

# Explore the Bible®

Winter 2017-18 > *Danny Akin, General Editor*

## Acts 13–28

LifeWay | Adults

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\*Evangelistic Emphasis

\*\*Sanctity of Human Life Emphasis

## » MEET THE WRITERS

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QUICKSOURCE LEADER GUIDE

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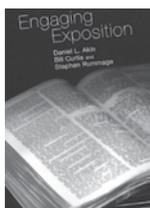
# A WORD FROM THE GENERAL EDITOR



In Acts 1:8 our Lord told His disciples that when the Holy Spirit came upon them, which He did in Acts 2, they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. Acts 13–28 is the record of the gospel’s advance to the ends of the earth. What began in Jerusalem (chap. 1) will make its way to Rome (chap. 28). What started with the Jews will make its way to the Gentiles. What started with the focus on Peter (chaps. 1–12) will conclude with the focus on Paul (chaps. 13–28). The Holy Spirit will direct every step. The Lord Jesus will be exalted at every turn. The gospel will go forth in unstoppable power. Opposition, false teachings, persecution, imprisonment, and perils at sea will not impede the spread of the gospel and the growth of the kingdom.

Acts is the history book of the New Testament. It provides vital and important information of the early church. There are so many valuable lessons we learn as we travel through its 28 chapters. Several stand out. First, God is sovereign and His plan to reach the nations with the gospel will succeed. Second, the work of the Holy Spirit is essential to the advance of God’s mission. Third, God calls ordinary persons to do extraordinary works that reveal His greatness and glory. Fourth, the gospel is a compelling message that demands a response. Neutrality is not an option. Fifth, the work of getting the gospel of the kingdom to the ends of the earth is not finished! The mission of Acts will only be finished when the one who ascended in chapter 1 returns. Our role in God’s story is clear. Live in the power of the Spirit, bear witness to Christ, and watch what our God does through the obedience of His people!

## ***Danny Akin***



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# TWO WAYS TO USE QUICKSOURCE

## ➤ AS A SUPPLEMENT TO THE EXPLORE THE BIBLE LEADER GUIDE

1. After completing your study using the commentary provided in the Explore the Bible Leader Guide, consult the Exploring Key Words section and the Talking Points page for additional insight or as a review.
2. After creating your initial plans for guiding the group time using the suggestions included in the Leader Guide, supplement and refine your plan using the ideas found in QuickSource. You will also want to consult the Explore the Bible blog ([LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible](http://LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible)) or Explore the Bible MinistryGrid page ([MinistryGrid.com/web/ExploreTheBible](http://MinistryGrid.com/web/ExploreTheBible)) for additional ideas.

## ➤ AS YOUR PRIMARY RESOURCE FOR PREPARING TO LEAD A SMALL BIBLE STUDY GROUP

### 1. Read and study the core passage.

Use Exploring Key Words on the first page of the session content to gain an understanding of the passage. Consult a study Bible and a Bible commentary like the *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* (available at [LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible](http://LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible) in both print and digital formats) to gain additional insight into the passage.

### 2. Review the outline provided on the Talking Points page (page 2 of each session).

Record ideas and insights gleaned from your personal study time. Note: You may want to make a photocopy of the Talking Points page so you can use *QuickSource* again in the future.

### 3. Review the questions on the Discussion Plan page (page 3 of each session).

Identify the questions you believe would work best with the group you are leading. Reword the selected questions to reflect your personality and the personality of the group. Record the reworded questions on the Talking Points page (or the photocopy you made of the page) next to the point related to the question. Remember to arrange the questions so that you are leading the group to a conclusion or action.

#### **4. Consider ways of using the Object Lesson idea (page 4 of each session).**

Brainstorm other ideas sparked by the object lesson suggestion.

#### **5. Read the Dig Deeper feature (page 4 of each session).**

Add insights gained from this page to the Talking Points page.

#### **6. Use the *Personal Study Guide* (PSG).**

Scan a copy of the *Personal Study Guide* (PSG), looking for additional questions and the Bible skill feature. Consider ways of incorporating the Bible skill into the session, recording your ideas on the Talking Points page. Record additional questions from the PSG on the Talking Points page as well.

#### **7. Review and refine.**

Consult the Explore the Bible blog ([LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible](http://LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible)) or Explore the Bible Ministry Grid ([MinistryGrid.com/web/ExploreTheBible](http://MinistryGrid.com/web/ExploreTheBible)) for additional ideas.

#### **8. Arrive early.**

The group time starts when the first person arrives. Make sure you are that person so you can set the tone and direction for the group Bible study time.

#### **9. Lead the group in a time of Bible study.**

Carry the Talking Points page into the class, using this page as your guide for leading the group.



# INTRODUCTION TO ACTS

Most English teachers will tell you that an opening paragraph should not only grab one's attention, it should provide the basic details of the upcoming story. Such is the case with the Book of Acts. In fact, the very first two verses tell us volumes about our book. "I wrote the first narrative, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up, after he had given instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen" (Acts 1:1-2).

## »» AUTHORSHIP

Acts is the second part of a two-volume work by the same author and is addressed to Theophilus. As we examine the gospels, we find that Luke 1:1-4 begins with a greeting to this same man. Further investigation will reveal that the ending of Luke (24:44-49) intentionally overlaps with the beginning of Acts, demonstrating continuity between the two volumes. At the end of Luke's Gospel, Jesus told the apostles to remain in the city until they received power. At the beginning of Acts we find them waiting in Jerusalem as instructed.

We can confidently conclude that Acts was written by the same person who penned the Gospel of Luke. From Luke 1:1-4 we discover that our writer was not an original eyewitness but a follower of Christ who had carefully researched everything from the beginning so that he could write an orderly sequence of Jesus' life and ministry. Thus, we can eliminate all the apostles as potential writers. As we read Acts, we will encounter a number of "we" passages that suggest the writer was a traveling companion of Paul. By investigating Paul's letters, we can compile a list of those who traveled with him. In 2 Timothy 4:11, Paul indicated that only Luke was with him, making him our best candidate. There are numerous other convincing indicators of Lucan authorship, including vocabulary, style, and themes that are repeated in Luke and Acts. We can affirm that Luke the physician was the writer of this two-volume work that contains twenty-five percent of all the New Testament material.

## »» PURPOSE

The first verses of Luke and Acts mention Theophilus as the recipient of Luke's writing. The name Theophilus means "friend of God" and was a common name in the first century. Some Bible students think Luke used the name with no individual in mind, but simply to indicate that his material was intended for all who are friends of God. Others, however, think that Theophilus may have been a Roman official who was interested in or sympathetic to the Christian cause. Luke would then be writing as an apologist for the Christian faith, demonstrating that the followers of Jesus were not political subversives. In any case, it is clear that Luke saw himself as a historian who wanted to provide "an orderly sequence" (Luke 1:3) of Jesus' life and ministry.

Acts has often been referred to as “the acts of the apostles” or “the acts of the Holy Spirit.” We could also refer to the book as “the continuing acts of Jesus.” Read the latter half of Acts 1:1 again—“all that Jesus began to do and teach.” If the Gospel of Luke was the narrative of what Jesus began to do and teach, then the Book of Acts was the continuing story of what Jesus was doing. In other words, the risen Christ is still at work advancing His kingdom through His followers—His church.

As you read Acts, you will notice that the apostles were certain that the risen Jesus had called, commissioned, and empowered them. Jesus was, therefore, still at work through them. For example, those who responded to the message at Pentecost were baptized in Jesus’ name and were promised forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). Peter healed the lame man at the gate to the temple “in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth” (3:6). In Acts 9:4, Jesus spoke directly to Saul, asking him why he was persecuting Him. When Saul asked further about His identity, He replied, “I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting.” In Paul’s speeches that we will study together in the next weeks, we will find that Paul consistently affirmed he had been transformed and commissioned by the living Christ. It is clear that no one in the Book of Acts thought of Jesus as dead or gone. He was—and is—alive and at work through His church. Jesus’ ascension into heaven did not mark His departure, but only a change in the manner in which He performs His earthly ministry.

## » ORGANIZATION

Luke’s Gospel ends with the command for the apostles to wait the Lord clothes them with power from on high (Luke 24:49). Acts 1:8 affirms that the time of that empowering was at hand. The giving of the Holy Spirit is vitally connected to the mission of the church—“you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Chapter 2 documents the giving of the power on the day of Pentecost and the birth of the church.

While we cannot attempt to provide a detailed outline of the Book of Acts, we will find that Luke follows the expansion of the church from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. Acts 1:1–8:3 chronicles the spread of the gospel in Jerusalem. After Stephen was put to death (chap. 7), widespread persecution of the church began. Those scattered by the persecution went about preaching the word, resulting in the expansion of Christianity to Samaria and the coastal regions (8:4–11:18). People in Judea and Samaria were converted, leading Luke to affirm, “So the church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers” (9:31). In chapter 10, they overcame a major barrier as Gentiles came to faith in Jesus as Gentiles came to faith in Jesus. A new section begins with the birth of the church in Antioch (11:19). This church was instrumental in sending Barnabas and Saul for the work the Holy Spirit set out for them. Paul’s three missionary journeys are the focus of much of the second half of Acts. The Book of Acts concludes with Paul headed for Rome, where he would spread the gospel while under house arrest.

# OUTLINE OF ACTS

## **I. Empowerment for the Church (1:1–2:47)**

- A. Waiting for power (1:1-26)
- B. The source of power (2:1-13)
- C. Pentecostal witness to the dispersion (2:14-47)

## **II. Early Days of the Church (3:1–12:25)**

- A. In Jerusalem (3:1–7:60)
- B. In Samaria: the Samaritan Pentecost (8:1-25)
- C. To the ends of the earth: Philip’s witness (8:26-40)
- D. Conversion and preparation of Paul (9:1-31)
- E. In Judea: Peter in Caesarea (9:32–11:18)
- F. To the ends of the earth (11:19–12:25)

## **III. Paul’s First Missionary Journey (13:1–14:28)**

- A. Cyprus (13:1-12)
- B. Pisidian Antioch (13:13-52)
- C. Iconium (14:1-7)
- D. Lystra, Derbe; return to Antioch (14:8-28)

## **IV. The Jerusalem Council (15:1-35)**

## **V. Paul’s Second Missionary Journey (15:36–18:22)**

- A. Antioch to Troas (15:36–16:10)
- B. Troas to Athens (16:11–17:34)
- C. Corinth (18:1-22)

## **VI. Paul’s Third Missionary Journey (18:23–21:16)**

- A. The Ephesian Pentecost (18:23–19:41)
- B. Macedonia to Troas, Athens, Corinth, and return (20:1–21:16)

## **VII. Paul en Route to and in Rome (21:17–28:31)**

- A. In Jerusalem (21:17–23:35)
- B. In Caesarea (24:1–26:32)
- C. Voyage to Rome (27:1–28:15)
- D. Ministry at Rome (28:16-31)

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# THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

## ACTS 13:26-39

<sup>26</sup> “Brothers and sisters, **a** children of Abraham’s race, and **b** those among you who fear God, it is to **c** us that the word of this salvation has been sent. <sup>27</sup> Since the residents of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize him or the **d** sayings of the prophets that are read every Sabbath, they have fulfilled their words by condemning him.

<sup>28</sup> Though they found **e** no grounds for the death sentence, they **f** asked Pilate to have him killed. <sup>29</sup> When they had carried out all that had been written about him, they took him down from the **g** tree and put him in a tomb. <sup>30</sup> But God **h** raised him from the dead, <sup>31</sup> and he appeared for many days to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people.

<sup>32</sup> And we ourselves proclaim to you the good news of the **i** promise that was made to our ancestors. <sup>33</sup> God has fulfilled this for us, their children, by raising up Jesus, as it is written in the second Psalm: You are **j** my Son; today I have become your Father. <sup>34</sup> As to his raising him from the dead, never to return to decay, he has spoken in this way, I will give you the holy and sure **k** promises of David.

<sup>35</sup> Therefore he also says in **l** another passage, You will not let your Holy One see decay. <sup>36</sup> For David, after serving God’s purpose in his own generation, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and decayed, <sup>37</sup> but the one God raised up did not decay. <sup>38</sup> Therefore, let it be known to you, brothers and sisters, that through this man **m** forgiveness of sins is being proclaimed to you. <sup>39</sup> Everyone who believes is **n** justified through him from everything that you could not be justified from through the **o** law of Moses.”

## EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** Ethnic Jewish people (Gen. 12:1-2; Ex. 3:13-16)
- b** Gentiles who worshiped God. Peter preached to God-fearing Gentiles in Acts 10, and they were converted and baptized. Gentiles also sought Jesus in John 12:20.
- c** The gospel was given by Jesus to the Jews and the apostles and then to all people (Matt. 28:18-20).
- d** The Scriptures that were read weekly in the synagogues. The Word of God is living and active.
- e** “No guilt worthy of death” (ESV). “They couldn’t find a good reason” (MSG). Jesus was sinless.
- f** Pilate found no reason to execute him, yet the people demanded it.
- g** The cross (Acts 5:30; 10:39; 1 Pet. 2:24)
- h** The Bible describes the resurrection as involving all three members of the Trinity: Father (Acts 5:30), Son (John 10:17-18), and Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:11).
- i** The gospel of Jesus was first promised in Genesis 3:15 and later to Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, and so on.
- j** Jesus’ resurrection declared He was God’s Son (Ps. 2:7).
- k** God promised an eternal kingdom to David (2 Sam. 7:13-16; Isa. 55:3).
- l** Psalm 16:10, a promise that the Messiah would rise from the dead
- m** Sins are forgiven through Jesus alone and are promised through faith in Jesus.
- n** A legal term relating to our standing before God; to be justified is to be found acceptable to God based on Jesus’ work for you.
- o** The Old Testament laws show us our need for Christ and how to live like Him (Rom. 7:7; 2 Tim. 3:15-17).

### »» 1. CRUCIFIED (Acts 13:26-29)

- Paul declared that the Messiah promised in the Old Testament had come, but Jesus was rejected and crucified by the residents and religious leaders of Jerusalem.
- He explained that all this took place in accordance with the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah.

### »» 2. RESURRECTED (Acts 13:30-37)

- Paul declared that God raised Jesus from the grave never to die again.
- The Risen Lord appeared to His followers over the course of several days, and those followers became witnesses to others of His resurrection.

### »» 3. PROCLAIMED (Acts 13:38-39)

- Paul declared that forgiveness and justification from sins are found only through belief in Jesus.
- Jesus provides what the law of Moses could not—salvation.

### »» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

**Christ's death and resurrection are central to the gospel message.**

- In the face of our rebellion, Jesus willingly paid the penalty for our sin by His death.
- We can have confidence that Jesus is resurrected and living eternally.
- Faith in Jesus is the only means of salvation.



## FOCUS ATTENTION

### What speech would you consider the greatest from the last 200 years? What makes it so important?

- Great speeches usually include a challenge that calls people to action.
- Paul presented a speech to a group assembled at Pisidian Antioch that would change the lives of many people, including his own.

## EXPLORE THE BIBLE

### ACTS 13:26-29

#### What specific Bible prophecies did Jesus fulfill when He was crucified on the cross?

- Jesus explained how He fulfilled Old Testament prophecies to the two men on the road to Emmaus (see Luke 24:13-27).
- For example, the Bible prophesied the rejection of Jesus by His people (see Isa. 53:1-3; John 12:37-38).

#### How does the message of the gospel speak to the needs of modern man today?

- Man is sinful and needs a Savior. The message of the gospel tells all of us how to receive salvation.
- God wants to use us as His messengers to share the good news of salvation with everyone.

### ACTS 13:30-37

#### How did Jesus' resurrection confirm the meaning of the prophecies?

- Paul mentioned specific prophecies in the passage that demonstrate the credibility of Jesus Christ's resurrection (Ps. 2:7; Isa. 55:3; and Ps. 16:10).
- The resurrection of Jesus displays His power over death and His promise of salvation to those who believe.

#### How can we establish the credibility of Jesus' resurrection from the dead when we share the gospel message with others?

- We can obtain a list of Bible prophecies that were fulfilled when Jesus came to purchase our salvation. Connecting New Testament events to Old Testament promises demonstrates precisely how Jesus Christ fulfilled Bible prophecy.
- Read these Scriptures to further the discussion of fulfilled prophecies: Deuteronomy 18:15 and Acts 3:20-22; Psalm 16:10; 49:15 and Acts 2:22-32.

#### How does what Jesus has done for us motivate us to witness to others?

- Discuss ways we can embrace our responsibility as witnesses to speak about how Jesus has changed our lives.
- Guide people to share something Jesus has done for them as they feel led.

### ACTS 13:38-39

#### How does the news of the gospel exceed the law of Moses?

- Compare these verses with Romans 3:20-24.
- The law is limited because it cannot justify us. The law can only show us what we have done wrong.
- The gospel of Jesus Christ provides justification from sin, which is something the law cannot do.
- The law condemns, but the gospel saves.

#### What is distinctive about the message of the gospel?

- Forgiveness of sin is available only through the person and work of Jesus Christ.
- The message of the gospel needs to be proclaimed so that the truth about salvation can be made known to all people.

#### What does this passage teach us about the number of ways to God?

- The only way to a relationship with God is through His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

## SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

#### What specific details do we need to explain to help others understand the gospel?

- The Law reveals our sinfulness by showing us precisely what we have done wrong.
- God sent His Son to provide salvation for anyone who believes in Him.
- The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy. Therefore, our faith in the person and work of Christ is grounded in actual historical events that confirmed the truth of Scripture.
- Because of the resurrection of Jesus, we serve a living Lord who wants us to proclaim the good news of salvation so people may believe.
- **Personal Challenge:** Identify a friend, coworker, or family member who does not know Jesus as Savior and Lord. Highlight specific verses in your Bible to use when presenting the gospel. Take time to write inside your Bible a list of specific prophecies Jesus fulfilled when He came into the world to die on the cross. Ask God to give you boldness and compassion as you prepare to share the gospel with others. Remember to use the law to help them understand sin and to use the gospel to point them to the One who died to make their salvation possible.



# OBJECT LESSON

## EMPTY EGGS

Blow out an egg prior to the group time. If you're unfamiliar with the technique, research video tutorials on the Internet. Once the egg is empty, let it air dry, and use glue to cover or hide the two holes in each end of the egg. Bring the empty eggshell to the group in a carton with other whole eggs.

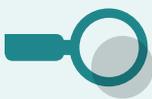
Recount the story of Jesus' death at the cross. Emphasize that His body was placed into a sealed tomb with Roman guards protecting it. As you tell the story, crack the eggs into a bowl, making sure to crack only the filled eggs. Tell of the early morning visit to the tomb by Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome. Highlight that fact that they expected to find the body of Jesus in the tomb (Mark 16:1-3). Now crack the hollowed egg. State: *Instead, they found an empty tomb and received a message from an angel that Jesus was alive!* Observe the group's reaction regarding the empty egg.

