and the Lamb. Yes, death may continue to work in us, but it does not reign anymore. Jesus holds the keys of death, and one day it will be destroyed, and the nations will frolic in the River of Life.

Finally, and above all, these chapters promise us an intimate friendship with God. Perhaps the most glorious phrase in all the Bible is in Revelation 22:4: “They will see His face.” Since the tragedy of Eden, this has been the great longing of humanity, the object of all our yearning, our searching, and our grasping—to see the face of God. And yet that goal has been hopelessly out of reach. But here, at last, God’s people look Him full in the face, and their joy is complete.

WORSHIP

Spend some time [beholding God in worship!](#) (5:24)



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Daily Verse for Meditation

Revelation 21:1-4

1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.

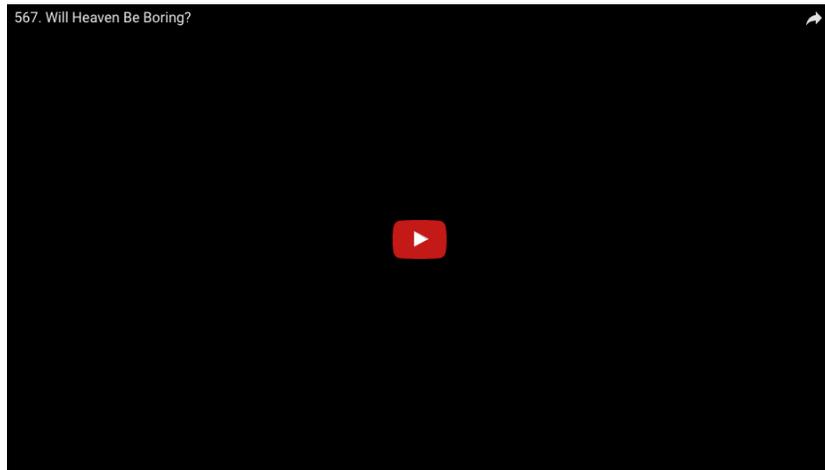
Reflect and Change

1. This world and its troubles have a tendency to darken our minds to the hope of eternity. These chapters of Revelation, however, remind us of what God has in store for His Son's people, and if we meditate on them carefully, the light of heaven will fill up the dark, hopeless spaces in our hearts and loose our tongues in a hope-filled explosion of longing.
2. Do you look forward to the day when all things are made new, when suffering and fear are ended, when life flows freely and death is no more, when you look God full in His loving and merciful face? That is not the world we live in now, is it? This world and this life are full of mourning, of crying, of tears, and of fear. And sometimes, that fear and mourning grips our hearts like a frozen hand. This is a world where Christians are chased out of their homes to a mountain and surrounded by people who want to kill their children. It's a world where terrorists explode bombs in a playground on Easter with the intent of killing as many children of Christians as possible. There is, here, so much fear, so much suffering, so many tears. And yet, here, the Bible holds out the promise that all this will come to an end—that it will all be

- made right, that it will all be made new, that life will conquer death.
3. If nothing else, this book reminds us that, as Christians, we're pilgrims in this world. This life, this world, is not our home; no, we look forward to another city, one not made by human hands. And as a result, our eyes—like those of any pilgrim—are cast toward our home, toward heaven. Let the promise of heaven fill you with hope and encouragement today. Pain, suffering, and tears will not last forever. One day our God will put an end to them forever.

HEAVEN

What will heaven be like? [It will not be boring](#) (3:02)



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because as John Piper puts it, Jesus is the joy of heaven (3:15).



By John Piper. © Desiring God Foundation. Source: desiringGod.org. Used by permission.

Go and Do

- Think back over these chapters. What parts of this vision of eternity that the Holy Spirit gave to John fill you with the most longing? The most hope? Are there any parts of this vision that are still confusing to you? Why?
- Read Ezekiel 47:1–12. What similarities with Revelation 21–22 do you see there?
- John makes it clear throughout Revelation that all the blessings of eternity come through Jesus Christ. Compare Revelation 22:13 and 22:16. What is the difference between what those two verses say about Jesus? (Hint: Verse 13 contains divine titles, while verse 16 contains the titles of a human king.) What does that tell you about the character of Jesus?

Discipleship Activities

- Give feedback to your Deepen Discipleship Group about your experience these past 6 months—areas of growth, change, and challenge. Any plans for new habits and activities for the future? We, at IMB Training, would also love to hear your feedback. Send it to us at training@imb.org

Section

Review**Pray**

Lord, help me as I reflect on what I've learned these past six weeks. Thank You for all I've seen in Your Word. Thank You for how You have helped me. Help me not forget how You've challenged me. Thank You that You are always with us. May I live for Your glory. In Jesus' name, amen.

Review

1. Think back to your reading from the Word these past six weeks. What specific things has God shown you? From your memory work? Stop now and take notes, if you haven't already, on any truths you want to remember from this time.
2. Reflect on what you learned from the "Reflect and Change" questions. Again, stop and note anything you want to remember, to pray about, or to continue to work on. What have you learned from other people
3. Review the "Go and Do" and "Discipleship Activities." How did you see God help you? Were there any new activities you want to continue? Anything you want further help on? Any new relationships you want to keep pursuing?

Celebrate

1. Celebrate how the Lord has helped you these past six weeks! Celebrate truths He has shown you in His Word. Celebrate any new acts of obedience He has helped you with, any areas of growth. Celebrate new relationships you have made.

2. Take notes of these things to celebrate with your Deepen Discipleship group, and celebrate together what the Lord has done.

Pray

1. Stop now and pray, thanking God for His Word, for His people, and for His Spirit that works in us.
2. Pray for any new relationships that have begun during these six weeks. Pray for God to work in their lives and for you to continue to have boldness, opportunities, and increased ability to share truth.
3. Pray for the others in your Deepen Discipleship group. Pray for those they have met and shared truth with. Pray for God's continued work in their lives, too.
4. Pray for yourself. For God's continued work in your life. For any specific areas of growth you want to continue to pursue. For continued faithfulness in discipleship routines.
5. Pray for your church, for those both leading and following.

Plan

1. Deepen Discipleship continues! Make plans to stay in God's Word, reading and learning, reflecting and changing, going and doing.
2. Prayerfully plan how you will continue to follow up with new relationships.
3. Prayerfully plan any habits or routines you should start, stop, or continue.

Section

Appendix

i 1. BEING A DISCIPLE

1. Being a Disciple includes personal holiness, living a life pleasing to God, abiding in Christ, developing godly character, demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit, and using spiritual gifts to edify others. Faithful disciples encourage others to be and make more faithful disciples and they encourage fellow disciples to gather in local churches that also make disciples.

“Disciples are followers of Jesus. They have turned from their sin and trusted in Jesus as their Savior. They have died to themselves and surrendered their lives to Him as Lord. Christ now lives in them, transforming everything about them from the inside out. . . . The disciple has a transformed heart. [They] are spiritually regenerate—they have been forgiven of their sin and they are now indwelt by God’s Spirit. . . . [They have] transformed affections. Disciples are deeply satisfied—they desire what Jesus desires. They also have a transformed will. Disciples are humbly obedient—they do what Jesus commands.” **IMB Terms and Definitions**

i 2. SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

2. Spiritual Disciplines help us focus upward, outward and inward and include prayer; bible reading and study; confession of sins to one another; regular repentance; Scripture memory and meditation on the Word; regular gatherings with other believers; fasting; service; generosity; acts of kindness or mercy; and all kinds of outreach.

“Transformed Affections: Disciples grow to participate in spiritual

disciplines not out of a sense of duty, but out of a sense of delight: enjoying the exaltation of God in worship, craving communion with God in prayer, hungering for God’s Word more than daily food, confessing sins with grateful contrition, and loving God’s glory more than their own lives.”

IMB Terms and Definitions

③ 3. HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

3. Healthy Relationships include living wise, loving, and godly lives in our family, church, work, and world. The “one another” passages in the New Testament instructs us in how to relate to others is a way that pleases God.

“A Disciple has Transformed Relationships: Disciples are sacrificially loving—they serve as Jesus serves.” **IMB Terms and Definitions**

④ 4. MAKING DISCIPLES

4. Making Disciples includes

- a. being a faithful disciple oneself who also practices evangelism (announcing with word the good news of the gospel)
- b. discipleship (intentionally seeking the spiritual good of another);
- c. modeling, teaching, training, loving and listening and
- d. encouraging disciples to make more disciples.

