

OPENING ILLUSTRATION:

- › *The Hiding Place* tells the story of Corrie ten Boom and her family who were Dutch Christians in German-occupied Holland during World War II. Because of their strong Christian faith, they joined an underground network in Holland to hide Jews and help them escape Hitler's cruelty. Eventually, Corrie, her sister Betsie, and her father were caught and sent to prison. From there, Corrie and Betsie were sent to Ravensbruck, the only Nazi concentration camp for women. The sheer evil at Ravensbruck is difficult to read about, never mind experience firsthand like Corrie, Betsie, and thousands of other women did. But Corrie's faith was strengthened in that season of severe testing, not destroyed. She said after her release, "I've experienced His Presence in the deepest darkest hell that men can create. I have tested the promises of the Bible, and believe me, you can count on them." What's remarkable about Corrie's story is that she knew she was taking a huge risk in hiding Jews, and yet she feared God more than she feared the punishment men could dole out. Despite the consequences, she trusted and acted upon God's promises, where she found true security, freedom, and rest. In Galatians 1, Paul said that we either fear God or fear man—there is no in between.

CONTEXT

- › Paul begins his letter by asserting his apostolic authority, explaining that his becoming an apostle was not his idea, but God's. This sealed his authority, not only to speak to the church at Galatia, but to give direction and insight to us today. The Bible is not a book like other books; it is divinely inspired. It is good to remind ourselves of that whenever we come to the Scriptures. Perhaps more than any other book of the New Testament, Galatians proclaims loudly and repeatedly that Christians are saved by grace and also that we grow by grace. It is a book about freedom. It's a book that will never go out of style because Christians will always need to be reminded of their freedom in Christ. Mixing human performance and God's grace has disastrous results. It is anti-gospel. No amount of obedience or effort can set us free, only Christ can. Paul takes a harsh tone in this letter because he knows the gospel must be preserved at all costs.

EXPOSITORY OUTLINE

These are some suggested sermon points for each verse or section of verses for a large group setting.

- › Galatians 1:1-5. *The gospel is for God's glory.* Paul establishes his apostolic authority and immediately inserts the gospel in his greeting. God has raised Jesus from the dead. Moreover, God comes to His people offering grace and peace rather than judgment. The church has been delivered from "this present evil age" (v. 4). The gospel has changed everything. All this brings glory to God.
- › Galatians 1:6-9. *There is no other gospel.* The churches in Galatia were infiltrated by false teachers espousing a different gospel. Constant vigilance to preserve the gospel is a must because the church is always tempted to depart from it.
- › Galatians 6:10. *We can't fear man and serve Christ.* Man-centered religion is at odds with gospel freedom. It always has been and it always will be. You would think people would love the good news of grace, but they often don't. Grace is a direct strike at human pride.

GROUP DISCUSSION

The following are suggested discussion questions on each verse or section of verses for leading a small group session also useful in sermon deliveries that include discussion.

Ask a student to read Galatians 1:1-5.

- › **How did Paul describe himself in verse 1? What does that tell us about him? Who did Paul write this letter to?**
- › **Paul greeted the Galatian believers with "grace and peace" from God and from Jesus. How do these words describe your relationship with God?**
- › **Paul described the age we live in as "evil." What does he mean by that? Who or what is behind this evil?**



Ask a student to read Galatians 1:6-9.

- › What does the word “gospel” mean? What are some gospels besides those in the Bible? Why do you think Paul was so amazed that people were departing from the true gospel?
- › Why do you think Paul uses such strong language in verse 9? He actually calls for people preaching a false gospel to be cursed. Why was he so worked up about this?

Ask a student to read Galatians 1:10.

- › Paul suggests that seeking the approval of other people and seeking the approval of God are mutually exclusive. That is, you can't do both. Why do you think he said that?
- › How are you tempted to seek the approval of others? Is this always bad?
- › In light of the gospel, what does it mean to be a servant of Christ?

SESSION CONNECTION

In Session 1 of their study of Joshua, students read the Lord's commission of Joshua to lead the people of Israel into the promised land. Three times Joshua is commanded “to be strong and courageous” (Josh. 1:6,8,9). Doing God's will would require great courage. There were enemies to conquer, and they would not go down easily. Joshua would have to lean on God and trust His promises if he was going to lead the people to victory and God's rest in the land He had for them. Paul talked about the need for courage in Galatians 1, too. Standing strong for the gospel can mean being unpopular. Paul warned about this. That's no reason to be afraid, however. It's an opportunity to trust God's promise to be with us and help us. Faith overcomes fear every time.

OBJECT LESSON/APPLICATION

- › According to statistics, Americans' greatest fear is public speaking. Ask students to share some of their greatest fears, then share some of your own. God knew there would be times when we would be afraid, whether it's a fear of public speaking, spiders, or being left out by our peers. But God has given us true and precious promises in His Word for every situation in life. He promises to be with us in the darkest valley (see Ps. 23:4); He promises to provide for us when we're in need (see Phil. 4:19); He promises that He has good plans for our future (see Jer. 29:11). There is nothing we will face in this life that God's doesn't have an answer for. But it's important that we know what God's promises are so that when we need them, we can stand on them. That is why it is so important to read and study God's Word—as we do, His truth will take root in our hearts and will strengthen us when we need it most.

Standing up for the gospel takes courage. God's love can help us overcome our fears, including the fear of what other people think.

- › <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/trading-fear-for-fear> – Christina Fox explains how a right fear of God eases our fears and anxieties.
- › <http://www.christianpost.com/news/untold-missions-story-mexico-drug-violence-driving-people-to-jesus-christ-69568/> – Evelyn Cook reports on the triumph of the gospel in Mexico in the face of oppression and persecution from drug lords.

* These websites are not affiliated with LifeWay. Consult with your church's leadership before including these in your session to be sure that your church's values allow their materials to be referenced in your session time.