Lead the group to contrast what the women expected to find in the tomb and what they actually found. Explain: *When people experience something they do not expect, they tend to share the experience with others. Many times we forget that the message of the gospel*



*communicates something we do not expect. God used the death and resurrection of His Son to make salvation possible for whomever repents of their sin and places their trust in Him. Although He died and was buried in a tomb, Jesus rose again victorious over sin and death!*

Challenge the group to share the unexpected good news of Jesus and His amazing grace with others.



## DIG DEEPER

### JUSTIFICATION EXPLAINED

In his sermon at the synagogue in Antioch, Paul carefully walked the hearers through the history of God's relationship with the Jewish people. Paul connected Jesus to God's previous work, detailing the events of Jesus' life with them. He wrapped His talk (Acts 13:38-39) by giving the results of the gospel—the forgiveness of sin—and the necessity of the gospel—because we can't save ourselves. He presented Jesus as the necessary fulfillment of God's promise to the Jewish people. In doing this, Paul used the word *justified*, a term often found in Scripture.

*Justified* has several connotations. In its secular usage it could range from someone "who fulfilled their civic duties" to "doing what is right" in the positive sense or in the negative sense of conviction or punishment. Many times for Greeks the term *justified* meant "someone got what was coming to him, and most often that was punishment."<sup>1</sup>

However, the biblical usage of the term is quite different. Paul's understanding would be guided by the Old Testament use of *justify*, which was "more often in the positive sense of pronouncing someone righteous rather than in the negative sense of condemnation."<sup>2</sup>

This is seen in texts such as Isaiah 53:11, where Isaiah promised about Christ:

After his anguish,  
he will see light and be satisfied.  
By his knowledge,  
my righteous servant will justify many,  
and he will carry their iniquities.

For Paul, *justify*, therefore meant to declare righteous or acquit, as a judge pronounces a verdict.

When we believe in Jesus Christ, we become "justified through him from everything that you could not be justified from through the law of Moses" (Acts 13:39). What can't the law of Moses do what Jesus can for our justification? The Law can't make us innocent, only God can, and He has chosen to do that through faith in His Son.

Faith in Christ makes us innocent, because "God grounds our acquittal not in our own merit, but in the atoning sacrifice of Christ."<sup>3</sup>

1. S. Booth, "Justified: The Meaning," *Biblical Illustrator* (Nashville, TN: LifeWay, Fall 2016), 78-81. 2. Ibid. 3. Ibid.

# MISGUIDED WORSHIP

For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at [LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible](http://LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible).

## ACTS 14:8-20

<sup>8</sup> In **A Lystra** a man was sitting who was without strength in his feet, had never walked, and had been lame from birth.

<sup>9</sup> He listened as Paul spoke. After looking directly at him and seeing that he had **B faith to be healed**, <sup>10</sup> Paul said in a loud voice, “Stand up on your feet!” And he jumped up and began to walk around. <sup>11</sup> When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they shouted, saying in the **C Lycaonian language**, “The **D gods** have come down to us in human form!” <sup>12</sup> Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, **E Hermes**, because he was the chief speaker. <sup>13</sup> The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the town, brought **F bulls and wreaths** to the gates because he intended, with the crowds, to offer sacrifice. <sup>14</sup> The apostles Barnabas and Paul **G tore their robes** when they heard this and rushed into the crowd, shouting: <sup>15</sup> “People! Why are you doing these things? We are people also, just like you, and we are proclaiming good news to you, that you turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything in them. <sup>16</sup> In past generations he allowed all **H the nations** to go their own way, <sup>17</sup> although he did not leave himself without **I a witness**, since he did what is **J good** by giving you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons and filling you with food and your hearts with joy.” <sup>18</sup> Even though they said these things, they barely stopped the crowds from sacrificing to them. <sup>19</sup> Some Jews came from **K Antioch and Iconium**, and when they won over the crowds, they **L stoned Paul** and dragged him out of the city, thinking he was dead. <sup>20</sup> After the disciples gathered around him, **M he got up and went into the town**. The next day he left with Barnabas for Derbe.

## EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** A Roman colony and military post, this town had a major highway connecting it to Antioch.
- b** In response to Paul’s preaching, the man came to faith. In His healing of the woman who touched his garment, Jesus said “your faith has saved you” (Luke 8:48).
- c** Lystra natives spoke a unique dialect due to their isolated location.
- d** The people of Lystra were Gentile pagans, so their frame of reference led them to believe these men must be gods once they saw the miracle performed.
- e** They called Paul Hermes, as he did most of the speaking. Hermes is believed to have been the god and inventor of speech.
- f** This signifies a ritual sacrifice of celebration; oxen would wear garlands while priests escorted them to be sacrificed.
- g** Paul and Barnabas knew this was no time for celebration, as they were all blaspheming God. Tearing their robes signified their protest at what was happening (see Mark 14:63).
- h** From the Greek word *ethnos*, referring to tribes or people groups
- i** “A clue” (MSG); “testimony” (NIV); “evidence of himself” (NLT)
- j** “Has shown kindness” (NIV); “his goodness” (NLT); God provided good through common grace.
- k** Antioch here is Pisidian Antioch and would have been about 100 miles away.
- l** Stoning was used in mob violence. Before Paul’s conversion to Christianity, he had taken part in the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7).
- m** Paul rose from his stoning and went right back into the city.

### »» 1. HEALING (Acts 14:8-10)

- While preaching in Lystra, Paul focused on a lame man.
- Paul called for the man to stand, and the man stood and walked on his own.

### »» 2. REACTION (Acts 14:11-13)

- The people who witnessed the healing of the lame man misinterpreted Paul's actions by concluding that Paul was a god.
- They prepared to worship Paul and the others with him.

### »» 3. REDIRECTED (Acts 14:14-18)

- Seeing the crowd's intent to worship them, Barnabas and Paul quickly tore their robes in shock.
- They sought to redirect the crowd's focus onto the one true God.

### »» 4. REJECTED (Acts 14:19-20)

- Hostile Jews from other cities converged on Paul and stoned him.
- Paul was left for dead, but the disciples found him still alive.
- Paul and Barnabas left for Derbe the next day.
- Note: Characterize the crowd's actions as a rejection of Jesus and His messengers.

### »» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

#### **Only God is worthy of worship and praise.**

- God uses believers as instruments of His grace and mercy.
- Unbelievers sometimes misinterpret the work of God in and around them.
- Believers who have been used by God as an instrument of His work must clearly point to Christ, giving Him all credit.



## FOCUS ATTENTION

**When was the last time your favorite sports team overcame obstacles or struggles to eventually win a game? Describe the swing of emotions you felt during the game.**

- Close games can provide a swing of emotions for the fans of both teams. When our team plays well, we get excited. However, if our team plays poorly, we can get frustrated very easily. Our responses can change quickly based on what we see.
- Sharing the gospel with other people can stir a variety of emotions within us, such as anxiety, fear, worry, hope, love, boldness, and even joy. Are we willing to share the gospel with people around us despite the risk of being misunderstood?

## EXPLORE THE BIBLE ACTS 14:8-10

**What purpose did the healing of the crippled man serve?**

- Paul noticed the crippled man was attentive as he listened to him preach.
- When people demonstrate attentiveness to God's Word, they display open minds to God's work.
- God uses His power to gain our attention and draw people to Himself.

**What evidence do you look for to discern that God is at work around you?**

- Paul sensed the crippled man's faith, so he encouraged him to take action by standing.
- When we become aware of God speaking to people, we should encourage them to respond in obedience.

## ACTS 14:11-13

**How do people mistakenly offer recognition to others rather than give credit to God?**

- The crowd attributed the miracle of healing to false gods rather than to the "only true God" (John 17:3). When people do not know God, they may attribute miracles to science, technology, superstition, or luck.
- The crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to men rather than praise God. Yet, Paul and Barnabas deliberately gave all the credit to God alone.

## ACTS 14:14-18

**What did Paul emphasize about God in his speech?**

- In order to establish God's rule over creation, Paul pointed to Him as the Creator of all things. Understanding that God is our Creator teaches us He is the Author and Giver of life.

**How can you present Christ clearly to someone who has not heard about Him?**

- Note the differences in Paul's sermon in Acts 13:17-41 with his speech in these verses.
- Paul noted that God provided for their physical needs. In the same way, we can share how God sent His Son to provide for our greatest need—the sacrificial payment for our salvation.
- As Christians, we should be careful to give credit to God for all the good things He brings into our lives.

## ACTS 14:19-20

**How can believers remain true to Jesus in the face of death?**

- Though he survived, Paul was stoned and dragged outside of the city of Lystra because the people rejected his message.
- We are called to share the gospel with others regardless of the consequences. People see Christ in us when we are committed to following Him despite the cost.

**Compare Acts 14:19-20 with Acts 3:1-11. What are the similarities? The differences?**

- Paul continued to share the gospel with others even though the crowd at Lystra had rejected him.
- Whenever we share the gospel, we exhibit faithfulness to the Lord regardless of the other person's response.

**How can the majority be won over by the influence of others?**

- As Christians, we must know for ourselves what God's Word says so that we may stand strong against opposition.

## SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

**What encourages you to continue sharing the gospel despite misunderstandings or rejection from others?**

- People need to know about the good news of Jesus. We are called to share the good news with all people. If we do not tell them, then who will?
- As Christians, we can be thankful that others took the risk to share the gospel with us. Are we willing to share the good news with others just as people shared it with us?
- **Personal Challenge:** Make a firm decision to share the gospel with your friend, coworker, or family member who does not know Jesus as Lord and Savior. Pray for opportunities to demonstrate God's love to them and verbally share what the Lord has done in your life.



# OBJECT LESSON

## FUNNY PICTURES OF ANIMALS

Search the Internet for funny pictures of animals. Bring several options to show the group. Encourage participants to write captions for some of the pictures. Ask volunteers to share their captions. Ask: *Did the captions share any common themes? What assumptions did we make?* Explain that sometimes people are quick to draw conclusions based upon what they see.

Call for a volunteer to read aloud Acts 14:8-20. Note the change in the crowd's response toward Paul and Barnabas. The people of Lystra originally sought to worship Paul and Barnabas as gods because they witnessed a miracle of healing. However, some Jews from another place came and changed the crowd's opinion. As a result, the crowd stoned Paul and threw him out of the city.

Explain that unbelievers sometimes react and misinterpret the work of God around them. Ask: *Can you think of a time when someone did not understand what God was doing around them?* Allow time for participants to share their answers to the question.

Explain: *Our responsibility as believers is to point people to Christ by helping them understand how they can trust and follow*



*Christ based upon what He has done for us. He alone is the One worthy of our worship.*

Close the session by brainstorming ways to tell others about what Christ has done for us all.



## DIG DEEPER

### ZEUS AND HERMES

The Greek pagan religion and its pantheon of gods carried with it many myths and rituals. The time Paul and Barnabas spent in Lystra demonstrates how serious many people took these myths. As the apostle healed a lame man, the people in the town presumed the missionary pair to be gods:

When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they shouted, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker (Acts 14:11-12).

What led to this assumption? And why were they called Zeus and Hermes? Hermes was seen as the spokesperson or messenger of the gods and the god of oratory. As for Zeus, he was seen as the head of the Greek pantheon of gods. According to Luke, because Paul was doing the speaking, they assumed he was Hermes. As for Barnabas, Luke doesn't give us an exact reason for his designation as Zeus.

However, a myth from the location may explain both why Barnabas was thought of as Zeus and why they thought they both may have been gods. The myth says that the two gods decided to come to earth, pretending to be humans.

"Specifically, the story goes: Seeking hospitality, these gods were rejected by everyone except for an impoverished elderly couple by the name of Philemon and Baucis. The couple not only took them in but forfeited their own meager repast in order to give it to the strangers. The gods rewarded the generous couple by transforming their cottage into a magnificent temple with a gilded roof. The inhospitable neighbors were punished by being inundated by a severe flood. The populace at Lystra may well have wanted to avoid the same mistake with regard to the miracle-working pair that now had come to visit them. The story is told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* viii, 626ff."<sup>1</sup>

Paul and Barnabas rejected this assumption and preached the gospel of the one true God to the crowd:

People! Why are you doing these things? We are people also, just like you, and we are proclaiming good news to you, that you turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything in them (v. 15).

1. J. Polhill, *New American Commentary: Acts* (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 313.

## SESSION 3

# AVAILABLE TO ALL

## ACTS 15:6-11,24-31

<sup>6</sup> The **A** apostles and the **B** elders **C** gathered to consider this matter. <sup>7</sup> After there had been much debate, **D** Peter stood up and said to them: “Brothers and sisters, you are aware that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the gospel message and believe. <sup>8</sup> And God, who knows the **E** heart, bore witness to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he also did to us. <sup>9</sup> He made **F** no distinction between us and them, **G** cleansing their hearts by faith. <sup>10</sup> Now then, why are you **H** testing God by putting a yoke on the disciples’ necks that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? <sup>11</sup> On the contrary, we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus in the same way they are.” [...] <sup>24</sup> “Since we have heard that some **I** without our authorization went out from us and troubled you with their words and **J** unsettled your hearts, <sup>25</sup> we have unanimously decided to select men and send them to you along with our dearly loved Barnabas and Paul, <sup>26</sup> who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>27</sup> Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, who will personally report the same things by word of mouth. <sup>28</sup> For it was the Holy Spirit’s decision—and ours—not to place further burdens on you beyond these **K** requirements: <sup>29</sup> that you **L** abstain from food offered to idols, from blood, from eating anything that has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. You will do well if you keep yourselves from these things. Farewell.” <sup>30</sup> So they were sent off and went down to Antioch, and after gathering **M** the assembly, they delivered the letter. <sup>31</sup> When they read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement.

## EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** Those who were commissioned by Christ to be “the foundation” of the church (Eph. 2:20). Of the original apostles from Acts 1, Herod would already have martyred James the brother of John by this time (12:1).
- b** The leaders of the church. (See 1 Tim. 3 and Titus 1 for their qualifications.)
- c** The reason for the gathering was to consider the Gentile believers and their need for keeping the Mosaic law, particularly circumcision for Gentile Christ-followers.
- d** The apostle who defended the gospel going to Gentiles in Acts 11
- e** “Humans see what is visible, but the LORD sees the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7b).
- f** All mankind, regardless of ethnicity, needs a savior.
- g** God gives us a clean heart when we come to Him in faith (Ps. 51:10; Heb. 10:22).
- h** “Challenging God” (NLT); “trying to out-god God” (MSG). We are not to test God (Matt. 4:7).
- i** The Jews had not been able to keep the law.
- j** “Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls” (NASB).
- k** These were not additions to the gospel but instructions for sanctification and would help with unity among Jewish and Gentile believers.
- l** They were to avoid certain activities that would damage their witness and be inconsistent with Christian faith.
- m** “Congregation” (ESV, NASB); “a general meeting of the believers” (NLT); “the church” (NIV)

### »» 1. NO DISTINCTION (Acts 15:6-11)

- The apostles gathered to discuss the full inclusion of non-Jewish believers.
- Peter explained that all people are saved the same way regardless of their ancestry or compliance with Jewish rituals.
- Note: Comment on the dangers of allowing racism in the church.

### »» 2. CLEAR EXPECTATIONS (Acts 15:24-29)

- The apostles, through a representative delegation and written letter, welcomed the Gentile believers without requiring them to take on Jewish rituals.
- The believers were expected to worship Jesus alone and seek to live morally clean lives as a testimony of their salvation.
- Note: Emphasize God's desire that His kingdom and thus His church include people from every tongue, tribe, and nation.

### »» 3. SECURE ENCOURAGEMENT (Acts 15:30-31)

- Upon reading the letter the Jerusalem Council had sent, the Gentile believers rejoiced and were affirmed in their spiritual walks.
- The letter served as a source of encouragement to them.

### »» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

**Salvation is available to everyone through faith in Jesus alone.**

- Believers can take joy in the fact that salvation is available to all who place their faith in Jesus.
- Believers are to demonstrate their trust in Jesus in word and in deed.
- Believers can encourage others who are seeking answers to spiritual questions.



## FOCUS ATTENTION

### When you were a child, how did your peers decide to pick teams for a game?

- Sometimes kids would use random methods such as coin flips, drawing straws, birth order, and so forth. Did you consider the methods inclusive or exclusive?
- Today we will discuss the fact that God's salvation through Jesus Christ is available to all people who choose to accept Him.

## EXPLORE THE BIBLE ACTS 15:6-11

### How would you summarize Peter's argument?

- God makes no distinction between Jew and Gentile. He saves both groups of people the same way. Peter emphasized this point of view by reminding the Jerusalem Council that the Gentile believers received the Holy Spirit just as the Jewish believers did.
- Peter reminded the Jerusalem Council that he was the one whom God initially used to share the gospel with the Gentiles. When Peter went to Cornelius's house, he witnessed firsthand how God wants to save the Gentiles by faith (Acts 10:27–11:18).

### How would you describe Peter's dilemma between the Jews and the Gentiles?

- Peter was a Jew who came to understand that "God doesn't show favoritism" (Acts 10:34; also Gal. 2:11-13).
- After Peter saw that the Gentile believers received the Holy Spirit, he concluded that he would be opposing God if he closed the door on the Gentiles hearing the gospel.

### What significance did the gospel being inclusive of different people groups have for the Jews? the Gentiles?

- God created all people and He sent His Son to purchase salvation for anyone who repents and believes.
- Since the Holy Spirit is given to all believers regardless of their race, we are reminded that God makes no distinction. For this reason, we are to be witnesses of the gospel "in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

## ACTS 15:24-29

### What expectations do believers face as recipients of salvation?

- The gospel makes a clear difference in people's lives. Knowing Christ begins a lifelong process of following Him in the power of the Holy Spirit. The transformation that takes place demonstrates to unbelievers that Christians are called to be lights in a dark world.

### What is the significance of the actions prohibited?

- As believers, our testimonies are effective when we avoid idolatry and immorality. This is why the letter from the Jerusalem Council listed four things to avoid and mentioned that the Gentile believers would do well if they did indeed avoid those things.

## ACTS 15:30-31

### How can believers encourage new Christians in their faith?

- The Jerusalem Council took the opportunity not only to write a letter to address certain concerns, but they also sent a delegation to confirm their decision verbally.
- The example they left for us is to follow up personally when we address the questions or concerns of new believers.

### What is your church's relationship like with other churches in the area?

- Brainstorm ways to bridge racial, economic, or locational gaps to work together to reach more people in the community.
- Believers who work together in harmony display God's love more effectively to those around them.

## SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

### What steps can we take to communicate to others that salvation is available to all?

- Discuss as a group how Acts 1:8 serves as the outline to the rest of the book. First, the gospel was proclaimed in Jerusalem and Judea. Next, the gospel went to Samaria. Then, the gospel was shared throughout the known world. Although the gospel started in one place, it spread throughout the world.
- Interview the person who shared the gospel with you. Discover who shared the gospel with that person. Think about the chain of believers who link you to previous generations. Remind everyone that we would not have heard the gospel if the Lord had not led Peter and Paul to share the gospel with the Gentiles.
- Make a prayerful commitment to share the gospel with someone this week who needs to know that salvation is available to all.
- **Personal Challenge:** Be prepared for the Lord to challenge any kind of prejudice you may have toward other people. His salvation is available to all people regardless of their background. Will you seek to pray and share the gospel with someone to whom the Lord directs you this week?