“The Disciple has a Transformed Purpose: Disciples are missionally engaged—they make disciples who make disciples of all nations.” “Disciple making is the Christ-commanded, Spirit-empowered duty of every disciple

of Jesus to evangelize unbelievers, baptize believers, teach them the Word of Christ, and train them to obey Christ as members of His church who make disciples on mission to all nations.” **IMB Terms and Definitions**

“Evangelism is proclamation of the gospel. In order to be biblical evangelism, the full message of the holiness and love of God, the sinfulness of every human being, the atoning sacrifice and victorious resurrection of Jesus for our sins, and the necessity of repentance and faith, must be presented.” **IMB Terms and Definitions**

① 5. TEACHING/EXPLAINING THE WORD SIMPLY

5. Teaching/Explaining the Word Simply includes understanding and explaining the Big Story and key teachings of each New Testament book; knowing which books say what; and knowing how to use them in disciple-making that includes a clear, simple approach that emphasizes transformation as well as information. Faithfully explaining God’s Word has the goal to make plain what written words of a Scriptural passage or text originally meant, how they fit into the context of all Scripture and how those words might apply to the hearers.

① 6. THE LOCAL CHURCH’S ROLE

6. The local church’s role in being and making disciples includes understanding what makes a healthy church, how simple church can be healthy, and what Scripture says about the life, practice and order of gospel churches in every context.

10 guidelines for church planting:

1. A church is intentional about being a church. The members think of themselves as a church and they are committed to one another and to God (“associated by covenant”) in pursuing all that Scripture requires of a church.
2. A church has an identifiable membership of baptized believers in Jesus Christ.
3. A church practices the baptism of believers only by immersing them in water.
4. A church observes the Lord’s Supper on a regular basis.
5. Under the authority of the local church and its leadership, members may be assigned to carry out the ordinances.
6. A church submits to the inerrant word of God as the ultimate authority for all they believe and do.
7. A church meets regularly for worship, prayer, the study of God’s Word, and fellowship. Members of the church minister to one another’s needs, hold each other accountable, and exercise church discipline as needed. They encourage one another and build each other up in holiness, maturity in Christ, and love.
8. A church embraces their responsibility to fulfill the Great Commission, both locally and globally, from the beginning of their existence.
9. A church is autonomous and self-governing under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of His Word.
10. A church has identifiable leaders, who are scrutinized and set apart according to the qualifications set forth in Scripture. They recognize two biblical offices: pastors/elders/overseers (which are synonymous terms in Scripture) and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor/elder/overseer is limited to men as qualified by Scripture. **IMB Terms and Definitions**

i 7. BASIC DOCTRINE

7. Basic Doctrine includes loving God with our minds as we consider with joy the attributes of God, understanding the person and work of Christ and the ministry of the Holy Spirit and all that Scripture says about important topics. The Baptist Faith and Message is a summary of basic doctrines embraced by the IMB.

“Transformed Mind: Disciples are biblically grounded—they believe what Jesus says.” **IMB Terms and Definitions**

i 8. ALL PEOPLES

8. All Peoples means having an eye for the nations and aiming at being and making disciples among all peoples. It means keeping constantly in mind God’s plan for all peoples, with the willingness to build bridges and cross barriers in order to show and tell the gospel to those who have little or no access to faithful gospel witnesses or who have little access to Scripture in an understandable language or form.

“The call to salvation includes a call to mission, for every person who responds to God’s call as a disciple of Jesus receives Christ’s command to make disciples of Jesus.” **IMB Terms and Definitions**

*Section***IMB Key Terms****i INTERNATIONAL MISSION BOARD**

The IMB partners with churches to empower missionary teams who are making disciples and multiplying churches among unreached peoples and places for the glory of God. This strategic aim includes and implies key terms and concepts that are not explicitly defined in the Baptist Faith and Message, the statement of belief with which we align all of our practice. Therefore, the purpose of this document is to provide biblically faithful, denominationally loyal definitions for terms and concepts that profoundly affect who we are, where we go, what we do, and how we train. We want a biblical understanding of these terms and concepts to be clearly articulated and consistently understood across the IMB so that we can wisely apply God's Word in our work together. Doubtless, more terms and concepts will need to be defined in the days to come, but this document contain definitions of the following: gospel, evangelism, conversion, disciple, disciple making, calling, missionary, missionary team, unreached peoples and places, and church.

i GOSPEL

The gospel is the good news that the only true God,[1] the just[2] and gracious[3] Creator of the universe,[4] has looked upon hopelessly sinful men and women[5] and sent His Son Jesus,[6] God in the flesh,[7] to bear God's wrath against sin through His own substitutionary death on the

cross[8] and to show His power over sin and death in resurrection from the grave[9]so that everyone who turns from their sin[10] and their own desires[11] and trusts in Jesus alone as Savior[12] and Lord[13] will be reconciled to God[14] forever.[15]

- The gospel is good news about God. It presupposes everything the Bible teaches about the only true God, and it is therefore unintelligible apart from biblical testimony to the character and activity of God. In particular, the gospel is rooted in the holiness of God and His righteous hatred against sin, and the love of God and His undeserved grace and mercy toward sinners. In order to be faithful to Scripture, gospel presentations must be God-centered, with His nature and His actions at the heart of the message.
- The problem the gospel addresses is humanity's sinful rebellion against God. Because God is holy and just, human rebellion rightly provokes His wrath and necessarily deserves eternal condemnation. While it is true that the gospel ministers to the consequences of sin in human life, in order to be faithful to Scripture, gospel presentations must identify the guilty rebellion of human sin as the root of our problem. Further, the gospel reveals the infinite severity of our problem, for an everlasting hell awaits every sinner who dies in this state of guilty rebellion against God.
- The gospel centers around Jesus Christ. It is the good news that in Jesus, God the Son took on full humanity and became one of us while remaining fully God. It is the good news that in Jesus, the kingly rule of God has broken into human history. It is the good news that Jesus lived a life of perfect, sinless obedience—the life we should have lived—and then died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins and to bear the wrath we deserve for our rebellion against God. Both in His life and in His death, Jesus traded places with us and served as our substitute. Further, the gospel is the good news that Jesus triumphed over sin and death in His glorious resurrection. It is the good news that He ascended

into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father, and that even now He intercedes for His people. The gospel is the good news that Jesus will come again in glory, and that His kingdom will have no end. In order to be faithful to Scripture, then, gospel presentations must be explicit about the identity of Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, and Son of God, and about His sinless life, atoning death, and victorious resurrection as the only hope for the salvation for sinners.

- The gospel is a call to repentance and faith. It is not just news; it is a royal summons for traitors against God to lay down their rebellion and return to Him through faith in Jesus. The gospel clearly declares there is no other way for sinners to be saved, and it categorically denies that sinners can earn their salvation by anything they do themselves. Consequently, in order to be faithful to Scripture, gospel presentations must challenge hearers to repent and believe the good news of Jesus, confessing Him as Lord.
- God grants amazing treasures to those who embrace the gospel. Their sins are forgiven, and they stand before God not only completely justified in His sight, but also clothed in the very righteousness of Christ. They have been reconciled to God. They have been adopted by God and they are alive in Christ, having been born again by the Holy Spirit. They now possess the Holy Spirit as a down payment and foretaste of their inheritance in Christ. They are a part of the body of Christ, the church. They are kept by the power of God in salvation until they see Him face to face. They will one day be free from sin as they live with God forever in infinite joy and glory. These treasures, and not earthly health or prosperity, are the true gifts of the gospel, and gospel presentations must be clear about this if they are to be faithful to Scripture.

[1] Deuteronomy 4:35, 39; 6:4; 2 Samuel 7:22; Isaiah 44:6; John 17:3; 1 Timothy 1:17; 2:5.

[2] Genesis 18:25; Proverbs 17:15.