## A COOKIE JAR AND COOKIES

Bring a full cookie jar to the group for everyone to observe, being mindful of any food allergies in your group. Give an explanation similar to this one that reflects your own experience: *As a child, the cookie jar in our house was placed upon a high shelf. Without assistance from an adult, we would need a chair in order to reach the cookie jar.* Encourage the group participants to recall their childhood experiences with cookie jars. Ask: *What particular childhood memories do you have of cookie jars?*

Explain: *Many people enjoy eating cookies. However, it is not fun when the cookies are out of reach. We can only enjoy cookies when they are available to eat.*

Direct a volunteer to read aloud Acts 15:1-6. Discuss: *In what ways were the Jews wanting to keep salvation away from the Gentiles? What conditions did the Jews demand?*

Call for a volunteer to read Acts 15:7-31. Ask: *What evidence did Peter share to reveal that salvation is a gift of grace from God?*

Explain: *The cookie jar represents how God wants to make salvation available to all people. No matter who you are, what*



*you have done, or where you come from, God offers salvation as a gift to all who repent of their sin and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.* Offer a cookie to every participant to remind them of the gift of grace they have received through Jesus Christ. Encourage them to tell others about the gift of salvation.

## DIG DEEPER

### LETTERS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT ERA

In the New Testament era, letter writing was a common means of communication. This was especially true among those in official and professional capacities in the Roman Empire. By the time of the early church, the Roman Empire had developed a postal service. It mainly included official correspondence. This helps explain Paul's letters, which he sent via individuals:

But I considered it necessary to send you Epaphroditus—my brother, coworker, and fellow soldier, as well as your messenger and minister to my need (Phil. 2:25).

Tychicus, our dearly loved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know how we are[a] and so that he may encourage your hearts (Col. 4:7-8).

Letter writing had taken on a set form by Paul's day, in part because of the influence of Cicero, a great Roman statesman. Cicero "set a high standard for others who desired to use the letter form for political, philosophical, or moral exhortation as well as for communicating matters of a more personal nature."<sup>1</sup> We see that eventually

handbooks were printed, covering a wide variety of letters.

Paul's letters make up most of the New Testament. He followed the Hellenistic style of his day, which followed a basic pattern of five elements:

- Opening (sender, addressee, greeting)
- Thanksgiving or Blessing (often with a prayer of intercession, well wishes, or personal greetings)
- The Burden of the Letter (including the citation of classical sources and arguments)
- Parenesis (ethical instruction, exhortation)
- Closing (mention of personal plans, mutual friends, benediction)<sup>2</sup>

In our letter here in Acts 15, we see a similar pattern used. In fact, one scholar noted: "the overall style of the letter is so markedly Greco-Roman, one has the impression that the basically Jewish congregation of Jerusalem was making every effort to communicate clearly and in the style of their Greek-speaking brothers and sisters at Antioch."<sup>3</sup>

God in His wisdom used the relatively routine activity of letter writing to build, equip, encourage, and teach His church.

1. Timothy George, *New American Commentary: Galatians* (Nashville: Broadman, 1994), Intro., 4.1.

2. Ibid, adapted. 3. J. Polhill, *New American Commentary: Acts* (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 333.

# THE PROMISED ONE

For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at [LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible](http://LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible).

## LUKE 2:25-38

<sup>25</sup> There was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, looking forward to **A Israel's consolation**, and the Holy Spirit was on him.

<sup>26</sup> It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would **B not see death** before he saw the **C Lord's Messiah**.

<sup>27</sup> **D Guided by the Spirit**, he entered the temple. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform for him what was **E customary under the law**, <sup>28</sup> Simeon took him up in his arms, praised God, and said, <sup>29</sup> Now, Master, you can dismiss **F your servant** in peace, as you promised. <sup>30</sup> For my eyes have seen **G your salvation**. <sup>31</sup> You have prepared it in the presence of all peoples— <sup>32</sup> **H a light for revelation** to the Gentiles and glory to your people Israel. <sup>33</sup> His father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him.

<sup>34</sup> Then Simeon blessed them and told his mother Mary: "Indeed, this child is **I destined** to cause the **J fall and rise of many in Israel** and to be a sign that will be **K opposed**— <sup>35</sup> and a sword will pierce your own soul—that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." <sup>36</sup> There was also a prophetess, Anna, a daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was well along in years, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, <sup>37</sup> and was **L a widow for eighty-four years**. She did not leave the temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayers.

<sup>38</sup> At that very moment, she came up and began to thank God and to **M speak about him** to all who were looking forward to the **N redemption** of Jerusalem.

## EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** Jerusalem's redemption and the coming of God's kingdom; salvation
- b** Referring to the Holy Spirit three times in verses 25-27 demonstrated the truthfulness of Simeon's confession of Jesus as the Messiah.
- c** Messiah means "anointed one" and is also translated "Christ" (ESV).
- d** The Holy Spirit guides us as we seek His purposes in life (Gal. 5:16-18).
- e** In Exodus 13:2, God commanded the Israelites to dedicate every firstborn male to the Lord. In Leviticus 12, the Lord said His people were to offer sacrifices to Him.
- f** Simeon's prayer demonstrated appropriate humility in response to who God is and what God had done for him.
- g** Simeon had now seen Jesus, the one who would bring about God's salvation for mankind (Matt. 1:21).
- h** Jesus is "the light" (John 8:12) and provides hope and salvation for Gentiles.
- i** "He will be a sanctuary; but ... he will be a stone to stumble over and a rock to trip over, and a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem" (Isa. 8:14).
- j** Jesus' ministry would cause many to stumble and fall (1 Pet. 2:8) and many to be raised up.
- k** Jesus would be rejected, as when the crowd chose Barabbas instead of Jesus (Luke 23:18).
- l** Anna's husband died after seven years of marriage. She devoted the rest of her life to serving God in ministry at the temple.
- m** Anna spoke of Jesus to all who were seeking God's salvation.
- n** "Freeing" (MSG); "rescue" (NLT)

### »» 1. SIMEON'S PRAISE (Luke 2:25-32)

- Simeon lived in anticipation of seeing God's Messiah.
- Directed by the Holy Spirit to enter the temple area, Simeon found Jesus and thanked God for bringing salvation through His Son.

### »» 2. A FUTURE PIERCING (Luke 2:33-35)

- Simeon blessed Joseph and Mary, but the blessing included a prophecy about Jesus causing great division and being the focus of opposition as well as a source of deep pain for Mary.

### »» 3. ANNA'S AFFIRMATION (Luke 2:36-38)

- Anna, a widow who had devoted herself to fasting and prayer, approached Jesus with thanksgiving.
- Note: Discuss briefly the different understandings of Anna's age.

### »» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

**Jesus is the promised Messiah, the One who provides salvation to all who trust Him.**

- Jesus is the promised Messiah.
- Jesus' purpose in coming included His sacrificial death on the cross.
- Believers should offer praise to God because He provided a means for salvation.



## FOCUS ATTENTION

**Describe the most memorable birth announcement you have seen or heard.**

- Some birth announcements are unique, while others are planned to surprise the grandparents. By design, an announcement seeks to be a pleasant experience that allows the parents to share their joy.
- Joseph and Mary received a surprising but pleasant experience from Simeon in the temple. His words pointed to an incredible future for the baby Jesus.

## EXPLORE THE BIBLE LUKE 2:25-32

**How was Simeon able to be receptive to God's promise?**

- Simeon was a righteous and devout man. He looked forward to the time when God would fulfill His promise to send the promised Messiah. By faith, Simeon was focused on what God was doing around him.
- Simeon sought to be led by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was at work in Simeon's life because he was receptive to His prompts and obedient to the Lord.
- When we are sensitive to the Holy Spirit's direction, the Lord can use us as channels of blessing to others.

**What did Simeon's initial words reveal to us about Christ?**

- God kept His promise to Simeon that He would reveal the Messiah to him before he died. In the same way, we are reminded that God keeps His promises to us as well.
- Luke hints in Simeon's words that salvation is available for all—both Jew and Gentile. Christ came to die so that anyone who comes to Him can be saved.

## LUKE 2:33-35

**How can Simeon's words to Mary be interpreted as a blessing?**

- Simeon's prophetic words about Jesus pointed to division, opposition, and ultimately pain for Mary. However, the purpose of Jesus' birth included His future sacrificial death on the cross.
- In light of the cross, we can appreciate Simeon's words of faith.

**What kind of affect did Simeon's words have upon Joseph and Mary?**

- Both Joseph and Mary marveled at the words Simeon spoke to them in the temple. In light of the angelic announcement to Mary and the dream revealed to Joseph, both parents were amazed at God's continued activity centered on the newborn Baby Jesus.

- Consider how God's Word encourages people when we take the time to share how it applies to our current situations. God wants our relationships with others to be a source of encouragement and joy as we help one another through trials and triumphs.

## LUKE 2:36-38

**What does Anna's confirmation of Simeon's words mean to us?**

- In the temple, two witnesses confirmed Jesus was the promised Messiah.
- In the Old Testament, everything was established on the premise of two or three witnesses. Here in the temple, Simeon and Anna boldly proclaimed in faith that Jesus is the promised Messiah.

**What is the relationship between being thankful and telling others?**

- Anna's response was appropriate and modeled for us the attitude of thanksgiving we should have about the coming of Jesus. Also, Anna spoke to others about the child of promise.
- We too, as Christians, should speak about the hope we have because of the birth, life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

## SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

**How can we look forward in faith to the realization of God's promise?**

- We can look back at the first coming of Christ to remember how God originally fulfilled the promise of the Messiah.
- We can make a list of how many times God has answered a prayer request. The list of answered prayers can serve as a personal reminder of how God is faithful to keep His promises.
- Just as Simeon and Anna faithfully anticipated the Messiah, we can look forward in faith to the return of our Lord. Once again, the Lord promised that He will one day return.
- **Personal Challenge:** Be intentional about encouraging other believers to be alert to the activity of God around them. Send messages of encouragement to fellow believers this week about how God wants to work in and through their lives. We need to be ready to share our faith with others when opportunities present themselves.



# OBJECT LESSON

## A WEDDING RING

Bring a wedding ring to display to the group. Point out how rings are used as symbols of promise and commitment. For example, a wedding ring represents the pledge of faithfulness that a man and a woman make to one another upon getting married. Ask participants to share how they have used rings as tangible ways to represent promises or commitments.

Explain: *Promises create anticipation and expectation that the person making the promise will fulfill it at some point in the future. In Luke 2, the Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon that Baby Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah whom God had promised. Call for a volunteer to read aloud Luke 2:25-32.*

*Notice how the biblical account emphasized the character of Simeon. He was a righteous and devout man who went to the temple (v. 25). A second emphasis was the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was upon Simeon (v. 25), revealed truth to him (v. 26), and moved him to go into the temple (v. 27). Clearly, the Holy Spirit was working through Simeon to reveal how God was going to fulfill a promise of Old Testament prophecy.*



*When God begins to work, He reminds us of His character and promises. Ask: When God reveals a promise to you through the Bible, what do you think about the promise and the character of the One making the promise? Affirm God's character as a faithful promise-keeper to people.*



## DIG DEEPER

### THE TEMPLE COMPLEX

The temple complex that Luke spoke of here had a long history and a tragic end. "There were three historical temples in succession, those of Solomon, Zerubbabel, and Herod in the preexilic, postexilic, and NT periods. Herod's temple was really a massive rebuilding of the Zerubbabel temple, so both are called the 'second temple' by Judaism. All three were located on a prominent hill in the northern part of David's capital city, which he conquered from the Jebusites (2 Sam. 5:6-7)."<sup>1</sup>

The building of the first temple for Israel was done under King Solomon (1 Kings 5:5). This first temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians in 587/586 BC. This original temple "was shaped as a 'long house' of three successive rooms from east to west, a vestibule of only 15-feet depth, a nave (the holy place) of 60 feet and an inner sanctuary (the most holy place) of 30 feet (1 Kings 6:2-3, 16-17). It was approximately 30 feet wide and 45 feet high by its interior measurements for the 'house' proper, not counting the porch, which was sort of an open entryway."<sup>2</sup>

The temple discussed in our text was started by Zerubbabel and was improved upon by Herod. Herod's renovations included an enlarged temple platform, the temple itself, and adding porches around the temple. The events of Luke 2 would have taken place

in the Temple courtyard, not in the sanctuary, and most likely in the court of women. There were different courtyards that had various levels of restriction. The court of the Gentiles was open to the whole population. However, Gentiles could go no further. Next was the court of women, where Jewish women and men could go. Beyond that was the court of Israel, reserved for the men of Israel, and beyond that area, only priests could go.<sup>3</sup>

The temple was eventually destroyed by the Romans under Titus in AD 70, an event predicted by Jesus in the days prior to the crucifixion (see Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21).

1. M. Matheney, "Temple of Jerusalem," *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Holman, 2003). 2. Ibid. 3. Ibid, adapted.

## SESSION 5

# STRENGTHENED

## ACTS 15:36-41; 16:1-5

**15:36** **A** After some time had passed, Paul said to Barnabas, “Let’s go back and visit the brothers and sisters in every town where we have preached the word of the Lord and see how they’re doing.” <sup>37</sup> Barnabas wanted to take along **B** John Mark. <sup>38</sup> But Paul insisted that they should not take along this man who had **C** deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone on with them to the work. <sup>39</sup> They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed off to **D** Cyprus. <sup>40</sup> But Paul chose **E** Silas and departed, after being **F** commended by the brothers and sisters to the grace of the Lord. <sup>41</sup> He traveled through Syria and Cilicia, **G** strengthening the churches. [...] <sup>16:1</sup> Paul went on to Derbe and Lystra, where there was a disciple named **H** Timothy, the son of a believing Jewish woman, but his father was a Greek. <sup>2</sup> The brothers and sisters at Lystra and Iconium spoke highly of him. <sup>3</sup> Paul wanted Timothy to go with him; so he took him and **I** circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, since they all knew that his father was a Greek. <sup>4</sup> As they traveled through the towns, they delivered **J** the decisions reached by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem for the people to observe. <sup>5</sup> So the churches were **K** strengthened in the faith and **L** grew daily in numbers.

## EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** A phrase to mark a new section of the narrative; see Acts 18:1; 21:5 for similar occurrences.
- b** The cousin of Barnabas and later the writer of the Gospel of Mark
- c** “Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia, but John left them and went back to Jerusalem” (Acts 13:13).
- d** A large island in the eastern Mediterranean Sea; Barnabas was a native of Cyprus (4:36) and journeyed with Paul there on the first missionary journey (13:4).
- e** Also known as Silvanus, he was viewed as one of the “leading men among the brothers” in Acts 15:22. He later joined Paul in writing the letters to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1).
- f** Paul had the support of the church in Antioch for this journey (Acts 13:1-3).
- g** This would include reading the letter of Acts 15:23-29; “to build up muscle and sinew in those congregations” (MSG)
- h** Possibly converted on Paul’s first journey, Paul mentored Timothy and called him “my true son in the faith” (1 Tim. 1:2). The Bible lists Timothy as an author of six New Testament books with Paul (2 Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; Philem. 1), and Timothy received two letters from Paul (1 and 2 Tim.).
- i** Timothy’s mother was Jewish and his father was Greek, so he was considered to have been Jewish.
- j** The decision of the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15
- k** Paul was fulfilling his goal from Acts 15:41.
- l** Similar to Acts 2:47: “Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.” Also see Acts 9:31; 15:41.

### »» 1. PARTING WAYS (Acts 15:36-39)

- Paul desired to revisit the churches established during his first missionary journey.
- Barnabas desired to take John Mark even though the young man had abandoned the team on the first trip.
- Paul and Barnabas agreed to go separate ways as a result of this disagreement.
- Note: Carefully portray Barnabas and Paul as having legitimate reasons for including or excluding John Mark. Characterize both men as being faithful to their calls.

### »» 2. A NEW TEAM (Acts 15:40-41; 16:1-3)

- Paul recruited Silas to accompany him on his second missionary journey.
- In Lystra, Paul added Timothy to the team.
- Note: Explain the circumcision of Timothy in terms of showing respect for Jewish law and heritage since Timothy's mother was Jewish.

### »» 3. GROWTH SEEN (Acts 16:4-5)

- Paul and his team evangelized and shared the decisions made at the Jerusalem Council.
- Believers were strengthened in their faith, and new believers were added to local congregations daily.

### »» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

#### **God strengthens His church through His faithful servants.**

- Being faithful to God's purposes in our lives plays a role in our decision-making process and personal growth.
- Believers must look for other faithful believers with whom they can partner to fulfill God's mission.
- Believers should be involved in both the sharing of the gospel and encouraging spiritual growth in others.



## FOCUS ATTENTION

**What is your favorite inspirational movie or story?**

**How and why does it encourage you?**

- Inspirational movies are usually based on actual accounts of people's successful life journeys. There are many inspirational stories about people achieving great things and overcoming difficult obstacles.
- Despite a conflict between Paul and Barnabas, God strengthened the church through His faithful servants.

## EXPLORE THE BIBLE ACTS 15:36-39

**How did they both have legitimate arguments for their views on inviting John Mark?**

- Paul was called to be a leader. Therefore, he wanted a faithful team to serve alongside him in the work of the ministry. Paul did not think John Mark was reliable because he had abandoned the team on their first mission trip.
- Barnabas was called to mentor other believers. Barnabas had mentored Paul when no one else trusted him. Now, Barnabas was passionate about mentoring John Mark because no one had confidence in him. Barnabas thought John Mark needed to be mentored in order to overcome failure and fulfill God's call upon his life.

**How do God's purposes for each of our lives take us in different directions?**

- We are each assigned unique roles in God's plan for mankind.
- God used Paul and Barnabas's differing viewpoints for His good; instead of one ministry team going on a single mission trip, now there were two ministry teams going on two mission trips.

## ACTS 15:40-41; 16:1-3

**How did Paul build a ministry team after losing Barnabas as a partner?**

- Paul recruited Silas to serve alongside him on the next mission trip. Paul had gotten to know Silas during the Jerusalem Council and the subsequent delivery of the letter from the apostles and elders in Jerusalem to the congregation in Antioch.
- During the mission trip, Paul met a young man named Timothy in Lystra. Because the believers in Lystra and Iconium spoke well of Timothy, Paul sought to add him to the ministry team.
- Paul was on the lookout for reliable leaders he could add to his ministry team. In the same way, we are to disciple people to join us in the work of ministry.

**Why do you think Paul wanted Timothy to be circumcised since the Jerusalem Council did not require circumcision for Gentile believers?**

- Paul did not want to circumcise Timothy on account of his salvation. Timothy was introduced as a disciple or believer in Christ (Acts 16:1). Also, the Jerusalem Council had already established that circumcision was not a requirement of salvation for Gentile believers.
- Paul did want to remove any stumbling block or hindrance in Timothy's future ministry. Even though Timothy's mother was a Jewish believer, his father was a Greek. For this reason, Paul felt it necessary to circumcise Timothy for the sake of reaching Jews in the future with the gospel.

## ACTS 16:4-5

**Why was it important for the church leaders to share the Jerusalem Council letter continually?**

- Paul sought to strengthen the churches "in the faith" and grow the church as new believers joined them (v. 5).
- By sharing the letter it reminded the believers to continue their ministry to one another and to the unbelievers around them.

**What is God's purpose in our ministries to unbelievers and believers?**

- Our ministry to unbelievers is to share the gospel. Only the good news that Jesus saves can change lives. We are called to share this life-changing hope.
- Our ministry to believers is to strengthen their faith. Believers are encouraged to grow and become spiritually mature. As a result, believers are strengthened and equipped to go out and share the gospel with unbelievers.

## SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

**How can you begin to partner with others in your church to share the gospel with unbelievers and strengthen other believers?**

- Share your vision for ministry with your pastor and other church leaders. Perhaps they can point you in the right direction for resources, training, and encouragement.
- Invite other believers to join you in prayer for lost family members, friends, and acquaintances. Practice sharing your testimony with each other until you are comfortable sharing it with an unbeliever.
- **Personal Challenge:** This week invite one or more believers to join you in serving others. Encourage them to discover their spiritual gifts, and take the time to show them how they can be partners in the ministry with you.



# OBJECT LESSON

## A ROPE

Bring a heavy rope. Explain how people in stressful situations use the analogy of a rope to describe their struggle. We hear statements like, "I'm at the end of my rope." Encourage group members to think of times when God strengthened them as a result of difficulties.

Call for a volunteer to read Acts 15:36–16:5. Explain: *Despite the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas, the kingdom of God was strengthened because there were now two mission teams rather than one. Both Paul and Barnabas were faithful to their call. Paul was a great leader, and Barnabas was a great mentor. For example, Barnabas was a mentor for Paul when no one had confidence in him. Now, Barnabas would do the same for John Mark. The crossroads between the two men revealed their gifts and passions. Paul wanted a team around him who would not quit, while Barnabas strengthened John Mark so that failure would not be his final story.*

In the end, Barnabas had mentored John Mark well, and Paul made a point to recognize how John Mark was profitable to his ministry (2 Tim. 4:11). God can bring people together for a season



of ministry to accomplish a specific purpose before they pursue different paths due to their gifts and calling.

Ask: *What lessons have you learned from stressful situations that God used to strengthen you and others? Who might need encouragement from you today?*



## DIG DEEPER

### CIRCUMCISION AND CHRISTIAN HERITAGE

The rite of circumcision harkens back to Abraham and was to serve as a sign of the covenant between Abraham (and his descendants) and God. As Moses writes:

This is my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you, which you are to keep: Every one of your males must be circumcised (Gen. 17:10).

The act of circumcision is described as the "act of removing foreskin of the male genital; in ancient Israel, ritually performed on the eighth day after birth on male children of natives, servants, and aliens (Lev. 9:3). Circumcision was carried out by the father utilizing a flint knife (compare Josh. 5:3)."<sup>1</sup>

God took the act of circumcision seriously, and before Moses returned to Egypt to rescue the Israelites, God almost struck him dead due to his failure to circumcise his sons (Ex. 4:24-26). However, the act of outward circumcision was meant to reflect an internal reality. It served to call Israel to their God, the one who promised to save them. The important thing for Israel was to have a circumcised heart, as Moses called Israel to do in Deuteronomy:

The LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the hearts of your descendants, and you will love him with all your heart and all your soul so that you will live (Deut. 30:6).

In the early church, battles raged about the necessity of circumcision, particularly among Gentiles who became Christians. In Acts 15 at the Jerusalem Council, the apostles and elders affirmed with Peter "we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus in the same way they are" (Acts 15:11). Paul argued that to force circumcision would be the equivalent of adding works to be saved:

Take note! I, Paul, am telling you that if you get yourselves circumcised, Christ will not benefit you at all. ... For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision accomplishes anything; what matters is faith working through love (Gal. 5:2,6).

Why? Because it is an attempt "to be justified by the law" (Gal.5:4) and is a denial of justification by faith, which is at the heart of the gospel. Thus, circumcision became no longer necessary to be a part of God's covenant people.

1. "Circumcision," *Holman Concise Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Broadman, 2001), 118.

# A CHANGED FAMILY

For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at [LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible](http://LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible).

## ACTS 16:22-34

<sup>22</sup> The crowd **a** **joined in the attack** against them, and the **b** **chief magistrates** stripped off their clothes and ordered them to be beaten with rods. <sup>23</sup> After they had severely flogged them, they threw them in jail, ordering the jailer to guard them carefully. <sup>24</sup> Receiving such an order, he put them into the **c** **inner prison** and secured their feet in the **d** **stocks**. <sup>25</sup> About midnight Paul and Silas were **e** **praying and singing hymns** to God, and the **f** **prisoners were listening** to them. <sup>26</sup> Suddenly there was such a **g** **violent earthquake** that the foundations of the jail were shaken, and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's chains came loose. <sup>27</sup> When the jailer woke up and saw the doors of the prison standing open, he drew his **h** **sword** and was going to kill himself, since he thought the prisoners had escaped. <sup>28</sup> But Paul called out in a loud voice, "Don't harm yourself, because we're all here!" <sup>29</sup> The jailer called for lights, rushed in, and **i** **fell down trembling** before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup> He escorted them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" <sup>31</sup> They said, **j** **"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved— k you and your household."** <sup>32</sup> And they spoke the word of the Lord to him along with everyone in his house. <sup>33</sup> He took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds. Right away he and all his family were baptized. <sup>34</sup> He brought them into his house, set a **l** **meal** before them, and **m** **rejoiced** because he had come to believe in God with his entire household.

## EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** After the excision of the slave girl in Philippi, the owners saw "their hope of profit was gone" (v. 19), so they drummed up a mob scene to complain to the authorities about Paul and Silas.
- b** They usually tried civil cases and upheld the law.
- c** The most secure place in the prison; a "dungeon" (NLT); "maximum security cell" (MSG)
- d** Stocks would secure a person's feet so they were unable to walk. Originally used for torture, stocks held a person in place so that the torso could be stretched, causing intense pain.
- e** The early Christians were often singing hymns and were hopeful no matter the situation (Col. 3:16). Even on the night of the last supper, Jesus and the disciples sang a hymn (Mark 14:26).
- f** Their hope in God brought wanted attention from their fellow prisoners (1 Pet. 3:15).
- g** Earthquakes were common around Philippi, but Luke saw God's timing in it as God used the event to free Paul and Silas.
- h** The jailer would have been held responsible for the loss of the prisoners. Instead of facing Roman punishment, he sought to kill himself.
- i** A sign of respect for Paul, who saved his life by not escaping during the earthquake
- j** This means to trust in the person of Jesus, not just the message about Him (Mark 16:16; John 3:16; 14:6).
- k** Anyone who believes will be saved, no matter their gender, status, ethnicity, or age.
- l** Their shared faith led them to share a meal as brothers and sisters in Christ (Acts 2:46; 16:15).
- m** "Filled with joy" (NIV); their faith in Christ led to great joy in the midst of a difficult situation for the missionaries.

### »» 1. THE SITUATION (Acts 16:22-24)

- Paul and Silas were beaten with rods and thrown into jail.
- The jailer secured them by placing them in an inner cell with stocks on their feet.

### »» 2. THE OPPORTUNITY (Acts 16:25-28)

- As Paul and Silas prayed and sang in prison, God sent an earthquake that opened the doors to the prison.
- Fearing that his prisoners had escaped, the jailer drew his sword to kill himself.
- Paul stopped the jailer from doing so, assuring him that no one had escaped.

### »» 3. THE CONVERSION (Acts 16:29-32)

- The jailer rushed to Paul and Silas, inquiring about what he must do to receive salvation.
- The jailer and his family heard and accepted Christ.
- Note: Emphasize the jailer as demonstrating spiritual influence among his family members.

### »» 4. THE TRANSFORMATION (Acts 16:33-34)

- After their conversion, the jailer and his family tended to Paul and Silas by cleaning their wounds and providing a meal in their house.
- The jailer and his family were baptized.
- Note: Emphasize the difference in how the jailer treated Paul and Silas after the jailer's conversion to Christianity.

### »» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

#### **God uses our influence to lead others to Him.**

- Believers can praise God when persecuted and ridiculed, knowing that God uses their responses as a testimony to others.
- Believers must share Jesus with other family members.
- Salvation through Jesus leads to demonstrations of that faith, observable by others.



## FOCUS ATTENTION

**Do you think a family or a culture has more influence on a person's life? Explain.**

- A Christian family goes to church together, but there is so much more. A Christian family strives to live out the teachings of Christ in their home as an everyday lifestyle.
- A Christian family is changed by the good news of Jesus Christ. It means the members of the family have come to know Christ and have been changed by Him. As a result, they desire to share with others the difference that Christ has made in their lives.

## EXPLORE THE BIBLE

### ACTS 16:22-24

**What kind of treatment did Paul and Silas receive after accusations were made against them?**

- Paul and Silas were stripped and beaten. Afterward, they were thrown into prison and placed in confinement with their feet in stocks.
- Despite the accusations of others, Paul and Silas remained faithful to the Lord.

**What are some concerns that keep people from accepting Jesus Christ as Lord today?**

- Some of the reasons people don't accept Jesus include pride, doubt, shame, or feelings of unworthiness.
- Unbelievers can also be hostile to Christians when they perceive that the message of the gospel threatens their economic livelihood.

### ACTS 16:25-28

**How did Paul and Silas respond to their imprisonment?**

- Despite being thrown into prison, Paul and Silas maintained positive attitudes. Although they were in a physical prison, they were spiritually free to worship God. Instead of wallowing in misery, they prayed and sang hymns of praise to God.
- Paul and Silas's worship of God became a witness to the other prisoners. When other people see believers praising God in spite of their difficult circumstances, our worship becomes a witness.

**What can we learn from Paul's example of peace and joy in the midst of hardship?**

- There is nothing quite like suffering to teach us what true joy is all about. While we don't long to experience suffering, God will use our circumstances for His good (Rom. 8:28; Jas. 1:2-4).

### ACTS 16:29-32

**How did Paul and Silas's response open the door to reach the jailer with the gospel?**

- A jailer's life was at stake if his prisoners escaped. After a violent earthquake shook the prison's doors open, the jailer took

desperate measures. He drew his sword to take his life until Paul notified the jailer that everyone was still there.

**What prompted the jailer to ask about receiving salvation?**

- Because Paul and Silas demonstrated their faith in God through worship, the jailer wanted to know more about God after the events of the earthquake.
- As we live out our faith in Christ, life's problems can create opportunities to witness to unbelievers.

**What is your answer to the question asked by the jailer?**

- Note: Take time to discuss in small groups how each person would answer, "What must I do to be saved?" (v. 30).

### ACTS 16:33-34

**What tangible difference can be seen in the jailer as a result of his conversion to Christ?**

- The jailer and his family washed the wounds of Paul and Silas. Also, the jailer provided a meal for them in his own home. The jailer was filled with joy because he and his household believed in Jesus.

**What evidence can be pointed to today that indicates a person is a follower of Jesus?**

- When people come to know Christ, there will be evidence of good works because of their belief in the gospel. The transformation in people's lives because of their belief in Jesus produces evidence observable to others.

## SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

**What steps can you take to lead family members and close friends to Christ?**

- Strive to live out the Christian life before them. Remember that they are watching how you respond to challenging circumstances. The old saying is true: actions speak louder than words.
- Our faithful worship of God in the midst of miserable situations not only strengthens our faith but also witnesses to the people around us.
- Be prepared to reach out to others in their times of distress and share the reason for the hope we have in Christ.
- **Personal Challenge:** Encourage the group to pray for each other's friends and families who do not know Christ. Direct them to contact each other during the week for encouragement and prayer. Also, remind them to focus on Christ instead of our circumstances, because our worship can become our greatest witness to those around us.

## A FAMILY BIBLE

Bring a family Bible to display to the group. If possible, refer to written dates where family members have been saved and baptized. Explain how family Bibles can contain precious information about relatives who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. Not only does a family Bible provide genealogical information, but also it can document the spiritual heritage of believers within one's family tree. Ask: *What makes reading the Bible together as a family so impactful?*

If you haven't, it can be a source of great blessing. Explain that in the movie *Courageous*, the dads decided to make reading the Bible together a priority for their families. Lead the group to reflect on their childhood years. Note: Briefly share your own experience.

Ask: *Do you remember seeing a family Bible displayed in the home of a family member or friend? If so, what memories come to mind?* Discuss the importance of reading the Bible together as a family. If you aren't already, then it's never too late to accept the challenge and start.

Instruct someone to read aloud Joshua 24:14-15 and Acts 16:31-34. Point out that each family declared they would serve the Lord.



They made firm decisions. Encourage the participants to accept the challenge of reading the Bible together as a family. Simply pray together, read together, and apply what God's Word means to your family. Remember, maintaining a consistent pattern of family Bible reading is the key. Ask: *How has God changed your family? What has God specifically done to work through your family?*

## DIG DEEPER

### HOUSEHOLDS IN THE FIRST CENTURY

In the first century, households played a crucial role in society.

The basic unit of the Greco-Roman society in which Paul lived and ministered was the household ... its importance was such that the secular ethics saw the stability of the city-state as dependent upon responsible management of the household.<sup>1</sup>

This is evident through the existence of Greco-Roman household codes and even in Paul's frequent teaching via his letters on how Christian households should operate (see Eph. 5:21-6:9; Col. 3:18-21).

Unlike the American context, where the household is primarily made up of the nuclear family of a husband, wife, and their dependent children, the ancient world viewed the household as a more encompassing unit. A household consisted of "members of the immediate family, and typically extended to include slaves, freedmen, servants, and laborers, and sometimes even business associates and tenants."<sup>2</sup> The head of the household would have had authority over the household, in addition to the responsibility of caring for everyone's well-being.

For Paul, the gospel necessitated a Christian approach to the operations of the household. His discussion of husbands loving their

wives "just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her" (Eph. 5:25) demonstrates the motivation behind Christian households. They are to operate in such a way that they reflect the gospel and are honorable before unbelievers (1 Thess. 4:12). The result, as Peter said, would make their evangelism more effective (1 Pet. 2:12).

As for church leadership, Paul's discussion of qualifications of elders and pastors necessitated a man who "must manage his own household competently and have his children under control with all dignity. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of God's church?)" (1 Tim. 3:4-5). A failure to manage one's household in a godly way disqualified him from church leadership.

The New Testament also uses the image of the household to describe the church (see Eph. 2:19; 1 Tim. 3:15).

The effect of Paul's use of household imagery is to depict the people of God as God's household, as living and growing family whose life together requires a mutuality of service and care, recognition of responsibilities, and a sense of identity, belonging, and protection.<sup>3</sup>

1. P. Towner, "Household and Household Codes," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1993), 471. 2. *Ibid.*, 417. 3. *Ibid.*, 418.

# THE UNKNOWN KNOWN

For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at [LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible](http://LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible).

## ACTS 17:22-34

<sup>22</sup> Paul stood in the middle of the **A Areopagus** and said:

**B “People of Athens!** I see that you are **C extremely religious** in every respect. <sup>23</sup> For as I was passing through and observing the objects of your worship, I even found an altar on which was inscribed: **D “To an Unknown God.’** Therefore, what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. <sup>24</sup> The God who made the world and everything in it—he is Lord of heaven and earth—does not live in shrines made by hands. <sup>25</sup> Neither is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since **E he himself gives everyone life and breath and all things.** <sup>26</sup> From **F one man** he has made every nationality to live over the whole earth and has determined their appointed times and the boundaries of where they live. <sup>27</sup> He did this so that they might **G seek God**, and perhaps they might reach out and find him, though **H he is not far** from each one of us. <sup>28</sup> For in him we live and move and have our being, as even some of your own **I poets** have said, ‘For we are also his offspring.’ <sup>29</sup> Since we are God’s offspring then, we shouldn’t think that the **J divine nature** is like gold or silver or stone, an image fashioned by human art and imagination.

<sup>30</sup> Therefore, having **K overlooked the times of ignorance**, God now commands all people everywhere to repent,

<sup>31</sup> because he has set a day when he is going to judge the world in **L righteousness** by the man he has appointed. He has provided proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.” <sup>32</sup> When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, **M some began to ridicule him, but others said, “We’d like to hear from you again about this.”** <sup>33</sup> So Paul left their presence. <sup>34</sup> However, some people joined him and believed, including Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

## EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** On the Areopagus the famous Athenian court met to adjudicate civil, criminal, and religious matters in Athens. This meant Paul was standing in the middle of the gathered court though there is no evidence he was on trial.
- b** Verse 19 tells us that citizens of Athens had gathered to hear more about Paul’s preaching.
- c** Athens had many temples to pagan gods.
- d** An altar existed in Athens to cover the bases religiously so that they didn’t leave out any deity in their religious observance.
- e** God is the true source of all life and all the good things we receive, contrary to the pagan myths of human origins and how the gods provide for people.
- f** Adam, the first of the entire human race
- g** God desires all people to seek Him. He makes Himself plain for all to perceive (Rom. 1:19-20).
- h** God is omnipresent and seeks repentance from all (2 Pet. 3:9). “He’s not remote; he’s near. We live and move in him, can’t get away from him!” (MSG).
- i** It’s generally agreed that Paul quoted Aratus, a third century BC poet, to show how all humans come from God Himself.
- j** As complex and wonder-filled as humanity is, God is infinitely greater.
- k** Sins committed out of ignorance still demand God’s judgment (Rom. 3:10).
- l** God’s judgment will be based on His standard of righteousness.
- m** Paul’s mention of the resurrection of Christ caused some to mock and others to believe (1 Cor. 1:18-25).

### »» 1. UNKNOWN GOD (Acts 17:22-23)

- Paul introduced his sermon in Athens by acknowledging popular religious beliefs as seen in the inclusion of an altar to an unknown God.
- Paul declared that he was introducing them to that unknown God.

### »» 2. THE KNOWN CREATOR (Acts 17:24-29)

- Paul declared that creation and providence point to God in ways that cause humanity to seek Him.
- God is near and can be found.

### »» 3. JUDGMENT BY THE SON (Acts 17:30-31)

- Paul concluded by pointing out that God would not ignore people's ignorance of Him but would judge those who did not turn to Him in repentance.
- Paul explained that this judgment would be carried out by Jesus Christ "the Man," who had been resurrected from the dead.

### »» 4. SPLIT DECISION (Acts 17:32-34)

- Some of Paul's listeners rejected it based on their views of death and resurrection.
- Others wanted to hear more even though they were still skeptical.
- There were some, including Dionysius and Damaris, who began to follow Christ that day.

### »» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

**Through faith in Christ, sinful humans can know the one true God.**

- People are searching for the truth and looking for meaning.
- God makes Himself known so that we can know and worship Him.
- No one is exempt from God's judgment.
- While people may respond in a variety of ways, believers must continue to share the truth of the gospel.



## FOCUS ATTENTION

### What subject was the hardest for you to learn in high school? Why?

- Learning a hard subject can be a challenge for a variety of reasons—the subject matter, the teacher, or a lack of interest. However learning is possible when we link what we do not know to something we already know well.
- We can share our faith in Christ with other people if we take the time to build bridges in our conversations with them. By talking about God in terms they understand, we can articulate our faith in Christ so that they can discover the meaning of the gospel.