- [3] Titus 2:11; Ephesians 2:8.
- [4] Genesis 1:1; Isaiah 43:15.
- [5] Romans 3:12, 23; Ephesians 2:1-3.
- [6] Luke 1:31-35; John 1:14; 3:16.
- [7] John 1:1-14; Hebrews 1:3.
- [8] Romans 3:21-26; 1 John 2:2.
- [9] 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Revelation 1:17-18.
- [10] Mark 1:15; Acts 2:38.
- [11] Luke 9:23-24; Galatians 2:20.
- [12] Acts 2:36; John 3:16.
- [13] Romans 10:9-10; Philippians 2:9-11.
- [14] Romans 5:1, 9-11; Colossians 1:19-23.
- [15] Romans 6:23; Revelation 20:11-21:8.

i EVANGELISM

Evangelism is the proclamation of the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit^[1] with the aim of persuading people to repent and believe in Christ.

[2]

- Evangelism always means proclamation, and it always involves communicating the message of the gospel using language the lost can understand.
- Evangelism always entails a proclamation of the gospel. In order to be biblical evangelism, the full message of the holiness and love of God, the sinfulness of every human being, the atoning sacrifice and victorious resurrection of Jesus for our sins, and the necessity of repentance and faith, must be presented.
- Evangelism is a proclamation of the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit. We present the gospel message, but only the Holy Spirit can turn a person's heart and mind toward Christ.

- Evangelism has the aim of persuading people to repent and believe in Christ. Evangelism is more than a mere presentation of the gospel; its intent is to persuade. Evangelism necessarily includes a call for the hearer to repent of sin and believe in Christ.

[1] Acts 1:8; 8:4; 20:24; Romans 10:9-17.

[2] Acts 16:31; 2 Corinthians 5:11.

① CONVERSION

Conversion is the divinely enabled personal response of individuals to the gospel[1], in which they turn from their sin and themselves (repent)[2] and trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord (believe).[3]

- Conversion is a divinely enabled response to the gospel. It's not something fallen sinners can accomplish on their own. According to Scripture, unregenerate people are slaves to sin.[4] They're unable to understand the things of God,[5] unable to obey God or please God,[6] and justly under His wrath.[7] They're blinded to the gospel so that they cannot see it.[8] They're not seeking God, but rather running away from Him.[9] They're dead in their sin.[10] Apart from the gracious initiative of God, no one can be saved. Therefore, God-dependent prayer is an essential component of evangelism.
- Conversion is a divinely enabled response of repentance and faith. The gracious work of God in conversion in no way minimizes or eliminates the necessity and responsibility of sinners to respond to the gospel call. Repentance involves turning away from sin and self. It marks a radical break from a life of rebellion against God.[11] Faith involves not only believing what the Bible teaches about Jesus is true, but also trusting in Him alone for salvation while entrusting one's life to Him. [12] Repentance and faith aren't separate or disconnected actions, but rather two sides of the same response: turning away from a life

of rebellion against God in repentance, and in the same act turning toward God through faith in Christ. Neither is complete or adequate without the other.

- Conversion is a divinely enabled response to the gospel. Two particular implications of this reality are significant. First, the gospel must be proclaimed for anyone to be converted. No one can be saved apart from receiving, understanding, and believing the gospel.[13] This makes the task of evangelism critically urgent.[14] Second, the content of the message matters. It's absolutely essential that missionaries get the message right, especially in light of distortions of the gospel that are popular around the world. Any "gospel" that denies or dilutes the full deity and humanity of Jesus—any "gospel" that identifies the human problem as anything else or anything less than our sinful rebellion against God—any "gospel" that does not major on the substitutionary death of Jesus and the reality of His bodily resurrection, or does not teach that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, is an unbiblical gospel which cannot lead to biblical conversion. [15]
- Conversion is radical. The Bible uses extreme language to describe it. Someone who has been converted has died to everything they used to be and has received new life in Christ.[16] They have, in fact, been crucified with Christ.[17] They've been created all over again.[18] They've been born again.[19] Conversion to Christ is neither casual nor superficial.
- Conversion is noticeable. While no believer attains perfection in this life, a converted person is a changed person. This is particularly evident in a Christian's belief in the gospel,[20] love for God's people,[21] and growth in holiness.[22]
- Conversion is permanent. God never lets go of or loses anyone who has been truly converted.[23] While it's true that some may profess faith for a time and then fall away, their very departure from the faith

indicates they were never truly converted.[24] While God alone knows the condition of a person's heart, it's neither biblical nor safe to assume that anyone who has denied the faith, whose life shows no evidence of regeneration, or who has voluntarily abandoned the fellowship of the body of Christ, has been converted, whatever they may have said or done in the past.

[1] Acts 2:38; 16:31.

[2] Isaiah 45:22; Matthew 4:17; Luke 9:23-24; Acts 3:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:9.

[3] Mark 1:14-15; John 1:12; Romans 10:9.

[4] Romans 6:15-21.

[5] 1 Corinthians 2:14.

[6] Romans 3:10-12; 8:7.

[7] Romans 1:18-32; Ephesians 2:1-3.

[8] 2 Corinthians 4:4.

[9] Romans 3:10-20.

[10] Ephesians 2:1-3.

[11] Mark 1:15; Luke 5:32, 13:3, 24:47; Acts 2:38, 3:19, 11:18, 17:30, 20:21; 2 Corinthians 7:10; 2 Peter 3:9.

[12] Mark 1:15; John 1:12, 3:16-18, 11:25-27, 20:31; Acts 4:12, 16:31; Romans 1:16, 3:21-28, 4:1-8, 10:9-17; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 1:13-14; 1 John 5:1, 11-13.

[13] John 3:18, 14:6; Acts 4:12; Romans 10:9-17; 1 John 5:11-13.

[14] 2 Corinthians 5:20-21, 6:1-22.

[15] Galatians 1:6-9.

[16] Romans 6:1-11; Colossians 3:3-4.

[17] Galatians 2:20.

[18] 2 Corinthians 5:17.

[19] John 3:1-8.

[20] Psalm 119; John 3:16-18; Galatians 1:6-9; 1 John 2:21-24; 4:1-6; 5:1-13.

[21] 1 John 3:14-15; 4:20-21.

[22] 1 John 2:4-5; 3:9-10.

[23] John 6:37-40; 10:27-30; Romans 8:31-39; Philippians 1:6; 1 Peter 1:3-5.

[24] 1 John 2:19.

i DISCIPLE

Disciples are followers of Jesus.[1] They've turned from their sin and trusted in Jesus as their Savior.[2] They've died to themselves and surrendered their lives to Him as Lord.[3] Christ now lives in them, transforming everything about them from the inside out, resulting in six primary marks of a disciple. The first of these marks (a transformed heart) occurs when a disciple places initial faith in Jesus. The rest of these marks are found in increasing measure as a disciple grows through faith in Jesus as a member of His body, the church.[4]

- **Transformed Heart:** Disciples are spiritually regenerate—they have been forgiven of their sin and they are now indwelt by God's Spirit. [5] By supernatural grace through saving faith in Christ, disciples have been acquitted before God the Judge and adopted by God the Father. [6] Such gracious regeneration has triggered a glorious transformation in every disciple of Jesus.[7] Having been brought from death to life, disciples are now new creations who live as servants of the King and heirs of His kingdom.[8] Empowered by the Holy Spirit, they grow in holiness as God gradually transforms them into the image of Christ from one degree of glory to another.[9] Disciples hold fast to the sure hope of full and final future glorification with Christ.[10]
- **Transformed Mind:** Disciples are biblically grounded—they believe what Jesus says.[11] Disciples of Jesus trust the truth of Jesus and view the world around them through the lens of God's Word.[12] As disciples abide in Jesus—reading, hearing, studying, understanding, memorizing,

and meditating on God's Word—He molds their minds to become like His.[13] They're continually being renewed in knowledge after the image of their Creator.[14]