## EXPLORE THE BIBLE

### ACTS 17:22-23

#### How does the altar “To an Unknown God” in Athens reflect man’s search for meaning?

- The people of Athens worshiped several idols. To avoid overlooking any particular idol, they erected an altar to an unknown God in case they had left one out.
- Idolatry then and now indicates that people are searching for something more in this life. The need to worship an unknown God proves that man is still searching for something more.

### ACTS 17:24-29

#### What characteristics of God did Paul emphasize?

- Paul taught that God is the Creator.
- He is the giver of “life and breath” to all things (v. 25) and the One who has “determined their appointed times and the boundaries of where they live” (v. 26).

#### How does a Creator God who wants to have a personal relationship with people compare to the idols the Athenians worshiped?

- The idols in Athens were man-made of gold, silver, or stone.
- The Creator God made all nations from one man. He made the world and everything in it. He provides everything people need. God does not need anything from humans, but Paul explained that God created us so we would seek out a relationship with Him.

### ACTS 17:30-31

#### On what basis did Paul teach that people should repent because judgment day awaits them?

- Paul pointed to the resurrection of Jesus Christ as proof that God will one day come to judge all people. For this reason, God commands everyone to repent of their sin before it is too late.
- When judgment day arrives, God will judge each person (Rev. 20:13).

- When we talk to unbelievers about the reality of the judgment day, we can point to Jesus’ resurrection as proof that He is alive and will one day judge every person who has ever lived.

### ACTS 17:32-34

#### What kind of response did Paul receive from the people of Athens about the resurrection of the dead?

- They responded in a variety of ways. Some sneered at Paul in unbelief. Others wanted to hear more from Paul later. And some people believed Paul’s message.
- People today have different views about the dead. One of Christianity’s distinctions is a living Lord who died for the sins of the world. Although He died, He rose again and now lives forevermore.

#### How might a person’s past understanding get in the way of them following Jesus?

- Paul used idols and Greek poetry to connect with those around him.
- As we seek out people in our circles of influence who do not yet know God, we should look for natural connection points that allow us opportunities to share about who God is and what He has done in our lives.

## SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

#### How can we point people to the truth about God as they search for meaning in this life?

- Begin by building bridges between where they are and what God wants them to know about Him. Speak the truth about the God of the Bible in a way they can begin to grasp and understand.
- Point to the truth about the resurrection of the dead and its implications. Explain that the proof of the judgment day is based on the historical account of the resurrection of Jesus.
- When you share the gospel with people, remind them that God is available to anyone who seeks Him.
- **Personal Challenge:** Start a spiritual conversation with a family member, friend, or coworker this week. You may want to suggest that the prevalence of idolatry reflects man’s search for meaning. After some discussion, introduce God as our Creator who wants to have a relationship with the people He created. The conversation can finish with a reference to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

## A NAME BADGE

Show a name badge. Discuss: *What can a name badge reveal about a person?* Ask participants to introduce themselves to the rest of the group by sharing one thing the rest of the group may not know about them.

Call for someone to read aloud Acts 17:22-34. Explain: *Paul introduced the God of the Bible by making a connection to something familiar to the people of Athens. Since there were several objects of worship in the city, Paul noticed one particular altar with the inscription "To an Unknown God" (v. 23). Rather than condemn the people of Athens for their idolatry, Paul used the concept of an "unknown God" to introduce the people to the God of the Bible.*

Discuss: *How can we introduce Christ to others? To model Paul's example, the key is to link what they do not know with what God wants them to know. What have you learned about God that you did not know before you came to faith in Him?* Encourage participants to share their testimonies by describing how they came to understand something about God that they did not know about Him. For example, I did not understand how merciful God was until I



asked Him to forgive me of all my sin. Note: Consider enlisting a few group members before the session to answer this question so they have time to determine their responses.

Close by praying that the group would be faithful to share with others about their personal relationship with God.

## DIG DEEPER

### AREOPAGUS AND PAGANISM

When the apostle Paul met the people of Athens, the result was a clash of civilizations. On one side there was Paul, the ethnic Jew who proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ. His gospel proclaims specific biblical truths: there is one God, who is the Creator and Sustainer of all things (Acts 17:24). The One true God (Deut. 6:4) is the One who has made all the nations, will judge all the nations, and offers salvation to all the nations through His Son, Jesus Christ (Acts 17:30-31).

On the other hand, the Athenians rejected monotheism. They held to a complex polytheistic religious system of various gods and goddesses who were not all powerful but influenced many things and could be influenced by man. These gods or goddesses were not all good, nor did they necessarily care for the good of mankind.

God made a way for Paul to proclaim the truth to the Athenians publicly in their most sacred space—the Areopagus. The Areopagus means “hill of Ares.” Ares was the Greek god of war, and this space was likely named in his honor. Some translations use the term “Mars’ hill,” which corresponds to the Roman identification of Mars as the god of war (v. 22, KJV).

The Areopagus was a “rocky hill, about 370 feet high, not far below the Acropolis and overlooked the Agora (marketplace) in

Athens, Greece.”<sup>1</sup> It was on this hill that the court would convene to discuss civil and criminal matters. As Polhill explains:

From ancient times a court met there that decided on civil and criminal cases and seems to have had some jurisdiction in matters of religion. Since it traditionally met on the Areopagus, it came eventually to be known by the name of the hill, just as for us Wall Street would designate either the street or the stock exchange.<sup>2</sup>

The philosophers took Paul to the Areopagus to further explain his teaching on the resurrection. To be brought to the Areopagus didn’t necessarily mean one was on trial, as the court was also used as “the philosophers of the city gathered to discuss their ideas, some of which revolutionized modern thought.”<sup>3</sup>

Though it may seem as though Paul’s gospel is being put on trial by the Areopagus, in reality, it was the other way around. Paul was not charged, nor were there any deliberations. Instead, He walked out, leaving the philosophers to deal with the weight of the truth of the gospel. The verdict, as we see in verse 34, was the salvation of several in attendance, as the gospel truth destroyed the falsehood of paganism.

1. “Areopagus,” *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman, 2003). 2. J. Polhill, *New American Commentary: Acts* (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 366. 3. Ibid., “Mar Hill,” *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*.

## SESSION 8

# VALUE ALL

## ACTS 16:16-19

**16:16** Once, as we were on our **A way to prayer**, a **B slave girl** met us who had a **C spirit by which she predicted the future**. She made a large profit for her owners by fortune-telling. **17** As she followed Paul and us she cried out, “These men, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation, are the **D servants** of the Most High God.” **18** She did this for many days. Paul was greatly annoyed. Turning to the spirit, he said, “I command you in **E the name of Jesus Christ** to come out of her!” And it came out right away. **19** When her **F owners** realized that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities.

## PSALM 139:13-16

**139:13** For it was you who **G created** my inward parts; you **H knit** me together in my mother’s womb. **14** I will **I praise** you because I have been remarkably and wondrously made. **J Your works are wondrous**, and I know this very well. **15** My bones were **K not hidden** from you when I was made in secret, when I was formed in **L the depths of the earth**. **16** Your eyes saw me when I was formless; **M all my days were written in your book** and planned before a single one of them began.

## EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** “Going to the place of prayer” (NIV, ESV)
- b** A girl who was owned as property; this girl was owned by more than one person (v. 19).
- c** Literally “python spirit,” which is rooted in the pagan myth of Apollos. It referred to an ability to predict the future.
- d** These men were slaves of God not of man. Paul often referred to himself in this fashion (Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:1).
- e** Jesus approved of this in Mark 9:38-41. Peter also healed in Jesus’ name in Acts 3:6. Jesus is the one who healed through the apostles.
- f** The girl’s owners had dehumanized her, not caring about her or her healing from the evil spirit. They were only concerned about how they would continue to make money off of the young girl.
- g** God is the Creator of each person (Job 10:11; Acts 17:25).
- h** Demonstrates the care God takes in forming each person; “formed” (MSG); “wove” (NASB)
- i** God’s care in creating us leads us to praise Him and His ability to bring about life.
- j** The creation of all humans is an amazing miracle. As Solomon said: “Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who alone does wonders. Blessed be his glorious name forever; the whole earth is filled with his glory” (Ps. 72:18-19).
- k** God can see things that mankind cannot see.
- l** “In the dark of the womb” (NLT); as the depths of the earth are unseen and mysterious, so too is a mother’s womb.
- m** “Every day of my life was recorded in your book” (NLT); “And in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me” (NASB).

### »» 1. FREEDOM GAINED (Acts 16:16-18)

- A demon-controlled slave girl who practiced fortune telling for the financial benefit of others followed Paul and Silas.
- She continually proclaimed them to be servants of God with His message of salvation.
- After many days of this activity, Paul freed the girl by casting out the spirit.

### »» 2. THE COMPLAINT (Acts 16:19)

- The owners of the slave girl realized that the casting out of the demon meant they had lost potential revenue.
- They forcibly took Paul and Silas to the local authorities.

### »» 3. VALUED BY GOD (Ps. 139:13-16)

- The psalmist celebrated the wonder of humanity, emphasizing God's involvement in the creation of every person, which gives every individual worth and value at conception.
- Note: Characterize human trafficking and abortion as acts that demean and devalue human life.

### »» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

**Christ values every person, so we should not exploit or disregard others.**

- Believers must seek to take action as advocates for people who are devalued and marginalized.
- Society should be challenged to examine the motives behind businesses that profit from the devaluing of humans.
- Believers are to value all human life.



## FOCUS ATTENTION

### What life experiences have taught you that people should be treated with dignity and respect?

- Our laws are based on treating people right and disciplining those who wrong others. When people violate the rights of others, the law and court systems enforce the consequences.
- The message of the gospel upholds the belief that people matter to God. For this reason, people need to know about the gift of eternal life that He offers them.

## EXPLORE THE BIBLE ACTS 16:16-18

### How was the young slave girl becoming a problem for Paul?

- The HCSB Study Bible clarifies this problem: "Though the girl cried out truth about Paul and his companions, Paul was greatly aggravated. Luke does not say why, but presumably Paul was irritated at the wild and distracting manner in which the girl carried on. Her manner would repel rather than attract crowds."<sup>1</sup>

### What kind of freedom did the slave girl receive?

- Although the girl was a physical slave, she received spiritual freedom when Paul commanded a spirit to leave her. Only the name of Jesus has the power to deliver someone from demon possession.
- When we look at the physical hardships of other people, we need to remember the reality of spiritual bondage prompts us to share the good news that Jesus died to set us free from sin and death.

## ACTS 16:19

### What does the response of the owners reveal about their view of others? Of themselves?

- The slave girl's owners saw her purely as a business opportunity.
- Their monetary view of the girl proved that they did not see all humans as valuable and worthy of respect.

### What parallels would you make between the slave girl and modern day human trafficking?

- In both instances, the captive person is considered personal property that serves the owner. While a slave girl was used as a fortune teller, human trafficking has a much darker purpose.
- The principle behind both activities involves seeing people as commodities rather than human beings who need help. The gospel compels us to reach out to people who are considered to be disregarded by society.

## PSALM 139:13-16

### Why is life considered valuable based upon the Bible?

- Psalm 139 teaches us that we are created and made by God in our mother's womb. He knows everything about us because He made us.
- We are made in God's image, so we are valuable in His eyes.
- Since the fall in the garden of Eden, man has been under the curse of sin. Yet, Jesus came to die for our sins and redeem us from the curse.

### What modern practices disregard the value of human life?

- Abortion and human trafficking both devalue the lives of others. Abortion reduces a baby in the womb to physical matter without any spiritual significance or meaning.
- Human trafficking views people as objects of sexual gratification without regard to their personal dignity.
- As Christians, we should seek to share the hope of the gospel with those personally affected by abortion or human trafficking. God's grace can minister to people's deepest needs to alleviate the guilt and pain experienced from these tragedies.

### What does it mean that God has numbered all of our days? How does that affect the way you view and value your time on earth?

- Compare verse 16 with Job 14:5 and Jeremiah 1:5.
- God knew the amount of time each of us would spend on this earth before He created us.

## SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

### What does the Bible teach about the sanctity of human life?

- God is the Creator of life. Therefore, all life is sacred.
- People are valuable to God because He sent His Son to die for them. God offers forgiveness and grace to those who will come to Him.
- Christians should advocate for the unborn and seek to minister to those affected by abortion and human trafficking.
- Christians can become the conscience of their communities by raising awareness about the rights of the unborn and those who are devalued as human beings.
- **Personal Challenge:** This week begin to discover more about the local crisis pregnancy center in your area. Perhaps you can volunteer to serve as needed, donate items, or help to contribute to their needs by giving. Pray for the workers and volunteers at your local crisis pregnancy center for the ministry they provide in your community.

1. Note on "Acts 16:17-18," HCSB Study Bible (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), 1894.

# OBJECT LESSON

## PAINTBRUSHES

Display some paintbrushes or a copy of the Mona Lisa for the group to view. Mention that Leonardo da Vinci painted the Mona Lisa during the early 1500s. Explain that the painting is one of the most recognizable pieces of art in the world. Ask: *What do we know about her?* Emphasize the lack of knowledge about the model.

Call on a volunteer to read aloud Acts 16:16-19.

Explain: *Notice the Bible doesn't mention the name of the slave girl, but that does not diminish her importance. The slave girl was freed from an evil spirit. Like the Mona Lisa, the slave girl has a story to be discovered and told. Consider the people around you everyday who have life experiences of which we are completely unaware.*

Ask: *How does God demonstrate that all people are valuable—even when we do not know their names?*

Read aloud Psalm 139:13-16.

Explain: *Consider how intimately acquainted God is with each person who has ever lived. He knows everything about us! According to Psalm 139:13, God created each of us.*



Discuss: *How does knowing that God is our Creator establish the fact that people are valuable in His eyes? How does knowing that God sent His Son to die for the sins of mankind demonstrate that people remain valuable in God's eyes?*

Close in prayer, asking that we would see value in every person and help share the news that God loves everyone.

## DIG DEEPER

### FORTUNE TELLING

In the ancient world, fortune-telling was big business. In Acts 16, we see Paul encounter an enslaved girl “who had a spirit by which she predicted the future” (v. 16). What was this spirit of prediction?

Some background helps us to see what Paul encountered here. The Greek term used is translated as “python spirit.” As one scholar noted:

The python was the symbol of the famous Delphic oracle and represented the god Apollo, who was believed to render predictions of future events. The serpent had thus become a symbol of augury, and anyone who was seen to possess the gift of foretelling the future was described as led by the “python.” Greeks and Romans put great stock on augury and divination. No commander would set out on a major military campaign nor would an emperor make an important decree without first consulting an oracle to see how things might turn out. A slave girl with a clairvoyant gift was thus a veritable gold mine for her owners.”<sup>1</sup>

The Bible has much to say on fortunetellers, divination, magic, and similar activities. God constantly and consistently condemns such activities. In the Old Testament, God's people are prohibited from participating in such activities (Deut. 18; Lev. 19:26), with the

penalty of such being death (Ex. 22:18). It demonstrates a lack of faithfulness and trust in God and His Word.

In the New Testament, Paul condemned such acts as something that by practicing you can't inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:20-21). Paul condemned such acts as things that by practicing would prevent you from inheriting the kingdom of God. Another scholar notes:

The Bible consistently condemns the practice of divination. ... They are condemned, not because they are not supernatural, but because the source is often demonic and practitioners are trying to circumvent God to find guidance for the future.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, salvation is available for those in this lifestyle.

Not only was this girl in bondage physically, she was also in bondage spiritually. By the power of Christ, Paul cast the spirit out of the girl, freeing her from spiritual slavery. This act cost him his physical safety, for he was beaten and jailed (Acts 16:22-23). Today, there are many suffering from both physical and spiritual bondage. Are we willing to proclaim Christ and seek the freedom of those who are enslaved physically and spiritually? If we are “servants of the Most High God” (16:17), we must.

1. J. Polhill, *New American Commentary: Acts* (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 349.

2. F. Smith, “Divination and Magic,” *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Holman, 2003).

# INCOMPLETE PICTURE

For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at [LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible](http://LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible).

## ACTS 18:24-28; 19:1-7

**18:24** Now a Jew named **A** **Apollos**, a native Alexandrian, an **B** **eloquent** man who was **C** **competent in the use of the Scriptures**, arrived in Ephesus. <sup>25</sup> He had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching **D** **accurately** about Jesus, although he knew only **E** **John's baptism**. <sup>26</sup> He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. After Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the way of God to him **F** **more accurately**. <sup>27</sup> When he wanted to cross over to Achaia, the brothers and sisters wrote to the disciples to welcome him. After he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. <sup>28</sup> For he **G** **vigorously refuted** the Jews in public, demonstrating through the **H** **Scriptures** that Jesus is the Messiah. [...] **19:1** While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled through the interior regions and came to Ephesus. He found some **I** **disciples** <sup>2</sup> and asked them, "Did you **J** **receive the Holy Spirit** when you believed?" "No," they told him, "we haven't even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." <sup>3</sup> "Into what then were you baptized?" he asked them. "Into **K** **John's baptism**," they replied. <sup>4</sup> Paul said, "John baptized with a **L** **baptism of repentance**, telling the people that they should believe in the one who would come after him, that is, in Jesus." <sup>5</sup> When they heard this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup> And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the **M** **Holy Spirit** came on them, and they began to **N** **speak in other tongues** and to **O** **prophecy**. <sup>7</sup> Now there were about twelve men in all.

## EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** He would become a leader in the early church, serving in Corinth and aiding Paul in Ephesus (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:5-9; 16:12; Titus 3:13).
- b** "Learned" (NIV)
- c** "Knew the Scriptures well" (NLT); "mighty in the Scriptures" (NASB). Moses was described the same way in Acts 7:22.
- d** Apollos's teaching about Jesus was accurate in what he taught. However, as verse 26 points out, his knowledge was incomplete, especially on baptism.
- e** That is, he didn't know Christian baptism (19:4-5).
- f** Priscilla and Aquila disciplined Apollos by clarifying his doctrine. Titus 2:1-8 shows the importance of all Christians being disciple-makers.
- g** Apollos publicly and powerfully demonstrated to the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah.
- h** "Scriptures" here refers to the Old Testament.
- i** Those who were followers of John (Luke 5:33; 7:18), the case with these men as well.
- j** Paul's question intended to discover if they were truly Christian or if they were followers of John.
- k** They were baptized by John, not in Jesus' name, so their baptism wasn't Christian.
- l** As John the Baptist said: "I baptize you with water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I. ... He himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matt. 3:11).
- m** The Holy Spirit indwells all those who have true faith in Christ Jesus.
- n** One gift of the Spirit is the ability to speak in other languages to testify about the gospel to others.
- o** A gift of the Spirit that was for building up or giving direction to the church (1 Cor. 14:3-4)

### »» 1. A PARTIAL WITNESS (Acts 18:24-26)

- Apollos arrived in Ephesus and spoke boldly about Jesus in the synagogue. However his understanding of Christian baptism was incomplete, so Priscilla and Aquila invited him to their house to help him gain a clearer picture.
- Note: Paint Apollos as an eloquent teacher needing a deeper understanding of baptism in Jesus' name. Emphasize the dangers of an accurate but partial witness.

### »» 2. A COMPLETE WITNESS (Acts 18:27-28)

- With the blessings of the Ephesian believers, Apollos traveled to Achaia to encourage others and to evangelize.
- He publicly explained how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament promises of the Messiah.

### »» 3. AN INCOMPLETE FAITH (Acts 19:1-7)

- As Apollos was ministering in Corinth, Paul arrived in Ephesus.
- Paul encountered disciples who had not yet heard of the Holy Spirit or of Christian baptism. Paul pointed them to Jesus, and they were baptized in His name.
- Note: Briefly discuss the two views on whether these people were genuine believers prior to this encounter with Paul. Emphasize that various incomplete understandings of Christianity were present in the early church (just as is the case today).

### »» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

#### **God uses believers to help others better understand the gospel.**

- Believers need to make sure that boldness and eloquence are accompanied by depth of understanding when presenting the gospel.
- The church is strengthened when believers with depth of understanding share what they know.
- Genuine faith in Jesus is demonstrated through baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit.



## FOCUS ATTENTION

**If you have ever looked at a three-dimensional picture, describe your experience.**

- Three-dimensional pictures require the observer to look at something from a variety of angles in order to see the complete picture. Some people can easily see the picture's dynamics while others need help to learn how to view it.
- As Christians, we are called to share our faith with others. As we have conversations with people, we need to explain the gospel clearly, so they can understand it.

## EXPLORE THE BIBLE

### ACTS 18:24-26

**What can we learn from the way Aquila and Priscilla confronted Apollos?**

- Rather than publicly advise Apollos, Aquila and Priscilla invited him to their home where they explained the way of God more adequately.
- People are more receptive to new truth when we take the time to have personal conversations with them.
- After listening to Apollos, Aquila and Priscilla realized that Apollos taught correct doctrine but had limited understanding about baptism. So they spent time with Apollos to improve his understanding on that subject.

**Why is a limited understanding of something a dangerous proposition?**

- Without full disclosure, a bad decision can be made with limited information available. A proper understanding of something is necessary before we can draw reasonable conclusions.
- When Christians do not have a complete understanding of the gospel, they could potentially confuse other believers based upon their limited knowledge. That is why knowledgeable Christians should come alongside new believers to explain the truths about God.

### ACTS 18:27-28

**What did Apollos do to help the believers in Achaia?**

- He was able to publicly refute the Jews in a debate about the claims of Christ as Messiah. Apollos pointed the Jews to various Old Testament prophecies that were fulfilled with the coming of Christ.
- Believers are strengthened in their faith when they learn how to confidently share their faith with others. When Christians are able to match the claims of Christ with the fulfillment of Bible prophecy, they can become more effective witnesses.

**How did God use believers to minister to Apollos?**

- The congregation in Ephesus encouraged Apollos to go to Achaia by writing a letter to the believers there instructing them to welcome him as a fellow believer.
- Christians today can help ministers and missionaries by encouraging them to pursue their desire to share the gospel with others.

## ACTS 19:1-7

**What was the significance of John's baptism? How was it different from Christian baptism?**

- John baptized people for repentance in preparation of the Lord's coming. While John baptized only with water, Jesus baptizes believers with the Holy Spirit as well.
- Since Jesus has died on the cross for our sins, we come to Him in repentance and faith to be saved. Upon believing in Jesus, we receive the promised Holy Spirit.

**Why did Paul ask the men of Ephesus if they had received the Holy Spirit?**

- Paul wanted to know if they were believers in Christ. Paul taught the Ephesian believers that they received the Holy Spirit once they placed their faith in Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:13-14).
- The New Testament teaches that our assurance of salvation is grounded in the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:16; 2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 3:2; 1 John 4:13).

## SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

**What doctrines from the Bible does someone need to understand to be saved?**

- Jesus is the Messiah. He died on the cross for our sins and was raised on the third day.
- Repentance and faith are two steps we take to come to Jesus for salvation.
- The Holy Spirit indwells every believer as a witness of our salvation in Christ.
- **Personal Challenge:** Encourage new believers by sharing how you grew up in your salvation and learned more about the Christian life. Offer to help them find a Bible that they can read and understand. Find out if they have any questions and refer them to a pastor or a teacher who can help them with their concerns.

# OBJECT LESSON

## A PHOTO CUT INTO PIECES

Give out the pieces of a cut up photo to volunteers without allowing others to see what's on each piece. Ask each volunteer to explain what they see. Explain: *Each person is only able to describe the picture based on their particular perception. With limited information, each individual only has a partial understanding, but with all the pieces, the same person could see the bigger picture. In the same way, people can have an incomplete view of God unless believers properly explain the gospel to them.*

Call for someone to read aloud Acts 18:24-26. Explain: *Apollos had a knowledge of the Scriptures and taught about Jesus accurately. Yet Apollos gained a better understanding about God's Word because Priscilla and Aquila privately explained to him the way of God more adequately (v. 26). Learning from others helps us to see life from a broader, more complete perspective.*

Direct a volunteer to read aloud Acts 19:1-7. Explain: *Again, Scripture records an example of incomplete understanding. The disciples from Ephesus whom Paul met did not know about the Holy Spirit. The common denominator between both stories suggests that*



*people understood John's baptism but were ignorant about the Holy Spirit. List the words on a board: repentance, faith, and baptism. Discuss: What response does salvation in Christ demand of us? In what ways is it possible for people to have a partial understanding of salvation? How can we clearly explain the message of the gospel to others so they can understand it? Discuss and close in prayer.*

## DIG DEEPER

### JOHN'S BAPTISM

In Acts 18 there are two examples of those who "knew only John's baptism" (v. 25)—Barnabas and the Ephesian disciples. But what exactly was meant by John's baptism?

The John referred to here was John the Baptist, the cousin of Jesus. All four Gospel writers described John's ministry in detail (Matt. 3:1-17; Mark 1:2-11; Luke 3:1-20; and John 1:19-37). Repentance and the act of baptism were central to John's preaching ministry. John baptized Jesus to mark the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.

Baptism is presented in the New Testament as an act of immersion or dipping someone into the water—in this case, the Jordan River:

"I baptize with water," John answered them. "Someone stands among you, but you don't know him. He is the one coming after me, whose sandal strap I'm not worthy to untie." All this happened in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing (John 1:26-28).

This pattern continued in the Book of Acts, as the Ethiopian eunuch was baptized when he "went down into the water" (Acts 8:38).

The baptism of John served two purposes. The first was one of repentance. "Baptism was not common in Old Testament history leading up to the time of John the Baptist. In fact, the only people

who were baptized were Gentiles who decided to become followers of Yahweh."<sup>1</sup> Yet John was baptizing Jewish people, which was the most shocking element. These people admitted that their ethnicity didn't earn them favor with God, but a life of faith and repentance before God was necessary. Thus John's baptism was tied to the repentance of sin.

Secondly, the baptism of John was tied to his ministry to "prepare the way for the Lord" (Matt. 3:3; Isa. 40:3), carrying a sense of urgency of the coming Messiah. As John baptized people, they were forming a "purified community awaiting the advent of Messiah."<sup>2</sup>

When Jesus was baptized, it was not because He needed to repent, but it was to "fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15). That is, Jesus was baptized to fulfill God's plan for the redemption of man, that He would associate with His people—sinners whom He came to save. As John's baptism formed a community of people seeking the Messiah, Jesus' baptism was the culmination of the purpose of John's baptism, which was to prepare the way for Christ. As Christ has come, died for His people, and rose again, baptism is no longer in anticipation of a coming Messiah; now baptism is a demonstration of alignment with the Messiah who has come.

1. David Platt, *Christ Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Matthew* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2013), 53.

2. P. Patterson, "Baptism," *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Holman, 2003).

## SESSION 10

# DELIVERED

## ACTS 20:22-35

<sup>22</sup> “And now I am on my way to Jerusalem, compelled by the Spirit, not knowing what I will encounter there, <sup>23</sup> except that in every town the Holy Spirit warns me that **A chains and afflictions** are waiting for me. <sup>24</sup> But I consider my life of **B no value** to myself; my purpose is to **C finish my course** and the **D ministry** I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the **E gospel of God’s grace**. <sup>25</sup> And now I know that none of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will ever **F see me again**. <sup>26</sup> Therefore I declare to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, <sup>27</sup> because **G I did not avoid** declaring to you the whole plan of God. <sup>28</sup> Be on guard for yourselves and for all **H the flock** of which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as **I overseers**, to **J shepherd** the church of God, which he **K purchased** with his own blood. <sup>29</sup> I know that after my departure **L savage wolves** will come in among you, not sparing the flock. <sup>30</sup> Men will rise up even from your own number and distort the truth to lure the disciples into following them. <sup>31</sup> Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for **M three years** I never stopped warning each one of you with tears. <sup>32</sup> And now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an **N inheritance** among all who are **O sanctified**. <sup>33</sup> I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. <sup>34</sup> You yourselves know that I worked with my own **P hands** to support myself and those who are with me. <sup>35</sup> In every way I’ve shown you that it is necessary to **Q help the weak** by laboring like this and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, because he said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

## EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** Paul didn’t know what he would encounter, but the Holy Spirit had revealed it would be incredibly difficult.
- b** “To live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21).
- c** Paul would later say in 2 Timothy 4:7, shortly before his death, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”
- d** The Lord gave Paul his ministry at his conversion (Acts 9).
- e** A gospel without grace isn’t the gospel (Gal. 1:6).
- f** Paul believed his death was imminent.
- g** There was no aspect of God’s plan that Paul left out of his preaching and teaching. He commanded this to Timothy and Titus as well (2 Tim. 3:16–4:5; Titus 2:1).
- h** A common term for God’s people in both the Old and New Testaments (Jer. 23:2; Ezek. 34:12; John 10:1-18; 1 Pet. 5:2).
- i** “Overseer,” “elders,” or “pastors” (1 Tim. 3:1; Titus 1:5; Eph. 4:11), those men who held that office and had leadership responsibilities in the church
- j** Paul used the language of Ezekiel 34 with the “shepherd” analogy. Jesus used the same in John 10:11 to describe Himself (see also 1 Pet. 5:2).
- k** “Bought” (NIV); “obtained” (ESV)
- l** “False prophets” within the church (Matt. 7:15)
- m** The length of Paul’s ministry to the Ephesians
- n** Peter says that the church has “an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you” (1 Pet. 1:4).
- o** Set apart for God and as God’s people.
- p** Paul was a tentmaker (Acts 18:3).
- q** Christian love requires helping those who are weak, not ignoring them (Rom. 15:1).

### » 1. HIS COMMITMENT (Acts 20:22-24)

- Paul declared his desire to fulfill his God-given mission of sharing Christ with everyone he encountered.
- He committed to continue doing so as he headed to Jerusalem, where the Holy Spirit revealed to him that imprisonment awaited as a consequence of his faithfully sharing Christ.
- Note: Emphasize Paul's sense of satisfaction and accomplishment in his resolve to remain faithful.

### » 2. HIS CONCERN (Acts 20:25-31)

- Paul continued to show his faithfulness in sharing Christ with the Ephesians.
- He also issued a warning that false teachers would arise and seek to cause much harm to the cause of Christ.

### » 3. HIS COMMENDATION (Acts 20:32-35)

- Paul committed the Ephesian believers to God, reminding them of the grace of God and their awaiting inheritance.
- He challenged the church leaders to follow his example, trusting God to provide for their needs as they led the church to provide for the needs of others.
- Note: Affirm local churches taking responsibility for the financial needs of their leaders. Emphasize the issue being addressed by Paul in terms of greed seen in some teachers and leaders.

### » SUMMARY STATEMENTS

#### **Sharing the gospel is worth the sacrifice and effort.**

- Believers experience contentment when they faithfully fulfill God's purposes in their lives.
- Believers must remain diligent to recognize divisive and false teachings.
- Believers must guard themselves from greed and focus on the needs of others.



## FOCUS ATTENTION

### What was the hardest goal you ever accomplished that was completely worth the effort and sacrifice?

- Goals can push us to achieve great things. A worthy goal is not accomplished unless we apply consistent effort and make sacrifices. We have to be diligent to meet our goal.
- The apostle Paul considered sharing the gospel his ultimate goal for living. He was willing to endure sacrifice, hardships, and imprisonment for the sake of telling others about Jesus.

## EXPLORE THE BIBLE ACTS 20:22-24

### What motivated Paul to endure the potential dangers?

- Paul knew that sharing the gospel of God's grace through Jesus Christ was the one thing he must accomplish before his death.
- Believers face countless distractions and deterrents, but the one thing that matters most is how we represent Christ to those around us.

### What was Paul's attitude about his call and commitment to follow Christ?

- Paul had a steadfast trust in the Lord no matter what happened to him. He was willing to serve Christ regardless of the cost. He did whatever it took to serve Christ.
- Paul compared his pursuit to follow Christ to a race to run and a task to complete. He was resolved to find contentment in being faithful to God despite his circumstances.
- Our attitude to follow Christ must demonstrate a willingness to respond to whatever the Lord commands. We need to be resolved to follow Him faithfully in every assignment and at every opportunity.

## ACTS 20:25-31

### What responsibility do we have to warn others who already know the truth?

- Even though Paul had preached the kingdom of God and taught them God's Word, he still warned the Ephesian leaders about impending danger.
- Knowing the truth and guarding against error are two different things. Paul wanted the Ephesian leaders to guard against the potential dangers of false teachings that would distort God's truth.
- Paul valued God's people and warned the leaders to shepherd the flocks that God had called them to oversee. Leaders have an obligation to protect their congregations from divisive people.

### What is dangerous about false teachers that should concern us?

- Unlike Paul, who taught the Ephesians the whole counsel of God, the false teachers distorted the truth. For this reason, the Ephesian believers needed to be on guard against any error.
- The most destructive goal false teachers accomplish is the following they obtain. Paul warned the Ephesians about false teachers who would arise to draw away disciples after themselves.
- Beware of any teacher who distorts the truth and draws people away from God and toward themselves.

## ACTS 20:32-35

### How did Paul's words offer hope to the Ephesian believers?

- Paul appealed to his work ethic and willingness to serve the needs of others as an example for them to follow.
- Paul did not covet other people's possessions. On the contrary, he worked to meet his own needs.
- Also, he modeled giving to others and referred to the words of Jesus.

### What example did Paul leave for the Ephesians as he commended them?

- Paul pointed them to God and His Word. He knew that a strong relationship with God based on daily application of Scripture would strengthen them to face the challenges of the future.

## SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

### What compelling reasons did Paul provide to make sharing the gospel worth the sacrifice and effort?

- First, Paul felt compelled by the Holy Spirit to be a faithful witness and possessed a deep trust in the Lord regardless of the outcome.
- Second, Paul considered his life's calling to finish the race and share his gospel testimony.
- Third, Paul was faithful to declare the gospel and the teaching of God's Word to them over a period of three years (Acts 20:31).
- **Personal Challenge:** This week ask God to give you His love for people. Also, ask God for opportunities to share the gospel and show His love to the people around you. Remember the words of Jesus as you go: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (v. 35).



# OBJECT LESSON

## A RELAY BATON OR STICK

Explain: *The apostle Paul had the desire to faithfully tell other people the good news about salvation through Jesus Christ. For this reason, Paul felt compelled to go to Jerusalem to be a witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul framed his desire by comparing it to finishing a race and completing a task.*

Display the relay baton or stick (or pictures of one) to the members of the group. Explain: *In a relay race the runners exchange a baton to each other as they work to reach their goal. This is like our calling to be witnesses of Jesus Christ.*

Ask: *Are we willing to finish the race by faithfully sharing the gospel with other people?* Challenge the group to think of the person who told them about salvation and led them to Christ.

Ask: *Are you willing to return the favor by sharing the good news with someone who does not know Jesus?*

Direct a volunteer to read aloud Acts 20:22-24.

Explain that nothing was more important to Paul than obeying God's will by being a faithful witness for Christ. Encourage participants to identify family, friends, or coworkers to whom they



can testify about the gospel of God's grace. Challenge each person to take advantage of every opportunity to be a faithful witness of the gospel to those around them. Challenge: *Will you be the one to deliver the message of the gospel to others?*

Close in prayer that they would keep the faith as they run the race and share the gospel with others (2 Tim. 4:7).



## DIG DEEPER

### SHEPHERDING THE FLOCK

"Shepherd the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). Paul's admonition to the Ephesian elders demonstrates an important understanding of ministry, one that can be more difficult to grasp for those who are distanced from an agrarian society. Yet this image is not solely rooted in the activities of farming but in the theology of Scripture itself. In fact, the name *shepherd* means *tender* or *keeper of sheep*.

The first keeper of sheep was Adam's son Abel (Gen. 4:2). Shepherding was the chief occupation of the Israelites in the early days of the patriarchs: Abraham (Gen. 12:16); Rachel (Gen. 29:9); Jacob (Gen. 30:31-40); Moses (Ex. 3:1).<sup>1</sup>

In the New Testament, the shepherds were the first to hear the announcement of Christ's birth and the first to see the newborn Messiah (Luke 2:8-20). The concept of shepherd also carried an important theological application.

"Shepherd" came to designate not only persons who herded sheep but also kings (2 Sam. 5:2) and God Himself (Ps. 23; Isa. 40:11). Later prophets referred to Israel's leaders as shepherds (Jer. 23; Ezek. 34).<sup>2</sup>

Jesus referred to Himself as "the good shepherd" (John 10:11), and Hebrews 13:20 identifies Jesus as "the great Shepherd of the sheep." Jesus used the image of a lost sheep being found to demonstrate the joy of repentance and God's persistence with us (Luke 15:1-7).

In Acts 20, the immediate application is that of church ministry. Paul's call for the Ephesian elders to shepherd the church finds its origin in Jesus' call to Peter to do the same. In John 21:16, He told him "shepherd my sheep." Peter also commanded the elders of the churches to "shepherd God's flock among you" (1 Pet. 5:2).

While a large part of shepherding is making sure the sheep are fed and healthy (John 21:15-16), as Paul mentioned in verse 32, a second important task is protecting the sheep from harm. In the shepherding of actual sheep, there are always predators who want to attack the herd. Jesus warned us that the same would be true among His flock (Matt. 7:15). Here Paul drove the point home by warning of attacking wolves—false teachers or prophets. Paul's way to guard the church was by making sure good teaching exists because wolves will "distort the truth" (Acts 20:30).

Paul commanded those who lead the church to care for the church by making sure its members are fed and guarded, and the primary tool for those tasks is the correct teaching of the Word.