- **Transformed Affections:** Disciples are deeply satisfied—they desire what Jesus desires.[15] Their pursuit of peace, joy, and life has led them to Jesus, who has not only saved them from their sin, but also satisfied their souls.[16] Disciples, therefore, grow to participate in spiritual disciplines not out of a sense of duty, but a sense of delight: enjoying the exaltation of God in worship, craving communion with God in prayer, hungering for God's Word more than daily food, confessing sins with grateful contrition, and loving God's glory more than their own lives.[17] Such love for God continually pushes out love for the things of this world.[18] Disciples daily crucify the desires of the flesh as they bear the fruit of the Spirit and long for the return of the Son.[19]
- **Transformed Will:** Disciples are humbly obedient—they do what Jesus commands.[20] Disciples of Jesus don't merely hear the Word and so deceive themselves; they do what it says.[21] Disciples see imperatives in the Scriptures as invitations from the Savior to experience the joy of active submission to Him.[22] The more they walk according to God's Word, the more Jesus conforms their ways to His will.[23]
- **Transformed Relationships:** Disciples are sacrificially loving—they serve as Jesus serves.[24] Having been reconciled to God through Christ, disciples continually work toward reconciliation with others in Christ, forgiving one another freely and serving one another selflessly. [25] Disciples of Jesus join together as members of local churches where they love one another by laying down their lives for each other. [26] Such sacrificial compassion extends beyond the local church as disciples care for their families, the global church, the lost, and the poor.[27]
- **Transformed Purpose:** Disciples are missionally engaged—they make disciples who make disciples of all nations.[28] Compelled by God's

grace, disciples are captivated by the Great Commission.[29] Jesus has not only transformed their way of life; He has revolutionized their reason for living.[30] Disciples live—and die—to share the gospel of Christ, to reproduce the life of Christ, to teach the Word of Christ, and to serve the world for Christ by praying for, giving to, and going to people around them and around the world for the sake of God’s fame.
[31]

[1] Matthew 4:18-22.

[2] Mark 1:15; Romans 10:9.

[3] Luke 9:23-24; Galatians 2:20.

[4] 1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 2:19-22; 4:4, 15-16; Colossians 1:18.

[5] Ezekiel 36:25-27; John 3:1-8.

[6] Romans 5:1-11; Galatians 4:4-7.

[7] Titus 3:3-8.

[8] 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:1-10; Romans 8:16-17.

[9] 2 Corinthians 3:17-18.

[10] Romans 8:18-39; Ephesians 1:11-14; 1 Peter 1:3-5; 1 John 3:1-3; 5:13.

[11] John 15:7-11.

[12] John 8:31-32; 2 Corinthians 10:5.

[13] Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 2:16.

[14] Colossians 3:1-10.

[15] John 4:13-14.

[16] Matthew 13:44; John 6:35; 10:10; Romans 5:1; Philippians 4:4.

[17] Job 23:12; Psalm 42; 63:1-8; Matthew 4:4; 6:5-15; 22:37.

[18] 1 John 2:15-17.

[19] Galatians 5:16-24; 1 Thessalonians 1:10.

[20] John 14:15-21; 15:14-17; Matthew 28:19.

[21] James 1:22-25.

[22] Matthew 11:28-30.

[23] Romans 12:1-2.

[24] Mark 10:43-45; John 13:35.

[25] Matthew 6:12-15; Romans 12:3-21; Ephesians 2:14-16.

[26] 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; 1 John 3:16-18.

[27] Ephesians 5:22-6:4; Romans 9:1-5; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15; James 2:14-17.

[28] Matthew 28:18-20.

[29] Luke 24:45-53; Acts 1:8.

[30] Acts 20:22-24.

[31] Psalm 67; 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20; Revelation 7:9-10.

① DISCIPLE MAKING

Disciple making is the Christ-commanded, Spirit-empowered duty of every disciple of Jesus to evangelize unbelievers, baptize believers, teach them the Word of Christ, and train them to obey Christ as members of His church who make disciples on mission to all nations.[1]

[1] Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8.

① CALLING

The call to salvation: First and foremost, calling is the gracious act of God by which He draws people to become disciples of Jesus and members of His church.[1] The call to salvation comes through the proclamation of God's Word in the power of God's Spirit.[2] Accompanying the call to salvation in Christ is a call to freedom,[3] holiness,[4] and suffering[5] in Christ. The call to salvation forms the unshakeable foundation of a disciple's primary identity now and forever.[6]

The call to mission: The call to salvation includes a call to mission, for every

person who responds to God's call as a disciple of Jesus receives Christ's command to make disciples of Jesus.[7] Disciple making is thus the God-given, Christ-enabled, Spirit-empowered duty of every disciple whatever his or her station, location, or vocation. In this way, every disciple plays an integral part in the eternal purpose of God to glorify His name through disciples made in every nation.[8]

The call to station: Christ calls disciples to specific stations in and through which they exalt Him on mission. One such station is the family, where Christians are called to be faithful sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, and mothers and fathers for the spread of God's gospel and the display of God's glory.[9] Scripture also speaks of a divine call to singleness for the sake of mission, either for a period or for the entirety of one's life in this world.[10] Other calls to specific stations include Christ's call to meaningful membership in His church[11] and responsible citizenship in their community.[12]

The call to service: Finally, calling is the gracious act of God by which He directs disciples to make disciples in a certain way, at a certain time, among a certain people, in a certain location, or through a certain vocation.[13] Calls to service may be fluid, operating at varying levels and open to varying assignments from God. What must be constant in a disciple's life, however, is faithfulness to God's call, no matter the cost, until God calls the disciple to different service.[14] Calls to service are discerned and affirmed not just individually, but as a member of the church on mission in the world through Spirit-led, Word-driven, prayer-focused examination of a disciple's desires, gifts, abilities, and opportunities.[15]

God's calls to salvation, mission, station, and service bring strength and comfort for disciples to persevere in the middle of trial and trouble, doubt and discouragement, pressure and persecution.[16]

[1] Isaiah 41:9-10; 43:1-2; Matthew 4:19; 9:13; Mark 2:14; Acts 2:39; Romans 8:28-30; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 26-27; Galatians 1:15; Ephesians 1:18; 4:1-16; 1 Thessalonians 4:7; 2 Thessalonians 1:1, 11-12; 2 Timothy 1:9; 2 Peter 1:3-11; Jude 1-2.

[2] Acts 13:48-52; 16:14-15; Romans 10:17; 2 Thessalonians 2:14.

[3] Galatians 5:13.

[4] Romans 8:28-30; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 4:1-16; 1 Thessalonians 4:7.

[5] Acts 9:16; Phil. 1:29-30; 3:8-11; 1 Pet. 2:20-21.

[6] Phil. 3:14; 1 Pet. 2:9.

[7] Mat. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8.

[8] Ps. 67; Rev. 5:9-10.

[9] Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Psalm 127; Proverbs 22:6, 15; Ephesians 5:22-33; 6:1-4; Colossians 3:18-21; 1 Timothy 5:8.

[10] Matthew 19:12; 1 Corinthians 7:17-35.

[11] 1 Corinthians 12:12-31; Ephesians 4:1-16.

[12] Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17.

[13] Mark 2:14; Acts 9:15-16; 13:2; 16:6-10; 20:22-24; Romans 1:1; 1 Corinthians 1:1; 7:17; Galatians 1:15-16; 1 Timothy 2:7.

[14] Acts 18:9-11; 20:22-24.

[15] Acts 11:22-26; 13:1-3; 15:2-4, 22-35.

[16] Acts 9:15-16; 18:9-11; 20:22-24.

① IMB MISSIONARY

An IMB missionary is a disciple of Jesus set apart by the Holy Spirit, sent out from the church, and affirmed by the IMB to cross geographic, cultural, and/or linguistic barriers as part of a missionary team that is focused on making disciples and multiplying churches among unreached peoples and

places.

- “A disciple of Jesus set apart by the Holy Spirit, sent out from the church” – At the most basic level, a missionary is a “sent one” who goes out from the church in the power of the Spirit as a representative of Christ.[1]
- “And affirmed by the IMB” – The IMB establishes strategies and processes for mobilizing, assessing, affirming, training, supporting, and leading missionaries who serve as representatives of the IMB.
- “To cross geographic, cultural, and/or linguistic barriers” – A missionary crosses one or more of these barriers for the spread of the gospel.[2]
- “As part of a missionary team” – IMB missionaries serve on teams in which different people have different roles and responsibilities in the missionary task. See “Missionary Team” below.
- “To make disciples and multiply churches” – The work of the missionary team involves evangelism, discipleship, church planting, and/or leadership training all aimed at seeing disciples made and churches multiplied.[3]
- “Among unreached peoples and places” – Missionary teams plant churches and/or facilitate church planting among unreached peoples and places,[4] entrust leaders of the church with responsibility for mission (i.e., equip them to shepherd the church and send out missionaries),[5] and then move on to plant the church among other unreached peoples and places.[6] See “Unreached Peoples and Places” below.