1. E. Gray, "Shepherd," *Holman Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Holman, 1991), 1263. 2. *Ibid.*

## SESSION 11

# THE TESTIMONY

## ACTS 22:3-8,15-22

<sup>3</sup> He continued, “I am a **A Jew**, born in **B Tarsus of Cilicia** but brought up in **C this city**, educated at the feet of **D Gamaliel** according to the law of our ancestors. I was zealous for God, just as all of you are today. <sup>4</sup> I persecuted this **E Way** to the **F death**, arresting and putting both men and women in jail, <sup>5</sup> as both the high priest and the whole **G council of elders** can testify about me. After I received **H letters** from them to the brothers, I traveled to Damascus to arrest those who were there and bring them to Jerusalem to be punished. <sup>6</sup> As I was traveling and approaching Damascus, about noon an intense light from heaven suddenly flashed around me. <sup>7</sup> I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you **I persecuting** me?’ <sup>8</sup> I answered, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ He said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, the one you are persecuting.’ [...] <sup>15</sup> ‘Since you will be a **J witness for him** to **K all people** of what you have seen and heard. <sup>16</sup> And now, why are you delaying? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name.’ <sup>17</sup> After I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance <sup>18</sup> and saw him telling me, ‘Hurry and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they **L will not accept your testimony** about me.’ <sup>19</sup> But I said, ‘Lord, they know that in synagogue after synagogue I had those who believed in you imprisoned and beaten. <sup>20</sup> And when the blood of your witness Stephen was being shed, I stood there giving approval and guarding the clothes of those who killed him.’ <sup>21</sup> He said to me, ‘Go, because I will send you far away **M to the Gentiles.**’” <sup>22</sup> They listened to him **N up to this point**. Then they raised their voices, shouting, “Wipe this man off the face of the earth! He should not be allowed to live!”

## EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** Paul spoke in the present tense, as he did in Romans 11:1: “I ask, then, has God rejected his people? Absolutely not! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin.”
- b** Tarsus was about 10 miles from the Mediterranean Sea on the east-west trade route, served as Cilicia’s capital, and was renowned for its academics.
- c** Paul moved to Jerusalem as a boy. This was important to show that he grew up in the holy city.
- d** A highly-regarded Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin, Gamaliel was Paul’s teacher (Acts 5:34).
- e** A term for Christianity used by early Christians; Jesus said He is “the way ... to the Father” (John 14:6).
- f** Before his conversion, Paul (known then as Saul) was “breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord” (Acts 9:1).
- g** Also known as the Sanhedrin, Jesus was tried by the council in Luke 22:66-71.
- h** Letters to synagogues seeking extradition of Christians to face trial before the Sanhedrin.
- i** “Saul, however, was ravaging the church. He would enter house after house, drag off men and women, and put them in prison” (Acts 8:3).
- j** Our word *martyr* comes from this term, describing someone who died because of their witness or confession of Christ.
- k** Paul’s task was to take the gospel to the Gentiles as well as the Jews.
- l** The Lord told Paul to leave and preach in other areas, as he would be ineffective in Jerusalem.
- m** God’s desire to bring all peoples into His kingdom through the preaching of the gospel.
- n** Paul’s association with Gentiles would lead to his arrest in Acts 21:28.

### »» 1. FORMER LIFE (Acts 22:3-5)

- Paul outlined his credentials as a Jewish zealot prior to his conversion.

### »» 2. LIFE-CHANGING ENCOUNTER (Acts 22:6-8,15-16)

- Paul identified Jesus as the One he had opposed and had encountered one day on the road to Damascus.
- Ananias declared that Paul (Saul) would become a witness of Jesus and encouraged Paul to be baptized.
- Note: Emphasize baptism as a step of obedience by the believer as opposed to the means of salvation.

### »» 3. NEW PURPOSE (Acts 22:17-21)

- Paul explained how his purpose changed after his conversion; he now focused on sharing the truth of the gospel with all people, including Gentiles.
- Paul also explained that one reason he was sent to the Gentiles was the rejection of Jesus as Messiah by most Jews.

### »» 4. REJECTION (Acts 22:22)

- The Jewish leaders rejected Paul because he included Gentiles in God's redemptive plan.
- The group cried for Paul's execution.

### »» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

**The gospel transforms people from sinners into instruments of God.**

- Believers must help others understand that no good deed will secure salvation.
- Salvation is offered to everyone, even those who publicly denounce Jesus.
- Jesus gives each believer a new life and missional purpose.
- Believers may face rejection and persecution for telling the gospel truth.



## FOCUS ATTENTION

### What is the most difficult aspect of losing weight when following a diet?

- A diet usually restricts the amount and type of food we consume. We need a certain amount of discipline and resolve to follow a diet consistently. Successful weight loss typically requires permanent change.
- Paul shared his testimony of how God changed his life. The transformation was an inner change that was evident to people who observed his life.

## EXPLORE THE BIBLE

### ACTS 22:3-5

#### How did Paul communicate his testimony to the citizens of Jerusalem?

- Paul appealed to them by pointing to his Jewish heritage, local upbringing, formal training, and zeal for God.
- Paul worked to build common ground with his audience so that he could gain a hearing.

#### Why was it important for Paul to share about his life prior to following Jesus?

- When we share our testimony with people, it is helpful to begin with our former way of life. By describing what our life looked like before knowing Christ, we communicate the advantages in receiving salvation.
- No amount of good deeds can secure salvation. It is a gift from God alone.

### ACTS 22:6-8,15-16

#### How does Paul's encounter with Christ inspire hope that the Lord can save anyone—even those who strongly oppose Him?

- Despite Paul's opposition to Christ and His followers, the Lord was willing to save Paul. Paul's testimony includes how he came to know Christ and serve Him.
- As a result of following Christ, Paul wanted to tell everyone what the Lord had done in his life.

#### When do you find your story most effective in helping to reach unbelievers? How can your story encourage fellow believers?

- Like Ananias, we need to come alongside new believers and encourage them to take the next steps forward in their relationships with Christ.
- Sharing the gospel with unbelievers and encouraging new believers to identify with Christ and His people in baptism are the first steps of the Christian journey.

### ACTS 22:17-21

#### How does salvation in Christ change one's life purpose?

- Paul's testimony revealed how God gave him a new purpose in life.
- Paul's desire to share Christ led him to go where people were receptive to the message. In Paul's case that meant leaving Jerusalem in order to take the gospel to the Gentiles.

#### What are the strongest motivators for sharing the gospel with others?

- When we receive new life in Christ, we begin a journey of being on mission with the Lord.
- As we faithfully follow Him, the Lord will guide our steps to share the gospel with people who are receptive to the message.

### ACTS 22:22

#### What caused the Jewish leaders to reject Paul's testimony?

- The Jewish leaders rejected Paul because he included Gentiles in God's redemptive plan. Their own personal bias blinded them from seeing the full extent of God's grace.
- After listening to Paul's testimony, the crowd turned against him. When we share the gospel with others, it is possible that they may reject us because they are not willing to accept the message.

#### What traits, skills, or experiences does your group have that they can use to reach people for Christ?

- We need to keep an open mind about the reach of the gospel, including the salvation of people we would not expect to come to Christ.

## SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

#### What did Paul's testimony reveal about the change that took place in his life?

- Paul began by sharing about his former way of life: he previously was so zealous that he persecuted Christians.
- Next, Paul testified about how he personally encountered Christ on the road to Damascus. The experience completely changed Paul's life.
- As a result of receiving Christ, Paul became an instrument of the Lord by sharing the gospel wherever he went.
- **Personal Challenge:** This week pray about and plan an outreach for those who do not know Christ. Whether it is a lunch conversation with an individual or a party of friends at home, take a step of faith and share your story with the people whom you care about the most. Focus on how the Lord has transformed your life. Regardless of their response, you will be glad that you witnessed to them about the life-changing power of the gospel.



# OBJECT LESSON

## A MULTI-TOOL

Bring a tool that has multiple uses to display to the group. Explain that the tool has multiple uses since it can be transformed from one object to another (knife, scissors, nail file, etc.). Explain that the purpose of a testimony is to share how a transformation has taken place in a person's life.

Direct a volunteer to read aloud Acts 22:3-8,15-21.

Explain: *This Bible passage contains Paul's testimony of how he became a Christian. As Christians, our testimonies are our personal experiences of how Christ has saved us. They are stories of how our lives changed as a result of receiving Christ. In other words, our testimonies are our stories about how Christ has transformed our lives.*

Be prepared to share your testimony in about two or three minutes. Simply include the following three things in your testimony: (1) What your life was like before Christ came into your life; (2) how you heard about Christ and received Him in your life; and (3) what a difference Christ has made in your life.



After sharing your testimony, invite other participants in the group to share their testimonies as well. Remind them to base their testimonies on the previous three things mentioned.

Close with a prayer that encourages them to be prepared to share their testimony with others whenever they have an opportunity.



## DIG DEEPER

### JEWISH EDUCATION IN THE FIRST CENTURY

In Paul's speech to the crowd, he detailed his educational past. Particularly that he was "educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the law of our ancestors" (Acts 22:3). What can Paul's educational past teach us about why he would make this comment to his fellow countrymen?

Paul was raised during the Second Temple period. At that time, the synagogue heavily influenced Jewish education. This began during the Babylonian exile period. Jewish leaders saw the need to educate children about the Torah and life as Jewish people, since they were removed from their land and the temple.

Since the first days of Israel, education centered around the family, following the Deuteronomic command: "Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (Deut. 6:7). As one writer explains,

The primary context for this education was in the home, and parents were responsible for instructing their children in the law, bringing them into marriages, and teaching them a trade.<sup>1</sup>

This was the normal educational experience until the period of exile, when the development of the synagogue also led to the development of a community-based approach to education, where the synagogue would act as a school to supplement the home-based education. Eventually, the synagogue education would take on a more formal approach, which included primary and secondary schools for boys. In fact, by AD 64, compulsory public education was mandated by Joshua ben Gamala for all children starting at age six or seven. Universal education was mandated for boys in the first century BC by Simeon ben Shetach.<sup>2</sup>

Beyond the normal educational experiences, there was the beth midrash for boys who showed promise in pursuing a rabbinical life. This served as a training ground for rabbis and scribes. Paul's rabbinical studies were under the famed Gamaliel (Acts 5:33-42; 22:3).

Paul's discussion of his educational training served to demonstrate to the crowds that, contrary to the accusations against him, he was thoroughly and properly Jewish. His education and his mentor had demonstrated that unlike someone who would desecrate the temple, Paul had maintained great respect and zeal for the laws and customs of his people.

1. R. Pazmino, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 137.

2. Adapted from J. Feinberg, "Rabbi as Educator," *Evangelical Dictionary of Christian Education* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 576.

# ANSWERING CRITICS

For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at [LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible](http://LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible).

## ACTS 26:19-29

<sup>19</sup> “So then, **a King Agrippa**, I was not disobedient to the **b heavenly vision**. <sup>20</sup> Instead, I **c preached** to those in Damascus first, and to those in Jerusalem and in all the region of Judea, and to the Gentiles, that they should **d repent and turn to God**, and do **e works** worthy of repentance. <sup>21</sup> For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and were trying to kill me. <sup>22</sup> To this very day, I have had **f help from God**, and I stand and testify to both small and great, saying nothing other than what **g the prophets and Moses** said would take place— <sup>23</sup> that the Messiah must suffer, and that, as the **h first** to rise from the dead, he would proclaim **i light** to our people and to the Gentiles.” <sup>24</sup> As he was saying these things in his defense, **j Festus** exclaimed in a loud voice, “You’re out of your mind, Paul! Too much study is driving you mad.” <sup>25</sup> But Paul replied, “I’m not out of my mind, most excellent Festus. On the contrary, I’m speaking words of **k truth and good judgment**. <sup>26</sup> For the king knows about **l these matters**, and I can speak boldly to him. For I am convinced that none of these things has escaped his notice, since this was **m not done in a corner**. <sup>27</sup> King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you believe.” <sup>28</sup> Agrippa said to Paul, “Are you going to persuade me to become a **n Christian o so easily?**” <sup>29</sup> “I wish before God,” replied Paul, “that whether easily or with difficulty, not only you but all who listen to me today might become as **p I am**—except for these chains.”

## EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** Agrippa II, son of Herod Agrippa and the great grandson of Herod the Great
- b** Paul’s conversion is recorded in Acts 9:1-19.
- c** Paul preached to Jews in Damascus, Jerusalem, and Judea, and also to the Gentiles. His pattern was to go to the synagogue first and then out to the Gentiles (Acts 17–19).
- d** True repentance is turning from sin and self-focus toward being fully-focused on God.
- e** In Matthew 7:17-20, Jesus explained that genuine faith and repentance bears fruit.
- f** Psalm 121:2 says, “My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.”
- g** Jesus explained this in Luke 24:27.
- h** Jesus Christ was first to rise (Col. 1:18), and as such He is a promise that all who are in Him will rise to life.
- i** A metaphor for the truth of the gospel
- j** Procurator who governed from AD 58 to AD 62, when he died from an illness
- k** “Accurate and sane” (MSG); “true and rational words” (ESV); “sober truth” (NLT, NASB). Paul politely disagreed with Festus.
- l** Agrippa would have had an understanding of the Prophets and the life of Jesus. His father, Herod Agrippa, had the apostle James killed and Peter thrown in jail (Acts 12:2-3).
- m** “This wasn’t done behind the scenes” (MSG). Christianity had been publicly preached.
- n** One of the three uses of the term in the New Testament (Acts 11:26; 1 Pet. 4:16)
- o** “A short time” (ESV, NASB, NIV); i.e., with such few words
- p** “Like me” (MSG), a Christian

### » 1. THE GOSPEL TOLD (Acts 26:19-23)

- To King Agrippa, Paul explained that the message for which he was being brought to trial was a call to repent and turn to God.
- Paul pointed out that this was the message of the Old Testament prophets, and Christ had fulfilled those prophecies.

### » 2. OBJECTION REBUFFED (Acts 26:24-26)

- Festus questioned Paul's sanity, but Paul quickly stated that he was in his right mind.
- He appealed to Agrippa's awareness of these prophecies and the events surrounding Jesus.

### » 3. INVITATION GIVEN (Acts 26:27-29)

- Paul appealed to Agrippa's belief in the Old Testament prophecies, opening the door for Agrippa to make a decision about Jesus.
- Paul was persuasive and had Agrippa's attention, but Agrippa did not move beyond that point.
- Paul expressed his desire for all people to hear the gospel and accept God's redemption in Christ.

### » SUMMARY STATEMENTS

#### **The gospel demands a response of repentance and faith.**

- Believers can and should point to the Scriptures when presenting the gospel.
- Believers must be prepared to respond to objections with love and directness.
- Everyone who hears the gospel must be given the opportunity to make a decision about Jesus.



## FOCUS ATTENTION

**When was the last time you had to ask someone to make a choice about an issue even though you were unsure about the outcome?**

- Conversations that require decisions can be stressful, and when the other person is the one making the choice a certain amount of risk is involved. The outcome remains in the balance until someone makes a decision.
- Paul shared his testimony as a prisoner with people in authority. While Paul did not know how they would respond, he extended an invitation to consider the claims of Christ. He wanted to give them an opportunity to respond to the gospel.

## EXPLORE THE BIBLE ACTS 26:19-23

**How did Paul refer to the Scriptures when sharing the gospel?**

- Paul assured Agrippa that his message was in agreement with the Law (Moses) and the Prophets.
- Paul summarized what the Law and the Prophets said about Christ by mentioning that Christ would suffer and rise from the dead, and the proclamation of the gospel would extend to the Jews and the Gentiles (Acts 26:23).
- Summarizing the contents of the Scripture can help people better understand the Bible's overall message.

**How would you describe the relationship between repentance and faith?**

- Paul extended the invitation of the gospel message by referring to repentance and faith.
- Repentance is to turn away from sin, but we exercise faith when we run toward God.
- Paul emphasized that the proof of repentance is based upon observable evidence. Repentance that does not lead to a change in behavior is not true repentance.
- When we share the gospel with people, it is important to remember that what the Bible asks is simple even though it is not easy.

**In verse 22 Paul admitted his human need for God's help. How does sharing our struggles help encourage and engage others in their walks with God?**

- The Christian life is not an easy one, but God has promised to be with us. He will redirect our steps to follow Him when we seek His guidance and repent from sin.

## ACTS 26:24-26

**How did Paul respond to objections from critics?**

- Paul deflected criticism from Festus by refuting him with the truth.

- Paul mentioned that the events surrounding the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus were "not done in a corner" (Acts 26:26) because they had not escaped Agrippa's notice.
- Also, Paul insisted that his message was reasonable because it was supported by Scripture (vv. 22-23).

**Why is appealing to Scripture so convincing?**

- The best way to respond to objections concerning the gospel is to appeal to the truth claims of Scripture. The Bible has endured the test of time and scrutiny.
- As believers, we need to be prepared to respond to objections about the gospel with love and straightforward speech.

## ACTS 26:27-29

**How did Paul appeal to Agrippa to make a decision about Jesus?**

- Paul began with Agrippa's belief in the Old Testament prophecies.
- Once we have established belief in Scripture's truthfulness we can consider Christ's claims and invite unbelievers to make decisions.

**How were Paul's words demonstrated by his actions?**

- Paul expressed his desire for all people to hear the gospel and accept God's offer of salvation through Christ. When we present the gospel to others, it is important for them to know we care about them and are not trying to win a persuasion contest.

## SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

**What can we learn from Paul about sharing the gospel with others?**

- Use Scripture when witnessing to people. If possible, show them where the Bible specifically states the claims you are making.
- Mention the claims of Christ and how He fulfilled Old Testament prophecy. This demonstrates the reliability of the Scriptures.
- Clearly explain the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Once their understanding is evident, you can invite them to make a decision.
- **Personal Challenge:** Write a short summary of the gospel message to keep in the back of your Bible. Mark key verses of Scripture to refer to when witnessing to others. Practice writing out on a sheet of paper an approach of how you would extend an invitation for someone to make a decision to receive Christ. Rewrite your final copy of that invitation on the inside back cover of your Bible for future reference.



# OBJECT LESSON

## A PHONE CALL

Prior to the meeting, ask a participant to use his or her cell phone to call you shortly after the group session begins. Make sure your cell phone's ringer is set to high volume. When the cell phone begins to ring, ignore the ringing phone but observe how everyone reacts to the persistent ringing.

Ask: *How do you respond to a message addressed to you? Do you ignore it? Or do you answer right away?*

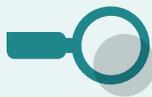
Direct a volunteer to read aloud Acts 26:19-29. Explain: *Paul wanted others to believe the gospel. He knew that everyone needs to hear it and have an opportunity to come to know Jesus Christ. Paul anchored the truth of the message to the authority of Scripture and was prepared to answer people's objections with a loving appeal to Scripture's claims. We would do well to follow Paul's example of witnessing to people.*

Challenge each person to look at their contact lists in their cell phones and identify five people they will commit to pray for regarding their salvation. Also, encourage participants to be ready for the Lord to give them opportunities to share the gospel with their five friends.



Ask: *Will you share the message that others need to hear? Remind them that it is our job to share the gospel so the recipients have an opportunity to either ignore or answer the message.*

Close in prayer, asking that the group answer the call to share the message of Christ.



## DIG DEEPER

### KING AGRIPPA OF THE JEWS?

In Acts 26, we are introduced to Festus and King Agrippa. Paul testified before both of these men about his innocence and about the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. While Festus had the regional authority, Agrippa was king of the Jews. How was that the case?