[1] See the original apostles plus Paul in Mark 3:14; Luke 9:1-2; Mt. 10; Acts 9:15; 1 Cor. 1:1. See also Barnabas in Acts 13:1-4; 14:4, 14; Andronicus and Junias in Rom. 16:7; James in Gal. 1:19; and Epaphroditus in Phil. 2:25.

[2] Acts 13:4ff.; 22:21.

[3] Mk. 3:14; Lk. 9:1-2; 24:27; Acts 8:4-8; 13:13-52; 14:1-23; Romans 15:17-23; 1 Cor. 9:16; Gal. 1:15-16.

[4] Rom. 15:20-21; 1 Cor. 3:6-11; 4:15; 2 Cor. 10:13-16. See churches

begun in Philippi (Acts 16:40), Thessalonica (Acts 17:4), Berea (Acts 17:12), Athens (Acts 17:34), Corinth (Acts 18:8–11), and Ephesus (Acts 19:10; 20:17).

[5] Acts 14:21-23; 20:32; 1 Thess. 1:4-10.

[6] Acts 13:6, 13; 16:40; 18:1, 18, 23; 19:21; Romans 15:20-24.

① MISSIONARY TEAM

In the New Testament, disciples on mission most often serve on teams in which different people have different roles and responsibilities.[1] Beyond this biblical precedent, Scripture points to strong personal, practical, and pastoral reasons for disciples on mission not to serve in isolation from others.[2] Even evangelistic reasons exist for disciples to exalt Christ in the context of Christian community.[3] Consequently, we believe it best for IMB missionaries to serve on teams in which different people have different roles and responsibilities in the missionary task. A missionary team is an identifiable group of disciples who meet together regularly, care for each other selflessly, and partner with one another intentionally to make disciples and multiply churches among particular unreached peoples and/or places. Teams may be comprised of IMB missionaries, national believers, and/or other Great Commission partners. The IMB provides multiple pathways through which missionaries may serve on one of these teams, each of which carries unique qualifications, involves various types of training, necessitates appropriate measures of accountability, and includes different levels of financial and/or other support.

[1] Luke 10:1; Acts 13:4ff.; 15:36-41; 16:1-5; 18:1-4; 19:29; 20:1-6; 1 Corinthians 1:1-3; 2 Corinthians 1:1-2; Philippians 1:1-2; Colossians 1:1-2; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-2; Thessalonians 1:1-2; Philippians 1-3, 23-24.

[2] Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31; Hebrews 10:24-25.

[3] John 13:35; 17:20-23; Acts 2:42-47.

i UNREACHED PEOPLES AND PLACES

Unreached peoples and places are those among whom Christ is largely unknown, and the church is relatively insufficient to make Christ known in its broader population without outside help.

In contemporary terminology, unreached peoples refer to ethnolinguistic groups in which the number of evangelical Christians is less than 2%.

Though this definition is helpful in some ways, it's problematic in others:

- **It arbitrarily identifies a 2% threshold as the determinant between “reached” and “unreached.”** Missiologists have examined sociological data to determine the threshold at which a population segment can sufficiently spread its ideas to its broader population without outside assistance. However, sociologists (and consequently missiologists) have disagreed on what percentage of people constitutes that threshold. This reality, in addition to the absence of biblical prescription regarding such a threshold, renders attempts to identify a particular percentage of people as “unreached” or “reached” problematic, particularly if that percentage becomes the sole determinant in mission strategy. We believe it's valuable to identify the percentage of evangelicals among a particular people group or in a particular place, but we also couple that percentage with research regarding a number of other factors in order to accurately identify the state of the church and the access to the gospel among that people or in that place. Based on all of this information, we then organize which missionaries we deploy where and what those missionaries do when they get there, letting the state of the

church determine our strategy for mission.

- **It unnecessarily limits the “unreached” label to a particular people group.** Research regarding people groups is necessary in light of Christ’s command to make disciples of all nations (of all ethne), Christ’s promise that the gospel will be proclaimed as a testimony to all nations (to all ethne) before the end comes, and the Bible’s guarantee that individuals from every tribe, language, people, and nation (ethne) will one day be ransomed by God and represented in heaven.[1] It is beneficial, then, to identify ethnolinguistic groups in the world and to track the spread of the gospel among them with the goal of reaching all of them. Furthermore, such research must inform mission strategy. However, we should not and do not ignore the reality that when the New Testament records the spread of the gospel through the early church, biblical authors strongly focus on places, not only peoples. In Luke’s account of Paul’s missionary journeys, he primarily records the spread of the gospel from city to city and region to region, not people group to people group.[2] Moreover, in Paul’s clear explanation of his passion to proclaim the gospel where Christ has not been named, he speaks in terms of distinct places, not of distinct people groups. [3] This does not mean biblical accounts neglect the mention (and even importance) of ethnic and cultural distinctions among Christian converts,[4] but the earliest missionaries seem focused not just on spreading the gospel to unreached peoples, but also (and often even more so) to unreached places.

It is both biblical and helpful, then, to recognize the unreached in terms of both peoples and places, for both realities bear uniquely upon mission strategy.

- **Recognizing the unreached in terms of particular people groups has a unique bearing on disciple making.** Ethnolinguistic barriers

often hinder the spread of the gospel across people groups. Such barriers are necessary for missionaries to consider in evangelism and discipleship as they contextualize the gospel for their listeners. Missionaries must often learn a language in order to share the gospel, and they should always consider the ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious distinctions of their listeners when communicating the gospel to them and applying the gospel to their lives.

- **Recognizing the unreached in terms of places has a unique bearing on church planting.** As previously noted, New Testament mission patterns put clear priority on planting churches in unreached places. As churches are planted in particular places, these churches are uniquely designed by God to include different people groups. The New Testament does not prioritize planting homogeneous churches comprised of single people groups. Across the New Testament, the gospel beckons (even requires) Christians to bridge ethnic barriers in the church.[5] Therefore, we reject the notion that in places where multiple people groups exist, we should purposefully plant churches exclusively and perpetually comprised of one people group. Instead, we believe that in places where multiple people groups exist, we should plant churches that intentionally bridge ethnic barriers by evangelizing distinct people groups and incorporating them into the church. To be sure, getting to this point in church planting can be a process which demands much patience and wisdom in disciple making. But it remains the end toward which we are working until the day when all the peoples gather as one people to give glory to God through Christ.[6]

Our mission strategy, then, focuses on both unreached peoples and places. We deploy missionary teams to unreached places where Christ is largely unknown and the church is relatively insufficient to make Christ known in its broader population without outside help. We also deploy missionary teams to reached places with a significant population of unreached peoples. In addition, we deploy missionary teams to reached

places with significant potential for reaching unreached peoples and places. Regardless of place, we proclaim the gospel to all people with an intentional focus on reaching different peoples and gathering them into churches together. In this way, we are resolutely focused on playing our part in seeing disciples made and churches multiplied in every place and among every people group in the world.

[1] Matthew 28:19; 24:14; Revelation 5:9-10.

[2] Acts 1:8; 8:1; 9:31; 11:19-21; 13-21.

[3] Romans 15:18-24.

[4] Acts 8:27; 10:1-2; 11:19-21; 16:48; 17:18.

[5] Acts 14:21-23; 5:1-35; 1 Corinthians 8-10; Galatians 3:23-29; Ephesians 2:11-22.

[6] Philippians 2:9-11; Revelation 5:9-14; 7:9-12.

i CHURCH

NOTE: The "Baptist Faith and Message" explicitly defines church, and the first paragraph below is a direct quotation from it. The subsequent paragraphs and bullet points describe the implications of this definition for our work.

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord.[1]

We believe that every local church is autonomous under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of His inerrant Word. This is as true overseas as it is in the United States. Some churches to which we relate overseas may make decisions in doctrine and practice which we would not choose. Nevertheless, we are accountable to God and to Southern Baptists for the foundation we lay when we plant churches, for the teaching we give when we train church leaders, and for the criteria we use when we count churches. In our church planting and teaching ministries, we will seek to lay a foundation of beliefs and practices that are consistent with the Baptist Faith and Message, although local churches overseas may express those beliefs and practices in different ways according to the needs of their cultural settings. Flowing from the definition of a church given above and from the Scriptures from which this definition is derived, we will observe the following guidelines in church planting, leadership training, and statistical reporting.