Agrippa is known to history as Agrippa II, son of Herod Agrippa, and great-grandson of Herod the Great. Agrippa was born in AD 27 and was raised in Rome. Beginning in AD 48 he ruled his deceased uncle's kingdom of Chalcis for several years. Eventually, his territory would spread through Emperor Nero's extension of his rule in AD 56.

Agrippa was considered king of the Jewish people though he didn't reign over Jewish territory; he ruled over the primary Gentile territory of Caesarea Philippi and some villages in the Sea of Galilee region. Judea and Samaria, however, were ruled by Roman procurators.<sup>1</sup>

The reason people continued to consider him the king of the Jewish people was two-fold. First was due to his father, who was king over the Jewish people. Secondly, the Romans gave him "the custody of the ceremonial high priests on the Day of Atonement . . . he also held the authority to appoint the high priest. In this respect he could be considered king of the Jews."<sup>2</sup>

Initially Romans preferred "governing certain national groups indirectly through native princes rather than directly through provincial governors. The native prince attracted most of the odium which would otherwise have been directed against Rome, and the Roman Empire enjoyed the benefits of the arrangement."<sup>3</sup>

By the time Agrippa II would have been king, that policy was no longer necessarily in effect. Outside the short reign of Herod Agrippa, Judea had been ruled by an emperor appointed governor (or prefect) for about 35 years, and after his death (Acts 12:23), it would be ruled by governors (or procurators) until the siege of Jerusalem in AD 70.

Agrippa II was granted his rule by the emperor and answered to him. Upon his death both the title he inherited, "king of the Jews," as well as the Herodian dynasty ended.

1. Adapted from J. Polhill, *New American Commentary: Acts* (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 492. 2. *Ibid.*, 493.

3. F. Bruce, "Herod Antipas, Tetrarch of Galilee and Peraea," *The Annual of Leeds University Oriental Society* 5 (1963/65), 6-23.

# ALWAYS ON MISSION

For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at [LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible](http://LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible).

## ACTS 28:17-28

**17** After **A** three days he called together the **B** leaders of the Jews. When they had gathered he said to them: “Brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or the **C** customs of our ancestors, I was **D** delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. **18** After they examined me, they wanted to release me, since there was no reason for the death penalty in my case. **19** Because the Jews objected, I was compelled to **E** appeal to Caesar; even though I had **F** no charge to bring against my people. **20** For this reason I’ve asked to see you and **G** speak to you. In fact, it is for the **H** hope of Israel that I’m wearing this chain.”

**21** Then they said to him, “We haven’t received any letters about you from Judea. None of the brothers has come and reported or spoken anything evil about you. **22** But we want to hear what your views are, since we know that people everywhere are **I** speaking against this sect.” **23** After arranging a day with him, many came to him at his lodging. From dawn to dusk he expounded and testified about the kingdom of God. He tried to persuade them about Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets. **24** Some were **J** persuaded by what he said, but others did not believe.

**25** Disagreeing among themselves, they began to leave after Paul made one statement: “The **K** Holy Spirit was right in saying to your ancestors through the prophet Isaiah **26** when he said, **L** Go to these people and say: You will always be listening, but never understanding; and you will always be looking, but never perceiving. **27** For the hearts of these people have grown callous, their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; otherwise they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears, understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them. **28** Therefore, let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the **M** Gentiles; they will listen.”

## EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** Paul had entered Rome three days earlier. He had a soldier guarding him, but they allowed him to rent a place to stay (v. 16).
- b** Leaders of the various synagogues in Rome, where there was an extensive Jewish presence
- c** “Absolutely nothing against Jewish laws or Jewish customs” (MSG). Paul had been true to the law of Moses.
- d** Similar to Jesus, whom the Jews also delivered up to the Romans (Luke 23:2-5).
- e** Paul appealed to Caesar because Felix favored the Jews, as they were objecting over his not being found guilty for a capital offense. This appeal prevented Paul from going to Jerusalem for what likely would have been a sham trial (Acts 25:9).
- f** “Not that I had any accusation against my nation” (NASB).
- g** Paul wanted to share the gospel directly with the Jews so they wouldn’t judge him based on rumors.
- h** Jesus is the one who is hoped for (Gal. 3:7-29) and the one who brings salvation (Titus 2:13-14).
- i** Christians were viewed in Rome as being opposed to Jews and persecuted for their faith.
- j** “Convinced” (ESV); some Jewish people came to Christian faith through Paul’s preaching in Rome.
- k** Paul upheld that Scripture was God-inspired, showing He is the ultimate Author who uses humans to accomplish His tasks (2 Tim. 3:16).
- l** Hundreds of years earlier, prophets had foretold the Jewish rejection of the gospel. God is never caught off guard by people’s actions (Isa. 6:9-10).
- m** Salvation through Jesus Christ is for “all nations”—Gentiles and Jews (Matt. 28:19).

### »» 1. THE JOURNEY (Acts 28:17-20)

- Paul outlined to the Jewish leaders in Rome the major steps that had led him to appeal to Caesar.

### »» 2. THE SEEKERS (Acts 28:21-23)

- The Jewish leaders in Rome expressed interest in hearing Paul's defense of himself and his message.
- At a set time, Paul met with the Jewish leaders in Rome and shared with them the gospel of Christ, utilizing the Old Testament.
- Note: Characterize the leaders as at least open to hearing Paul teach.

### »» 3. THE RESPONSE (Acts 28:24-28)

- A debate arose with the sticking point being salvation offered to all people, including Gentiles.
- Their rejection fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 6.

### »» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

**The gospel message is for all people; some will believe, but others will not.**

- God uses a variety of means to bring believers in contact with others who need to know the gospel.
- Believers should be looking to share the gospel with all people, especially those who are seeking to know more.
- Believers are to be faithful witnesses to all people regardless of their response.



## FOCUS ATTENTION

### How often do you power off your mobile phone? Why?

- In May 2015, an article appeared in *TIME* magazine recommending that mobile phones only be turned off once a year.<sup>1</sup> A quick search online reveals a divergence of opinions.
- Some people keep their phones on all the time. Similarly, we are always on mission with God. We need to be ready to share the message of the gospel with those who need to hear it.

## EXPLORE THE BIBLE ACTS 28:17-20

### How did the Lord direct Paul's path to Rome in order to share the gospel?

- Paul told the Jewish leaders in Rome of the journey that led him to appeal to Caesar. He assured them that he did not have a charge against his own people. Rather, he wanted to share the gospel with them.

### Why is it important for us to recognize God's direction in our lives?

- Like Paul, it is important for us to acknowledge God's hand in directing our paths when we meet people who do not know Christ.
- God can use a variety of means to bring believers into contact with those who need to know Christ. The main objective is to make sure we take advantage of opportunities to witness.

## ACTS 28:21-23

### How did Paul approach people who were seeking to know more about the Christian faith?

- Paul and the Roman Jews arranged a meeting after the Jews expressed interest in what Paul had to say.
- Paul spent the entire day using the Law of Moses and the Prophets to show that Jesus was the Messiah.

### Describe a time when someone wanted to hear more from you about the Christian faith.

- When people express an interest in the things of God, we should engage them in further conversations.
- The key is to point them to the truth about Jesus Christ. He is the One of whom the Bible speaks.

## ACTS 28:24-28

### What responses can we expect when we share the gospel with others?

- When Paul shared the gospel with the Roman Jews, some were convinced but others did not believe (v. 24).
- Despite the mixed reception, Paul said Christianity was for everyone, including Gentiles who would listen to the message.

- We have a responsibility to share the gospel with all people from all nations. Whether they receive or reject the message, we are responsible for sharing. The recipients are responsible for their response to it.

### What makes the idea of salvation for all so divisive?

- Jesus' holy character exposes our sinful humanity—the pride, lust, and hatred we have in our hearts. We can draw near to Him for His help and forgiveness, or we can run from Him because we don't believe He is who He says He is or that we are worthy of His love.

## SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

### What do we learn from Paul's experience about always being on mission?

- We must share the message of the gospel with others. The Book of Acts documents how people took the gospel to "Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).
- We need to take advantage of the opportunities we have to share salvation with the people we encounter each day.
- When people express an interest in the things of God, we need to engage them in a conversation using Scripture to point them to the claims of Jesus Christ and the hope we have in Him.
- The most important thing is to share the message of the gospel with people regardless of their response. Christ's message will provoke a variety of responses, but we are only responsible for the sharing of the message.
- **Personal Challenge:** This week think about how God has directed your path to the circumstances you face. Prayerfully identify the people God has put in your life who don't know Jesus Christ. Pray for the Lord to work in their lives and move them closer to repentance from sin and faith in Christ. Look for opportunities to engage in conversations about the things of God. Strive to be a faithful witness of Jesus Christ regardless of the responses that people choose to make.

1. John Patrick Pullen, "Do You Ever Need to Turn Off Your Smartphone?" *TIME*, published May 12, 2015. Available at [time.com](http://time.com).



# OBJECT LESSON

## A GLOBE

Bring a globe to display for the group. Ask: *How many of you have been to another country? If so, where did you go?* For those who have gone on a foreign mission trip, ask them to take a few moments to share their experiences.

Explain: *God created the world and all of the people in it. The Bible declares: "And we have seen and we testify that the Father has sent his Son as the world's Savior" (1 John 4:14). Since Jesus ascended to heaven after His resurrection, He commissioned us to share the gospel with all people.*

Call on a volunteer to read aloud Acts 28:17-28. Point out: *Paul was always on mission sharing the good news with the people around him. Not even house arrest deterred him from sharing the gospel with others.*

Ask: *What are some specific ways we can intentionally share the gospel with people around us?*

Instruct the group to pair off in order to pray for specific continents. Assign a different continent to each group. Encourage them to pray for the lost in those countries and for the Christians in those areas



to have boldness in sharing the gospel. Remind the participants that the Lord has given us the Holy Spirit to equip and empower us to be effective witnesses for Jesus Christ.



## DIG DEEPER

### WHAT HAPPENED TO PAUL?

The Book of Acts ends rather abruptly, not letting us know what happened to Paul when he went on trial before Caesar. There are several possibilities.

The first scenario is that Paul was executed after his two-year imprisonment at Rome (Acts 28:30), and Luke may not have mentioned it because the book was written before the verdict. While this is a scenario, it is highly unlikely.

A second scenario is that Paul was not executed but exiled. This could have been in the western part of the Empire, which would have made it possible to fulfill Paul's desire of going to Spain (Rom. 15:23-29). After his exile of a few years, perhaps he was executed under Nero's persecution.<sup>1</sup> This scenario is possible, and is alluded to in a letter by Clement of Rome around 30 years after Paul's death.<sup>2</sup>

A third and more widely-accepted possibility is that Paul was released and returned to ministry. His release could have happened in several ways. Either he won his case, his accusers didn't show up, or he was released by the emperor in an act of clemency. (Acts 27:23-24 would still have been fulfilled in his second arrest.) Whatever happened to Paul, the traditional view is that he was released by Rome.

After Paul's release (around AD 61/62), he ministered for several years, writing 1 Timothy and Titus. He was then arrested again during Nero's persecution of the Christians. Paul likely wrote 2 Timothy as he was in prison awaiting his fate. Early tradition has Paul (and Peter) executed during Nero's persecution of the church.

He was condemned by the Emperor Nero and beheaded with the sword at the third milestone on the Ostian Way at a place called *Aquae Salviae* . . . his execution probably occurred in 66 or 67.<sup>3</sup>

While the third possibility is most likely what actually occurred, in the end, Acts doesn't tell us what exactly happened to Paul (or Peter) on purpose. As this book is not a book about powerful men but about the power of the gospel to save. As one scholar notes:

Whatever may have been the outcome of Paul's Roman imprisonment, Luke seems to have deliberately chosen to end his story where he did. He ended not on Paul but on the gospel, on the message of the kingdom. The word of God in Christ—not Peter, not Paul—is the real hero of Acts.<sup>4</sup>

1. A. Kostenberger, *The Cradle, The Cross, and The Crown* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 394. 2. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 444. 3. *Ibid.*, Kostenberger, 395. 4. J. Polhill, *New American Commentary: Acts* (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 547.



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# THE POWER OF STORY TO BUILD COMMUNITY

by Bill Donahue



Paying attention to our story is one way to discover the movement of God in our soul. The Bible is replete with stories, hundreds of mini-dramas putting His work on display amidst the good, bad, and ugly narratives of our lives. Here are some strategies for helping people bring their story into group life.

## **HELPING PEOPLE BRING THEIR STORY INTO THE GROUP**

As a group leader, or even fellow group member, you want to hear and understand people's stories. But sometime people are reluctant. Fear, insecurity, doubt, past relational trauma, and lack of skill can all keep people from opening up. Here are a few tips for creating a story-telling environment.

### **SUB-GROUP**

It is hard for some people to open their lives to a group of eight or more people, especially when they do not know everyone in the group. By getting in groups of two or three, members feel safer and are able to talk with fewer people. In this less intimidating environment, sharing with a friend instead of the whole group allows you to build confidence.

## **WRITE YOUR STORY FIRST**

Before telling your story, write it down. For example, ask people to write two or three paragraphs about what they hope to see happen in this small group. What are they looking for? Why did they decide to be in the group? Then a few people can read what they wrote. Reading those paragraphs is easier than answering such a question on the spot.

## **START WITH SMALL PORTIONS**

From time to time ask a person to describe one aspect of their story. For example, you could say, “Tell us about the most difficult aspect of your job.” This focused question will begin a safe, guided conversation. It is personal but the person is an “expert” on the subject. And you can ask follow up questions that create dialogue like, “Wow, you do have a hard job. Is it rewarding to do that difficult part of your job, or do you find it keeps you from what you really like to do?”

## **USE ICE BREAKERS & DISCUSSION STARTERS**

Ice breakers and discussion starters are similar to the questions above, but tend to be lighter and more open. “If you could change something in the world right now, what would it be and why?” Ask each person to answer and then look for common themes, values, passion and ideas. Help people see what they have in common. And ask more questions and invite feedback.

## **START LIGHTER AND MOVE DEEPER**

The Quakers, a group with a high value on community, used to ask a series of questions, each more deeper than the one before. “What was your life like in the 7th grade?” Then, “Tell us about your favorite room in the home and why your family enjoyed being there together.” And then a more direct spiritual question. “What is your first recollection about God or hearing about God growing up?” By moving from general to family to personal/spiritual topics, the Quakers could help one another tell their stories.

## **SAFETY & CONFIDENTIALITY ARE ESSENTIAL**

In order for people to speak freely about life, work and spiritual topics, they need to trust group members and believe others are for them. A leader must create an atmosphere of safety and confidentiality, reminding participants that what is discussed in a group meeting stays in the group.

So take the plunge and begin telling more stories! Leaders should lead the way and set the tone, and then invite others to join in. You will find it not only opens people’s lives, but hearts and minds as well.

Story on!

Adapted from Bill Donahue. Read the original article in its entirety at [www.lifeway.com](http://www.lifeway.com).

# COMING NEXT QUARTER

## 1 AND 2 CORINTHIANS

- Session 1**    **United in Christ** > *1 Corinthians 1:10-25*
- Session 2**    **Glorifying God** > *1 Corinthians 6:12-20*
- Session 3**    **Keeping Commitments** > *1 Corinthians 7:1-13*
- Session 4**    **Influencing for Christ** > *1 Corinthians 9:19-27; 10:31-33; 11:1*
- Session 5**    **Assurance of the Resurrection\*** > *John 20:2-9; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28*
- Session 6**    **Remembering the Sacrifice** > *1 Corinthians 11:17-29*
- Session 7**    **Serving God's People** > *1 Corinthians 12:4-12, 21-26*
- Session 8**    **Understanding Love** > *1 Corinthians 13:1-13*
- Session 9**    **Enjoying God's Comfort** > *2 Corinthians 1:3-14*
- Session 10**    **Displaying the Gospel** > *2 Corinthians 4:5-18*
- Session 11**    **Becoming New** > *2 Corinthians 5:16-21; 6:1-2*
- Session 12**    **Giving Faithfully** > *2 Corinthians 9:1-15*
- Session 13**    **Finding Strength** > *2 Corinthians 12:7b-10; 13:2-8*

\*Evangelistic emphasis

# LIFE BY DESIGN

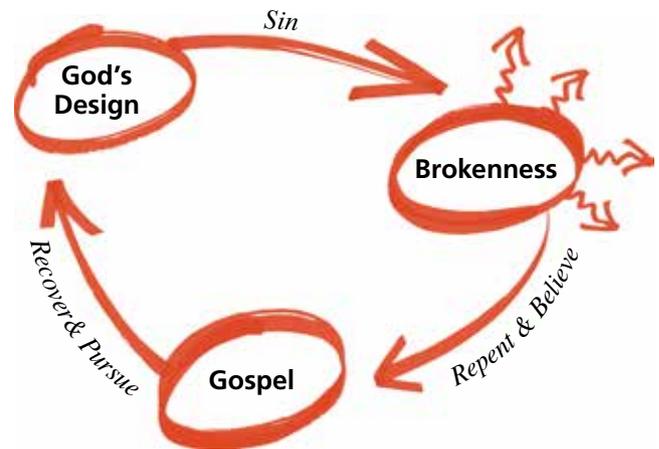
**We live in a broken world. This brokenness is seen in suffering, violence, poverty, pain, and death around us. Brokenness leads us to search for a way to make LIFE work.**

The Bible tells us that God originally planned a world that worked perfectly—where everything and everyone fit together in harmony. God made each of us with a purpose—to worship Him and walk with Him. (See Genesis 1:31 and Psalm 19:1.)

Life doesn't work when we ignore God and His original design for our lives. We selfishly insist on doing things our own way. The Bible calls this sin. Sin leads to a place of brokenness. The consequence of our sin is separation from God—in this life and for all of eternity. (See Romans 3:23 and Romans 6:23.)

At this point we need a remedy—some good news. Because of His love, God did not leave us in our brokenness. Jesus, God in human flesh, came to us and lived perfectly according to God's Design. Jesus came to rescue us—to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. He took our sin and shame to the cross, paying the penalty of our sin by His death. Jesus was then raised from the dead—to provide the only way for us to be rescued and restored to a relationship with God. (See John 3:16; Colossians 2:14; and 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.)

We don't have the power to escape this brokenness on our own. We need to be rescued. We must ask God to forgive us—turning from sin to trust in Jesus. This is what it means to repent and believe. Believing, we receive new life through Jesus. God turns our lives in a new direction. (See Mark 1:15; Ephesians 2:8-9; and Romans 10:9.)



When God restores our relationship to Him, we begin to discover meaning and purpose in a broken world. Now we can pursue God's Design in all areas of our lives. God's Spirit empowers us to recover His Design and assures us of His presence in this life and for all of eternity. (See Philippians 2:13 and Ephesians 2:10.)

Now that you have heard this Good News, God wants you to respond to Him. You can talk to Him using words like these: My life is broken—I recognize it's because of my sin. I believe Christ came to live, die, and was raised from the dead—to rescue me from my sin. Forgive me. I turn from my selfish ways and put my trust in You. I know that Jesus is Lord of all, and I will follow Him.

Excerpted from *Life on Mission: A Simple Way to Share the Gospel*.

# Paul's Missionary Journeys





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