1. A church is intentional about being a church. Members think of themselves as a church. They are committed to one another and to God (associated by covenant) in pursuing all that Scripture requires of a church.
2. A church has an identifiable membership of baptized believers in Jesus Christ.
3. A church practices the baptism of believers only by immersing them in water.
4. A church observes the Lord's Supper on a regular basis.
5. Under the authority of the local church and its leadership, members may be assigned to carry out the ordinances.
6. A church submits to the inerrant word of God as the ultimate authority for all that it believes and does.
7. A church meets regularly for worship, prayer, the study of God's word, and fellowship. Members of the church minister to one another's

needs, hold each other accountable, and exercise church discipline as needed. Members encourage one another and build each other up in holiness, maturity in Christ, and love.

8. A church embraces its responsibility to fulfill the Great Commission, both locally and globally, from the beginning of its existence as a church.
9. A church is autonomous and self-governing under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of His Word.
10. A church has identifiable leaders, who are scrutinized and set apart according to the qualifications set forth in Scripture. A church recognizes two biblical offices of church leadership: pastors/elders/overseers and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor/elder/overseer is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.

Based upon these guidelines, we identify twelve characteristics of healthy churches: biblical evangelism, biblical discipleship, biblical membership, biblical leadership, biblical teaching and preaching, biblical ordinances, biblical worship, biblical prayer, biblical fellowship, biblical accountability and discipline, biblical giving, and biblical mission.

As we make disciples among unreached peoples and places and these disciples gather together in groups, we work intentionally to bring these groups to the point where they identify as a church. Again, a church is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel that observes the two ordinances of Christ; is governed by His laws; exercises the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word; and seeks to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. As disciples thus identify themselves as a church, we intentionally work with them toward becoming healthy churches with all of the characteristics above through patient teaching,

training, prayer, and guidance. Our goal in the missionary task is healthy church formation.[2]

Finally, as IMB missionaries plant churches around the world, we prioritize meaningful personal membership in local churches. IMB missionaries are sent out as members from local churches in North America, and IMB missionaries serve as members of local churches on the field. Knowing that we need the church even as we plant the church, IMB missionaries actively participate on the field as members of local churches which align as much as theologically, ecclesiologically, and missiologically possible with the churches we are planting. Such local church participation may be in a church we are planting or have planted. IMB missionaries work to model healthy church membership in our lives as we plant healthy churches among the nations.

[1] Matthew 16:15-19; 18:15-20; Acts 2:41-42,47; 5:11-14; 6:3-6; 13:1-3; 14:23,27; 15:1-30; 16:5; 20:28; Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 3:16; 5:4-5; 7:17; 9:13-14; 12; Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:19-22; 3:8-11,21; 5:22-32; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:18; 1 Timothy 2:9-14; 3:1-15; 4:14; Hebrews 11:39-40; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Revelation 2-3; 21:2-3.

[2] Acts 14:21-23; Titus.

Section

Baptist Faith and Message

i I. SCRIPTURE

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.

Exodus 24:4; Deuteronomy 4:1-2; 17:19; Joshua 8:34; Psalms 19:7-10; 119:11,89,105,140; Isaiah 34:16; 40:8; Jeremiah 15:16; 36:1-32; Matthew 5:17-18; 22:29; Luke 21:33; 24:44-46; John 5:39; 16:13-15; 17:17; Acts 2:16ff.; 17:11; Romans 15:4; 16:25-26; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 1:1-2; 4:12; 1 Peter 1:25; 2 Peter 1:19-21.

i II. GOD

There is one and only one living and true God. He is an intelligent, spiritual, and personal Being, the Creator, Redeemer, Preserver, and Ruler of

the universe. God is infinite in holiness and all other perfections. God is all powerful and all knowing; and His perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures. To Him we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience. The eternal triune God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being.

A. God the Father

God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace. He is all powerful, all knowing, all loving, and all wise. God is Father in truth to those who become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. He is fatherly in His attitude toward all men.

Genesis 1:1; 2:7; Exodus 3:14; 6:2-3; 15:11ff.; 20:1ff.; Leviticus 22:2; Deuteronomy 6:4; 32:6; 1 Chronicles 29:10; Psalm 19:1-3; Isaiah 43:3,15; 64:8; Jeremiah 10:10; 17:13; Matthew 6:9ff.; 7:11; 23:9; 28:19; Mark 1:9-11; John 4:24; 5:26; 14:6-13; 17:1-8; Acts 1:7; Romans 8:14-15; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 4:6; Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:17; Hebrews 11:6; 12:9; 1 Peter 1:17; 1 John 5:7.

B. God the Son

Christ is the eternal Son of God. In His incarnation as Jesus Christ He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself human nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with mankind yet without sin. He honored the divine law by His personal obedience, and in His substitutionary death on the cross He made

provision for the redemption of men from sin. He was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion. He ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God where He is the One Mediator, fully God, fully man, in whose Person is effected the reconciliation between God and man. He will return in power and glory to judge the world and to consummate His redemptive mission. He now dwells in all believers as the living and ever present Lord.

Genesis 18:1ff.; Psalms 2:7ff.; 110:1ff.; Isaiah 7:14; Isaiah 53:1-12; Matthew 1:18-23; 3:17; 8:29; 11:27; 14:33; 16:16,27; 17:5; 27; 28:1-6,19; Mark 1:1; 3:11; Luke 1:35; 4:41; 22:70; 24:46; John 1:1-18,29; 10:30,38; 11:25-27; 12:44-50; 14:7-11; 16:15-16,28; 17:1-5, 21-22; 20:1-20,28; Acts 1:9; 2:22-24; 7:55-56; 9:4-5,20; Romans 1:3-4; 3:23-26; 5:6-21; 8:1-3,34; 10:4; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2:2; 8:6; 15:1-8,24-28; 2 Corinthians 5:19-21; 8:9; Galatians 4:4-5; Ephesians 1:20; 3:11; 4:7-10; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:13-22; 2:9; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18; 1 Timothy 2:5-6; 3:16; Titus 2:13-14; Hebrews 1:1-3; 4:14-15; 7:14-28; 9:12-15,24-28; 12:2; 13:8; 1 Peter 2:21-25; 3:22; 1 John 1:7-9; 3:2; 4:14-15; 5:9; 2 John 7-9; Revelation 1:13-16; 5:9-14; 12:10-11; 13:8; 19:16.

C. God the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, fully divine. He inspired holy men of old to write the Scriptures. Through illumination He enables men to understand truth. He exalts Christ. He convicts men of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. He calls men to the Saviour, and effects regeneration. At the moment of regeneration He baptizes every believer into the Body of Christ. He cultivates Christian character, comforts believers, and bestows the spiritual gifts by which they serve God through His church. He seals the believer unto the day of final redemption. His

presence in the Christian is the guarantee that God will bring the believer into the fullness of the stature of Christ. He enlightens and empowers the believer and the church in worship, evangelism, and service.

Genesis 1:2; Judges 14:6; Job 26:13; Psalms 51:11; 139:7 ff.; Isaiah 61:1-3; Joel 2:28-32; Matthew 1:18; 3:16; 4:1; 12:28-32; 28:19; Mark 1:10,12; Luke 1:35; 4:1,18-19; 11:13; 12:12; 24:49; John 4:24; 14:16-17,26; 15:26; 16:7-14; Acts 1:8; 2:1-4,38; 4:31; 5:3; 6:3; 7:55; 8:17,39;10:44; 13:2; 15:28; 16:6; 19:1-6; Romans 8:9-11,14-16,26-27; 1 Corinthians 2:10-14; 3:16; 12:3-11,13; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:30;5:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:19; 1 Timothy 3:16; 4:1; 2 Timothy 1:14; 3:16; Hebrews 9:8,14; 2 Peter 1:21; 1 John 4:13; 5:6-7; Revelation 1:10;22:17.

i III. MAN

Man is the special creation of God, made in His own image. He created them male and female as the crowning work of His creation. The gift of gender is thus part of the goodness of God's creation. In the beginning man was innocent of sin and was endowed by his Creator with freedom of choice. By his free choice man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race. Through the temptation of Satan man transgressed the command of God, and fell from his original innocence whereby his posterity inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin. Therefore, as soon as they are capable of moral action, they become transgressors and are under condemnation. Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God. The sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man; therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy

of respect and Christian love.

Genesis 1:26-30; 2:5,7,18-22; 3; 9:6; Psalms 1; 8:3-6; 32:1-5; 51:5; Isaiah 6:5; Jeremiah 17:5; Matthew 16:26; Acts 17:26-31; Romans 1:19-32; 3:10-18,23; 5:6,12,19; 6:6; 7:14-25; 8:14-18,29; 1 Corinthians 1:21-31; 15:19,21-22; Ephesians 2:1-22; Colossians 1:21-22; 3:9-11.

④ IV. SALVATION

Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man, and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer. In its broadest sense salvation includes regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification. There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.

A. Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God's grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. It is a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, to which the sinner responds in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith are inseparable experiences of grace. Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God. Faith is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Saviour.

B. Justification is God's gracious and full acquittal upon principles of His righteousness of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ. Justification brings the believer unto a relationship of peace and favor with God.

C. Sanctification is the experience, beginning in regeneration, by which the

believer is set apart to God's purposes, and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual maturity through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. Growth in grace should continue throughout the regenerate person's life.

D. Glorification is the culmination of salvation and is the final blessed and abiding state of the redeemed.

Genesis 3:15; Exodus 3:14-17; 6:2-8; Matthew 1:21; 4:17; 16:21-26; 27:22-28:6; Luke 1:68-69; 2:28-32; John 1:11-14,29; 3:3-21,36; 5:24;10:9,28-29; 15:1-16; 17:17; Acts 2:21; 4:12; 15:11; 16:30-31; 17:30-31; 20:32; Romans 1:16-18; 2:4; 3:23-25; 4:3ff.; 5:8-10; 6:1-23; 8:1-18,29-39; 10:9-10,13; 13:11-14; 1 Corinthians 1:18,30; 6:19-20; 15:10; 2 Corinthians 5:17-20; Galatians 2:20; 3:13; 5:22-25; 6:15; Ephesians 1:7;2:8-22; 4:11-16; Philippians 2:12-13; Colossians 1:9-22; 3:1ff.; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24; 2 Timothy 1:12; Titus 2:11-14; Hebrews 2:1-3;5:8-9; 9:24-28; 11:1-12:8,14; James 2:14-26; 1 Peter 1:2-23; 1 John 1:6-2:11; Revelation 3:20; 21:1-22:5.

① V. GOD'S PURPOSE OF GRACE

Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man, and comprehends all the means in connection with the end. It is the glorious display of God's sovereign goodness, and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable. It excludes boasting and promotes humility. All true believers endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end. Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ and

temporal judgments on themselves; yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 19:5-8; 1 Samuel 8:4-7,19-22; Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 31:31ff.; Matthew 16:18-19; 21:28-45; 24:22,31; 25:34; Luke 1:68-79; 2:29-32; 19:41-44; 24:44-48; John 1:12-14; 3:16; 5:24; 6:44-45,65; 10:27-29; 15:16; 17:6,12,17-18; Acts 20:32; Romans 5:9-10; 8:28-39; 10:12-15; 11:5-7,26-36; 1 Corinthians 1:1-2; 15:24-28; Ephesians 1:4-23; 2:1-10; 3:1-11; Colossians 1:12-14; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 2 Timothy 1:12; 2:10,19; Hebrews 11:39-12:2; James 1:12; 1 Peter 1:2-5,13; 2:4-10; 1 John 1:7-9; 2:19; 3:2.

VI. THE CHURCH

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.

The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.

Matthew 16:15-19; 18:15-20; Acts 2:41-42,47; 5:11-14; 6:3-6; 13:1-3; 14:23,27; 15:1-30; 16:5; 20:28; Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 3:16; 5:4-5; 7:17; 9:13-14; 12; Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:19-22; 3:8-11,21; 5:22-32; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:18; 1 Timothy 2:9-14; 3:1-15; 4:14; Hebrews 11:39-40; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Revelation 2-3; 21:2-3.

① VII. BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming.

Matthew 3:13-17; 26:26-30; 28:19-20; Mark 1:9-11; 14:22-26; Luke 3:21-22; 22:19-20; John 3:23; Acts 2:41-42; 8:35-39; 16:30-33; 20:7; Romans 6:3-5; 1 Corinthians 10:16,21; 11:23-29; Colossians 2:12.

① VIII. THE LORD'S DAY

The first day of the week is the Lord's Day. It is a Christian institution for regular observance. It commemorates the resurrection of Christ from the dead and should include exercises of worship and spiritual devotion, both public and private. Activities on the Lord's Day should be commensurate with the Christian's conscience under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Exodus 20:8-11; Matthew 12:1-12; 28:1ff.; Mark 2:27-28; 16:1-7; Luke 24:1-3,33-36; John 4:21-24; 20:1,19-28; Acts 20:7; Romans 14:5-10; I Corinthians 16:1-2; Colossians 2:16; 3:16; Revelation 1:10.

① IX. THE KINGDOM

The Kingdom of God includes both His general sovereignty over the universe and His particular kingship over men who willfully acknowledge Him as King. Particularly the Kingdom is the realm of salvation into which men enter by trustful, childlike commitment to Jesus Christ. Christians ought to pray and to labor that the Kingdom may come and God's will be done on earth. The full consummation of the Kingdom awaits the return of Jesus Christ and the end of this age.

Genesis 1:1; Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Matthew 3:2; 4:8-10,23; 12:25-28; 13:1-52; 25:31-46; 26:29; Mark 1:14-15; 9:1; Luke 4:43; 8:1; 9:2; 12:31-32; 17:20-21; 23:42; John 3:3; 18:36; Acts 1:6-7; 17:22-31; Romans 5:17; 8:19; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 11:10,16; 12:28; 1 Peter 2:4-10; 4:13; Revelation 1:6,9; 5:10; 11:15; 21-22.

i X. LAST THINGS

God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord.

Isaiah 2:4; 11:9; Matthew 16:27; 18:8-9; 19:28; 24:27,30,36,44; 25:31-46; 26:64; Mark 8:38; 9:43-48; Luke 12:40,48; 16:19-26; 17:22-37; 21:27-28; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:11; 17:31; Romans 14:10; 1 Corinthians 4:5; 15:24-28,35-58; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Philippians 3:20-21; Colossians 1:5; 3:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18; 5:1ff.; 2 Thessalonians 1:7ff.; 2; 1 Timothy 6:14; 2 Timothy 4:1,8; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 9:27-28; James 5:8; 2 Peter 3:7ff.; 1 John 2:28; 3:2; Jude 14; Revelation 1:18; 3:11; 20:1-22:13.

i XI. EVANGELISM AND MISSIONS

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

Christ.

Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 19:5-6; Isaiah 6:1-8; Matthew 9:37-38; 10:5-15; 13:18-30, 37-43; 16:19; 22:9-10; 24:14; 28:18-20; Luke 10:1-18; 24:46-53; John 14:11-12; 15:7-8,16; 17:15; 20:21; Acts 1:8; 2; 8:26-40; 10:42-48; 13:2-3; Romans 10:13-15; Ephesians 3:1-11; 1 Thessalonians 1:8; 2 Timothy 4:5; Hebrews 2:1-3; 11:39-12:2; 1 Peter 2:4-10; Revelation 22:17.

❶ XII. EDUCATION

Christianity is the faith of enlightenment and intelligence. In Jesus Christ abide all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. All sound learning is, therefore, a part of our Christian heritage. The new birth opens all human faculties and creates a thirst for knowledge. Moreover, the cause of education in the Kingdom of Christ is co-ordinate with the causes of missions and general benevolence, and should receive along with these the liberal support of the churches. An adequate system of Christian education is necessary to a complete spiritual program for Christ's people.

In Christian education there should be a proper balance between academic freedom and academic responsibility. Freedom in any orderly relationship of human life is always limited and never absolute. The freedom of a teacher in a Christian school, college, or seminary is limited by the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ, by the authoritative nature of the Scriptures, and by the distinct purpose for which the school exists.

Deuteronomy 4:1,5,9,14; 6:1-10; 31:12-13; Nehemiah 8:1-8; Job 28:28; Psalms 19:7ff.; 119:11; Proverbs 3:13ff.; 4:1-10; 8:1-7,11; 15:14; Ecclesiastes 7:19; Matthew 5:2; 7:24ff.; 28:19-20; Luke 2:40; 1 Corinthians

1:18-31; Ephesians 4:11-16; Philippians 4:8; Colossians 2:3,8-9; 1 Timothy 1:3-7; 2 Timothy 2:15; 3:14-17; Hebrews 5:12-6:3; James 1:5; 3:17.

① XIV. COOPERATION

Christ's people should, as occasion requires, organize such associations and conventions as may best secure cooperation for the great objects of the Kingdom of God. Such organizations have no authority over one another or over the churches. They are voluntary and advisory bodies designed to elicit, combine, and direct the energies of our people in the most effective manner. Members of New Testament churches should cooperate with one another in carrying forward the missionary, educational, and benevolent ministries for the extension of Christ's Kingdom. Christian unity in the New Testament sense is spiritual harmony and voluntary cooperation for common ends by various groups of Christ's people. Cooperation is desirable between the various Christian denominations, when the end to be attained is itself justified, and when such cooperation involves no violation of conscience or compromise of loyalty to Christ and His Word as revealed in the New Testament.

Exodus 17:12; 18:17ff.; Judges 7:21; Ezra 1:3-4; 2:68-69; 5:14-15; Nehemiah 4; 8:1-5; Matthew 10:5-15; 20:1-16; 22:1-10; 28:19-20; Mark 2:3; Luke 10:1ff.; Acts 1:13-14; 2:1ff.; 4:31-37; 13:2-3; 15:1-35; 1 Corinthians 1:10-17; 3:5-15; 12; 2 Corinthians 8-9; Galatians 1:6-10; Ephesians 4:1-16; Philippians 1:15-18.

① XV. THE CHRISTIAN AND THE SOCIAL ORDER

All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ

supreme in our own lives and in human society. Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. In the spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. In order to promote these ends Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth.

Exodus 20:3-17; Leviticus 6:2-5; Deuteronomy 10:12; 27:17; Psalm 101:5; Micah 6:8; Zechariah 8:16; Matthew 5:13-16,43-48; 22:36-40; 25:35; Mark 1:29-34; 2:3ff.; 10:21; Luke 4:18-21; 10:27-37; 20:25; John 15:12; 17:15; Romans 12-14; 1 Corinthians 5:9-10; 6:1-7; 7:20-24; 10:23-11:1; Galatians 3:26-28; Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:12-17; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; Philemon; James 1:27; 2:8.

① XVI. PEACE AND WAR

It is the duty of Christians to seek peace with all men on principles of righteousness. In accordance with the spirit and teachings of Christ they should do all in their power to put an end to war. The true remedy for the

war spirit is the gospel of our Lord. The supreme need of the world is the acceptance of His teachings in all the affairs of men and nations, and the practical application of His law of love. Christian people throughout the world should pray for the reign of the Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 2:4; Matthew 5:9,38-48; 6:33; 26:52; Luke 22:36,38; Romans 12:18-19; 13:1-7; 14:19; Hebrews 12:14; James 4:1-2.

ⓘ XVII. RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

God alone is Lord of the conscience, and He has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are contrary to His Word or not contained in it. Church and state should be separate. The state owes to every church protection and full freedom in the pursuit of its spiritual ends. In providing for such freedom no ecclesiastical group or denomination should be favored by the state more than others. Civil government being ordained of God, it is the duty of Christians to render loyal obedience thereto in all things not contrary to the revealed will of God. The church should not resort to the civil power to carry on its work. The gospel of Christ contemplates spiritual means alone for the pursuit of its ends. The state has no right to impose penalties for religious opinions of any kind. The state has no right to impose taxes for the support of any form of religion. A free church in a free state is the Christian ideal, and this implies the right of free and unhindered access to God on the part of all men, and the right to form and propagate opinions in the sphere of religion without interference by the civil power.

Genesis 1:27; 2:7; Matthew 6:6-7,24; 16:26; 22:21; John 8:36; Acts 4:19-20; Romans 6:1-2; 13:1-7; Galatians 5:1,13; Philippians 3:20; 1 Timothy 2:1-2;

James 4:12; 1 Peter 2:12-17; 3:11-17; 4:12-19.

① XVIII. THE FAMILY

God has ordained the family as the foundational institution of human society. It is composed of persons related to one another by marriage, blood, or adoption.

Marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime. It is God's unique gift to reveal the union between Christ and His church and to provide for the man and the woman in marriage the framework for intimate companionship, the channel of sexual expression according to biblical standards, and the means for procreation of the human race.

The husband and wife are of equal worth before God, since both are created in God's image. The marriage relationship models the way God relates to His people. A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. He has the God-given responsibility to provide for, to protect, and to lead his family. A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ. She, being in the image of God as is her husband and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation.

Children, from the moment of conception, are a blessing and heritage from the Lord. Parents are to demonstrate to their children God's pattern for marriage. Parents are to teach their children spiritual and moral

values and to lead them, through consistent lifestyle example and loving discipline, to make choices based on biblical truth. Children are to honor and obey their parents.

Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15-25; 3:1-20; Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Joshua 24:15; 1 Samuel 1:26-28; Psalms 51:5; 78:1-8; 127; 128; 139:13-16; Proverbs 1:8; 5:15-20; 6:20-22; 12:4; 13:24; 14:1; 17:6; 18:22; 22:6,15; 23:13-14; 24:3; 29:15,17; 31:10-31; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; 9:9; Malachi 2:14-16; Matthew 5:31-32; 18:2-5; 19:3-9; Mark 10:6-12; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 7:1-16; Ephesians 5:21-33; 6:1-4; Colossians 3:18-21; 1 Timothy 5:8,14; 2 Timothy 1:3-5; Titus 2:3-5; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Peter 3:1-7.

① XIII. STEWARDSHIP

God is the source of all blessings, temporal and spiritual; all that we have and are we owe to Him. Christians have a spiritual debtorship to the whole world, a holy trusteeship in the gospel, and a binding stewardship in their possessions. They are therefore under obligation to serve Him with their time, talents, and material possessions; and should recognize all these as entrusted to them to use for the glory of God and for helping others. According to the Scriptures, Christians should contribute of their means cheerfully, regularly, systematically, proportionately, and liberally for the advancement of the Redeemer's cause on earth.

Genesis 14:20; Leviticus 27:30-32; Deuteronomy 8:18; Malachi 3:8-12; Matthew 6:1-4,19-21; 19:21; 23:23; 25:14-29; Luke 12:16-21,42; 16:1-13; Acts 2:44-47; 5:1-11; 17:24-25; 20:35; Romans 6:6-22; 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2; 6:19-20; 12; 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8-9; 12:15; Philippians 4:10-19; 1 Peter 1:18-19.

Section

My Opportunities Report

My Opportunities Report (M.O.R.)

"Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone." Col 4:2-6 (NIV)

"Lord, give me more opportunities to share...more boldness in the face of them... & more ability to speak with clarity as I should."

OPPORTUNITIES

"And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ..." Col 4:3 (NIV)

- Have you asked the Lord for opportunities to share each week? Yes No
- Did He provide you with opportunities? Yes No Describe them:
- What did you do in the face of the opportunities God provided?

BOLDNESS

"Now, Lord,...enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness." Acts 4:29 (NIV)

- Have you asked the Lord for boldness in proclamation each week? Yes No
- Have you solicited prayer from others regarding boldness? Yes No
- How did the Lord answer your (their) prayer?

ABILITY

(...to proclaim it clearly as we should)"

Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel.... "Eph 6:19 (NIV)

- In the opportunities God provided, did you proclaim the Gospel &/or speak truth clearly into the lives of those God gave you? Yes No Describe:
- Are you able to share the Gospel (in 5 min.) and your personal testimony (in 3 min.) in the heart language of your people? Yes No Describe:
- What are your plans to improve your ability to clearly share (i.e. spiritual vocabulary &/or Gospel presentation) in the heart language of your people this next week?

Have you had any additional disciple-making encounters where a person already believes and you are encouraging them in the faith? Yes No

Describe:

Have you been intentional about getting the Word out (i.e. distributing literature, tracts, books, DVDs, other)? Yes No

Describe: