

THIS IS US

LEADER'S NOTES | A SEVEN-WEEK GROUP STUDY

Table of Contents

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1 Bold Preaching	4
2 Patterned After the New Testament Church	9
3 Standing Up for Christ	14
4 The Importance of Baptism	20
5 Evangelism and Missions	25
6 Prayer and the Holy Spirit	30
7 Service and Leadership	36



Session One: Bold Preaching

When it comes to flying a plane or leading a Life Group, the takeoff is very important. One of your main goals as a Life Group leader is to create an environment where group members feel safe to openly and honestly share their true opinions and answers. It has often been said, "Your group will only go as deep as the leader." It is our hope and prayer that your Life Group would not only be a safe place, but that members would be transparent and "go deep" when comes to answering the questions. Therefore, the best way to cultivate this atmosphere in your group is to lead the way.

Because this is the first week of the series, you may have to start the conversation by being the first to answer the questions. This is especially true when it comes to the personal, introspective questions. Remember to encourage your group members when they answer, and all costs, fight the urge to give hasty advice or quick fixes. We believe that God—through your group, His Word, and His Holy Spirit—will guide and correct people.

Have a great group!

As you begin your group discussion, take some time to talk about some interesting points that your group members picked up from watching the lesson. This is a good time to discuss something that was mentioned in the teaching or testimony that may not be addressed within the questions of the lesson.

1. According to the verses we've read, we would see a bold preacher represents himself honestly and with authenticity. He doesn't play a character or pretend to be something he is not. A bold preacher carries himself with humility, not needing to puff himself up in order to seem impressive. The gospel message he carries is impressive enough! A bold preacher speaks from his emotions, even if those emotions bring tears. He is not unaffected by whether people spend their eternity with God or away from Him. Instead, his passion is evident to all who hear him.

A bold preacher will often experience resistance, particularly because the message he carries may be difficult for many to hear. Nonetheless, a bold preacher never hesitates to share the message that has been given to him. There is no situation in which a preacher will retreat or give up an opportunity to share the gospel. A bold preacher is willing to preach anywhere and at any time. A bold preacher keeps the core of the gospel front and center: We must repent from our sins and turn to God in faith.

2. This is an early opportunity for many in your group to begin thinking about situations where they might shy away from speaking about their faith. And for many, this is a question that could reveal a group member's personality. For one person, they might hesitate because they don't feel as if they could speak perfectly. Another might hesitate because they're afraid of hurting someone's feelings. Maybe they don't want to look foolish, or maybe they want to avoid a potential conflict. Allow each member time to determine why they personally might hesitate to preach the gospel.

3. The center of Paul's message was the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For Paul, there was no greater message than to tell others this truth. He would preach from the Old Testament Scriptures, point to the prophecies that foretold the coming of the Messiah, and how that Messiah would die and rise again from the grave. Then, he would show and prove that Jesus was the person who perfectly fulfilled those prophecies in the Old Testament.

Paul chose this truth to be the center of his message because Jesus is the means by which we are saved. If Jesus did not die for our sins, then we would have no way of entering eternity with God. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then death would be the end for each and every one of us. However, Jesus paid the sacrifice for our sins and conquered death by rising from the dead. Because Jesus did this, we can be saved from our sins. Though Paul likely taught and spoke on other subjects (and he frequently did so in his letters), the death and the resurrection of Jesus was the center of everything, because it is the means by which we all have been saved from sin and death.

4. This question may require the members of your group to really ponder. Some of them may even pull out their phones to scroll through their social media posts to see what they're actually saying online. Others will need to take some time to think about what they spend their time talking about. Some may like to talk about baseball and are preaching the "gospel of the Los Angeles Dodgers." Some may like to brag about their accomplishments and are guilty of promoting the "gospel of me." Allow time for this question to settle in.

5. Again, this is a personal question, and many in your group will have different answers. Allow them space to share their stories. Once you ask the question, give your group time to process. It may help kickstart your group members if you allow yourself to be transparent and share your honest answer with them. Be careful to allow everyone a chance to share, but your openness may encourage your group to share their experience.

6. Frankly, the people of Athens had probably never heard of the Bible. They likely had zero context for the God of Israel called YHWH. And so, if Paul started using the Old Testament Prophecies to prove that Jesus was the Messiah, for the people of Athens, it would have meant very little to them. The very idea of a messiah would have been completely foreign. In fact, if Paul had used the Bible in his message, he very likely would have confused the Athenians. He would have provided more questions than answers.

There are many occasions where we may want to follow Paul's lead in this story when it comes to preaching the gospel. If bringing up the Bible would confuse someone rather than help them understand, we might want to wait before discussing God's Word. When we tell others about the gospel, we need to think critically about who is listening to us. We should not speak in such a way to convince ourselves. Instead, we should speak to convince whoever is listening to us. We should be sensitive of where people are at on their journey to God and speak accordingly.

7. Paul first made a connection through the "religiousness" of the people of Athens. Instead of instantly condemning the large number of idols in that city, he used them to build a bridge. He found a connecting point, that both he and the people of Athens cared deeply about their respective faiths. Paul brilliantly located an idol in the city dedicated to an unknown God and used that to talk about the God that he himself knows. He basically told the Athenians that they were already worshipping the true God, and they didn't know it! But then, Paul uses the subject of idols to talk about how the God he serves is so much bigger. You get the sense in Paul's message here that he spoke almost like a Greek philosopher, like Aristotle or Socrates. Paul also quotes Greek poets who would be known to the people of Athens, another point of connection. Through his message, Paul is trying to show the Athenians that the Lord has already been with them. Rather than try to alienate the people of Athens by telling them that they've got it all wrong, instead Paul tries to help them see how they were already walking toward God.

8. This is a good moment for internal reflection. Allow your group members time to process the question and to come up with a personal answer. Each person will have a different perspective, so give them the opportunity to share the message they desperately need to hear from the Lord. Some may need to hear that everything will be okay. Others may need to be challenged to wake up and take hold of the mission that God has set before them. You can also spur on your group by sharing from your own life and from the message that you need to hear.

DEEPER STUDY QUESTIONS

9. This question can be enriched by digging into Roman history. The Romans believed they had brought peace to the world. They believed their gods were the true gods. They believed their way was the true way. They believed that their way of bringing peace was the true way of bringing peace. They considered themselves the greatest nation in the world. Consider today that the Roman Empire no longer exists, and yet, the church of Jesus Christ is stronger than ever. The message of Paul was a threat because it was true. It is only through Jesus do we find the true God and the true way and the true method of bringing peace to the world.

The gospel is a threat to the world, because it exposes the lies that the world tells us. The gospel is a threat to the advertising industry, because it teaches us that we do not need possessions to be happy. The gospel is a threat to the culture, because it teaches that right and wrong are determined by God and not by what is popular at the time. The gospel is a threat to the nations of the world, because it teaches that Jesus is King over all the earth.

10. The answer to this question will depend on your perspective. Here is one possible answer: In a world where so many different messages compete in order to grab our attention, it is essential to listen to one person stand and declare aloud what is true. The church needs to continue to hear the truth of God's Word in order to stay true to it and to not be carried off by the world.

Session Two: Patterned After the New Testament Church

Please remember these notes are only for reference **if NEEDED**. They are a supplement to the discussion. The goal is not to get to the answers provided below, but instead to engage in open and honest discussion. Please give adequate time for group members to respond to the questions before referring to these notes.

Take some time right after the group watches the video to discuss what your different group members thought were the highlights of the teaching and testimony. There are no right or wrong answers here, but there is an opportunity to discuss some things that were important or maybe missed by others.

1. There certainly isn't a clear-cut answer to this question. The answers lie within the individual perspectives of everyone in the group. When it comes to similarities, there are many! At Shepherd Church, we are still devoted to the teaching of the apostles, which we would call the New Testament. We are driven to fellowship through our Life Group ministries and through events that take place at the church. We break bread every week by serving the Lord's Supper at our weekend services. And we are committed to prayer. We also hope to see the warm hospitality mirrored in these verses, as well as a willingness to share possessions with those in need. However, allow your group members to speak about the differences they see as well. There is no right or wrong answer here because it depends on your perspective.

2. The pattern laid out in these verses is fundamental to the success of the church throughout history. The church cannot survive without the guidance of God's Word in the Old and New Testament. It cannot survive without fellowship—that common ownership that causes everyone to feel they are part of something bigger than just themselves. The church cannot survive without breaking bread and consistently remembering the sacrifice of Jesus, which made our salvation possible. The church will not survive without remaining constantly connected to the Father in prayer. The pattern set out for us is not just a suggestion, but

rather, it is a necessity of survival. We should also pay attention to the fact that when the church was modeled this way, it grew! If we want more and more of our neighbors to follow God, then we should follow the pattern for when the church was exploding with growth!

3. Allow your group to use their creativity here. There is no right or wrong answer. You might try pulling up some pictures of what the temple in Jerusalem looked like at that time to help give people a picture of what they might see. The point of this question is to allow everyone an opportunity to put themselves in the shoes of the very first Christians, catching their passion. They were part of something vibrant and revolutionary. What would you be like if you were part of a cutting-edge movement that was changing lives and bringing people salvation from their sins?

4. Allow each person the space to share their stories. Once you ask the question, give your group time to process. It may help kickstart your group members if you allow yourself to be transparent and share your honest answer with them. Be careful to allow everyone a chance to share, but your openness may encourage your group to share their experience. If you're having difficulty with discussion, have your group think of being at a rock concert or a sporting event where the crowd seems to speak as one.

5. Our lives consist of rhythms. We breathe in and we breathe out. We awake and we sleep. We eat at certain times of the day. We drive to work and we drive home. These are the things we do in order to live and survive. If we want to flourish, then we must keep our healthy rhythms of life. The same is true of our spiritual lives.

Imagine you were tasked with getting a plant to grow and open its flowers. You would make sure you watered that plant every day. You would make sure it got new soil every one to two weeks. You would make sure it got regular sunlight. You would ensure that the plant got everything it needed to survive. The same is true of the spiritual life. We must consistently keep our faith watered and planted in fresh soil and renewed by the light of the sun. We do this by attending church every week to receive the nutrients our spiritual life needs. We do this by

staying regularly in prayer and by reading God's Word. When we build these healthy habits, they keep us nourished in order to make it through the difficult storms of life.

A rhythm becomes a ritual when it no longer gives life. When reading God's Word no longer fills us up, that is a clue it has become ritual for us. When singing praise to God doesn't bring us closer to Him, we need to inspect why this is happening. A ritual takes place when we are "going through the motions."

6. The first part of this question invites personal reflection. Allow each person the space and time to take an inventory and determine the parts of their faith that are no longer giving life or nourishment. You yourself can share about what has become a lifeless ritual for you. By doing so, you may open the door for others to find the courage to speak about how their faith has lost steam.

The second part of the question can have many answers, and it may depend upon the person. One way we can transform a ritual into a rhythm is by changing up how we do it. If we pray in a certain way all of the time, then try a new method of prayer. Attempt to read a section of the Bible you've never read before. Try serving in a ministry or with a non-profit organization that might help you see a new perspective. In essence, do something to shake up your life. When we go through rituals, we are asleep to our faith. Find a way to wake up.

7. One major defining characteristic of the Christians in Antioch is that they were an ethnically diverse group of people. They weren't just comprised of Jews or Gentiles, but both! What separated them from other people was that they lived like Christ, hence the name Christian. They were unique because they were eager to tell others about Jesus and to follow His example. We could also point back to the earlier verses and say that these people were different from others because they followed the pattern of the New Testament church. They were devoted to the teaching of the apostles, to fellowship, and to the breaking of bread and prayer. They were marked by a radical generosity and togetherness.

The second part of the question is an opportunity to distinguish how Christians should live as opposed to how the world chooses to live. One important guide you could use for this question is the fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians 5:22-23. Christians should be defined by love, as opposed to the world that is defined by selfishness. Christians should be defined by joy, as opposed to the temporary thrills the world seeks. This is a good chance to allow your group members to talk about how Christians should conduct themselves in the world.

8. While many in your group will have different ways of answering this question, the overall tone will likely be that the world looks at Christians in a negative light. Perhaps the world views Christians as hypocrites or fanatics or people who are “behind the times.” This is a chance for your group members to think about how they are perceived by outsiders. What does the world see when they look at them?

Get creative in developing strategies to turn the tide against this negative perception of Christians. Again, this is a personal question that has no right or wrong answer. Some in your group will be driven to serve more in their community in order to show others they care. Others in your group may have to rethink how they speak online, so as to open the door toward Christ rather than shutting it. At the end of the day, Christians need to be defined as people who follow the example of Christ. How specifically can we show people the love of God?

DEEPER STUDY QUESTIONS

9. There may be a few different reasons why the church was called “the Way.” Perhaps it was because they taught the Way to salvation. Perhaps it was because they followed Jesus, who was described in John 14:6 as “the way and the truth and the life.” It may help to know here that the Greek word for “way” is *hodos*, which can also mean “road.” Perhaps the title was a nod to Jesus’ famous teaching during the Sermon on the Mount, where he beckoned believers to follow on the narrow road (Matthew 7:13-14).

The name for the church that each person might choose will be personal to them. It will speak about the aspect of the faith that they

connect to the strongest. Some might call it “The Rock,” because the church provides safe ground during storms. Some might call it “The People,” because the church serves as the people of God. Once people choose a name they like, ask a follow-up question to see why they chose it. This can be a good opportunity to talk about why the church is so important to them.

10. Many Jews at that time would have viewed “the Way” as a heretical branch of Judaism, one that claimed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. It would have been natural to think this way, of course. After all, these believers still read and believed in the Old Testament Scriptures and prayed to the same God. However, they would have been viewed as a faction that had branched off from the main religion. There were many sects of Judaism at that time, the most famous of which were the Essenes. The Essenes were a community of Jews who lived far out in the desert and practiced communal living. They are also the people we can thank for the Dead Sea Scrolls. Their teachings diverged in many places from what we would call mainline Judaism at that time.

When Paul was first named Saul in Acts 9:1-2 and was a persecutor of the church, he would have viewed “the Way” as a dangerous and false branch of Judaism— one that he needed to stamp out. But after his conversion, Paul in Acts 24:14-16 does not view “the Way” as a sect. Instead, Paul views “the Way” as more than a religion. For him, it was what Judaism was supposed to be: teachings of the Old Testament that led to Jesus. They found their fulfillment in Him. So, for Paul, following Jesus was simply accepting the truth. “The Way” is not a sect of Judaism. Instead, it is the natural progression of Judaism.

Session Three: Standing Up for Christ

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Take some time right after the group watches the video to discuss what your different group members thought were the highlights of the teaching and testimony. There are no right or wrong answers here, but there is an opportunity to discuss some things that were important or maybe missed by others.

1. The priests and Sadducees were threatened by the teaching of Peter and John because it went against everything they had known for their entire lives. Also, imagine the kind of prestige these men enjoyed in their community. They were leaders. Everyone looked up to them. When these men spoke, everyone around them listened, quietly taking note of each word.

When these two unschooled, redneck fishermen named Peter and John show up and tell them that everything they've believed about the Old Testament Scriptures is wrong, they're doubtful. In the minds of the priests, they're the ones in the right. Peter and John are wrong.

They don't care if Peter and John worked a miracle and helped a man walk again. In their minds, they file that information under "Things We're Not Going to Think or Talk About Ever."

These men resisted even the message and ministry of Jesus, so they will certainly resist his followers as well. Here is what Jesus says to them in John 6:39-40: *"You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."*

2. Allow everyone in your group time to ponder how they would defend themselves as they stood in the shoes of Peter and John. In order to understand the story better, it is helpful to imagine that you are standing before those 70 men, looking into their hostile or puzzled eyes. On the one hand, you're rather confident in the message you preach. You have just healed a man who has never walked in his life, and you've done it by the power of the Holy Spirit. You may just let the message speak for itself. Or maybe you would try to appeal to their sense of humanity and focus on how the crippled man's life has just been changed forever. Perhaps you would try to put yourself on their level and say, "I'm just as baffled that this is happening as much as you guys are. But I can't ignore everything I've seen!"

This is a good opportunity for those in your group to begin to form their own personal defense of their faith. As strange as it might sound, it's far easier to defend another person's faith than to defend your own.

3. This question is a good opportunity to help group members reframe some of their past experiences. Sometimes, we don't know we had an opportunity to share the gospel until we think about our past through that particular lens. If your group has trouble coming up with specific examples from their lives, try to get more general and ask: "What are some situations you could think of where you might have a chance to share the gospel?"

When we reframe the past, our eyes are opened in the future. If we can recognize opportunities we missed, we can more easily identify opportunities in the future to share our faith.

4. One important note about this question is how similar Stephen sounds to Jesus as He was being crucified. In Luke 23:34, Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And in Luke 23:46, Jesus said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

These quotes are very similar to what Stephen said as the crowd was stoning him. And in those similarities, we find a very important direction for answering this question: Stephen was able to forgive the men who were about to kill him because Jesus was able to forgive the men who

crucified him. We have been given a pattern of forgiveness to follow because God has forgiven us for our sins!

In Ephesians 4:31-32, Paul wrote, *“Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”* The real test of this verse is to forgive a person who does intentional harm to you. Despite the evil they were doing to Him, Jesus’ desire was for the men who were crucifying Him, to be saved. In the same way, Stephen’s hope was that the men responsible for his murder, would be saved as well. And one of the men present at Stephen’s death was saved—a man named Saul who would change his name to Paul, and would write the words at the very top of this paragraph.

5. Instead of stamping out the faith, the persecution of the church caused the gospel to spread. As believers were running from Jerusalem for their lives, they sought refuge in the Galilean and Judean countryside and even in the hostile nation of Samaria. However, they didn’t stop preaching. As they spread outward, the gospel spread outward with them.

Imagine you have a field full of dandelions, and you want to get rid of them. When you kick a dandelion, you do not succeed in getting rid of it. On the contrary, you only succeed in spreading its seeds into the air and causing the dandelions to spread all the more.

There are many instances today where persecution has caused the gospel to actually grow stronger instead of weaker. According to historical sociologist Rodney Stark in his book *The Rise of Christianity*, he observed that persecution actually gave Christians credence to their message. Since believers were willing to die for their faith, outsiders were more likely to take their message seriously and believe as a result.

6. Some in your group may be uncomfortable with attempting to answer this question, thinking they need to go into specific, or even violent, detail. Do not ask anyone to go into great detail about what they would do specifically to Christians in order to get them to stop

preaching the gospel. Don’t spend time dwelling on torture methods or on ways of harming people.

The purpose of the question is to ask yourself: How will my opponent try to stop me? In a game of checkers or chess, for instance, in order to win the game, you must think about what your opponent is trying to do. When you treat your opponent with respect and expect he will try to beat you at every turn, then you will play a far better game against him.

When we understand how our enemy will attempt to attack us, we can prepare a far stronger defense for our faith. How could someone stop you from telling others about Jesus? Would they try to distract you? Would they try to intimidate you?

7. It is comforting to know that when we are persecuted, Jesus feels that persecution as well. This makes sense because it says in Ephesians 1:22-23, *“And God placed all things under [Jesus’] feet and appointed him to be Head over everything for the church, which is his Body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”* In many other verses, we see that the church is called the body of Christ, and that Jesus Himself is the head of that body. This means that we are united together. We are working together with Jesus to accomplish the mission He began through His ministry on this earth.

We are also united to Jesus through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God that descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove when he was baptized (Matthew 3:16) is the same Spirit that dwells within each and every one of us (1 Corinthians 3:16).

We can find comfort knowing this, since we often can feel alone when we’re being persecuted. However, we are not abandoned! Jesus is with us. He feels our pain. He sees our tears. He understands what we’re going through. And He has conquered all of that and can help us conquer it all as well.

8. This, too, is a question that helps us reframe the way we should see the world. As Christians, we cannot view our enemies as enemies. We must view them as children loved by God. During the Sermon on the

Mount, Jesus leveled a difficult challenge: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:43-48).

This teaching has caused the church to be a revolutionary force throughout history. The world teaches you must conquer and defeat and destroy and bankrupt your enemy. Instead, Jesus teaches us to love our enemies. For this is true defeat: to win your enemy to your side.

Allow your group members time to think of a person who has been antagonistic or hostile in the past. Instead of thinking about what they have done, we should look through the lens of what they could do if they believed in Jesus. We should be looking at a person’s potential, at what the Holy Spirit can do through them.

DEEPER STUDY QUESTIONS

9. Paul’s preaching was a financial threat to Demetrius and his fellow silversmiths. These men made their money by making idols out of silver. They relied on people believing that Artemis and the other Greco-Roman gods were real. As long as the people believed in this false religion, they were able to sell idols and make a profit. However, this Apostle Paul preached a message that said men should not worship or own idols at all! This was terrible news for Demetrius and his fellow silversmiths. Their bottom line was threatened.

There is a similar story to this in Acts 16:16-24, where Paul and Silas were thrown into prison after casting a demon from a young girl. The young girl was actually a slave, and the demon helped her tell the future. The owners of the slave girl made money off of her fortunetelling. But after the demon was cast out, she could no longer tell the future, which erased the income of her slave owners. Therefore, the slave owners lashed out and threw Paul and Silas in prison.

We need to know that the gospel can threaten those who make money dishonestly. The Christian faith is terrible for the pornography industry. It wreaks havoc on the advertising industry. It renders self-help literature useless. When we understand this, we can better understand the motivations of those who would stand against the faith.

10. In this day and age, many people hate the Christian church without having a good reason to hate it. They simply despise the faith because other people around them despise it. And like the mob in this story, they are swept up by the anger of others. As strange as this may sound, there are people in this world who persecute the church without really considering whether or not they believe in the message of Jesus Christ.

For us, this can equally be frustrating and encouraging. It’s frustrating because it shows us that much of the persecution against the church is baseless. It’s encouraging because many people who hurt the church can be convinced of the error of their ways. If we meet their aggression with compassion and love, then they will find a different picture of the church than the one they were told to believe.

This note indicates to me how important it is to represent Jesus faithfully in this world. When the church looks like Jesus, then the people who are typically swept up with the crowd will know better and will stand with the church instead of with the mob.

Session Four: The Importance of Baptism

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Take some time right after the group watches the video to discuss what your different group members thought were the highlights of the teaching and testimony. There are no right or wrong answers here, but there is an opportunity to discuss some things that were important or maybe missed by others.

1. The Greek word for “cut to the heart” is *katanussomai*, which means “to be stabbed deeply” or “to be wholly pierced through.” That is a powerful word to use in this context, for Jesus himself was pierced by nails all the way through his hands and feet. Jesus’ side was also pierced by a spear, deeply in his flesh. It is no mistake that the author of the book of Acts, whose name is Luke, used this word to describe what the people were experiencing.

They were feeling guilt and remorse. They were feeling sadness for the wrong they had done. The crowd realized they had crucified the son of God, and they were completely gutted by it. Some in the crowd may have felt a sense of hopelessness, knowing that there was nothing they could do to make up for the wrong they had done.

These are the feelings that typically precede someone becoming baptized. Each and every one of us must face the wrong we have done in this life. We must realize our sins placed Jesus on the cross. And when we do, we are overcome with guilt and remorse. However, we will soon find hope, knowing that our sins will be forgiven!

2. If we take Acts 2:38 to be the pattern by which we come to salvation, it follows according to these steps: (1) repent, which means

to completely change your life around and begin to follow God; (2) be baptized, which means to be immersed in water in the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit; (3) receive forgiveness for your sins; (4) receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is His presence in your life.

The process follows in this way because it is a natural progression that many people will go through. When people hear the gospel, their first step is to turn away from their sinful life and turn to a righteous life following God. Their next step is to join Christ in baptism. After this, their sins will be washed away, and the Holy Spirit will dwell within them. Peter presents this as the typical way people will come to faith.

This, however, is not the only way! God can do whatever He wants whenever He wants without our permission. He is the One who grants salvation to us. He sees every heart, and He decides who receives forgiveness and who does not. We are not meant to use this pattern as a ritual chiseled in stone. Our salvation is certainly not at risk because we did things “out of order.” Instead, it is a guide by which we can lead others to faith in Christ.

3. Let’s review what we know about this Ethiopian eunuch: (1) This man was an important official who served under the queen of Ethiopia. (2) Since he was a man entrusted with the wealth of a nation, we can reasonably assume that he himself was wealthy. (3) He does not worship the foreign gods of his nation. Instead, he is actually heading to Jerusalem in order to worship the God of Israel. (4) He owns a scroll of Isaiah, and he was reading it. And that means that this man can read Hebrew, a language that was probably not widely spoken in this man’s country.

Let’s add some more information to this story just for fun: This man was from a Nubian kingdom called Meroe, a city that was founded in 760 B.C., and would be found in today’s nation of Sudan. Meroe was an impressive city, but one that was located quite a far distance from Jerusalem. According to the historians of that day, such a journey would have taken months. This man was a eunuch, and he was likely one by choice. In African kingdoms like Ethiopia, men could ascend into

positions of power and prominence by becoming eunuchs. This particular eunuch had ascended to a position of extreme authority and prestige. The city of Meroe was fantastically wealthy, sitting on an excellent trade route, and was one of the world's leading providers of livestock, iron, ivory, and ebony. The treasuries of Meroe were famous among Roman historians for being full of gold and jewels. This man was likely powerful in his nation beyond measure, and was a wealthy man himself.

At this point, we should point out that this man would not have been treated well on his entry into Jerusalem. Eunuchs were not well regarded in Jewish society. What's more, though this man worshipped Yahweh and was reading the Old Testament, he would not have been allowed to become Jewish since he was a eunuch. And since he would've been treated as a Gentile, then he could not enter into the temple in Jerusalem. And yet, this man was making the journey anyway.

This man is faced with a puzzle. He has read a Scripture in the book of Isaiah for which he does not have an explanation. He is reading Isaiah 53:7-8, a verse where we see that the Messiah will suffer and ultimately die. He is moved by this verse. There is something powerful in it for him.

When Philip explains how Jesus fulfills this Scripture, everything clicks into place for the Ethiopian eunuch. This man has had wealth and prestige, but it wasn't enough! There was an emptiness within him that nothing could fill. He studied the religions of the world in order to find an answer, and he was drawn to the God of Israel. The stories rang true for him. He made a far journey to a land where he wouldn't be well received, all in search of the truth.

And here on the side of the road, he finally finds the answer he seeks. Why did this man get baptized so quickly? Because he had been looking for the truth his entire life and he finally found it.

4. One way to enrich this question is by asking follow-up questions. Try to help the people in your group uncover as many details as they can about their experience. What was the temperature of the water?

Who was the person who baptized you? What did they say to you before, during and after the event? What was the moment you knew you were going to be baptized?

5. A person would be hard-pressed to come up with a reason for keeping Cornelius and his household from becoming baptized. They might say that since Cornelius had only just heard about the gospel, and maybe he should take some time considering whether or not this is a decision he truly wants to make. Some might argue that Cornelius hasn't had enough time to truly repent from his sins and turn to Jesus. However, the presence of the Holy Spirit with Cornelius and his household would erase all doubt. These men were ready to receive forgiveness for their sins, the first Gentiles to be included in the people of God.

In the second half of this question, allow people to consider what has kept them from making a decision. This is an excellent time to see how all of the obstacles between us and our baptisms really aren't obstacles at all. They are excuses we tell ourselves in an attempt to self-sabotage, to keep ourselves from an eternity in heaven with God.

6. This is a beautiful moment and metaphor in the story, where the Philippian jailer washes the wounds of Paul and Silas. Because as the story unfolds, Paul and Silas will turn around and wash the Philippian jailer's spiritual wounds. For us, baptism is a healing activity. When we sin, we don't just wound and hurt the people around us, we also hurt ourselves. Our sin causes self-inflicted damage, cuts, and bruises that cannot be healed by ordinary medicine or ointment. However, we are healed when we are baptized. Our sinful wounds are washed clean and healed.

7. The Philippian jailer no doubt rode an emotional roller coaster that night. When he believed the prisoners were gone, he very likely felt despair and guilt and turmoil over having failed in such a horrific way. When he saw the prisoners were still there, he likely felt a relief he had never experienced before in his life. He probably felt hopeful and like he had been given a new lease on life. He probably felt a warm joy in his heart, knowing he would not be punished for his wrongdoing.

Session Five: Evangelism and Missions

The key in this question is to link the feelings of the Philippian jailer to our own feelings regarding our sinfulness. All of us get to a point where we feel the depths of despair and realize we cannot save ourselves from the mess in which we've landed. But when we come face-to-face with the gospel, we find hope in a new beginning. A joy springs in our hearts because we know we will not receive punishment for our wrongdoing. Instead, we have been granted forgiveness and grace.

8. Allow your group members time to process the question and consider when they've made massive changes in their lives. You may notice a familiar pattern among many of the stories: Big change often happens after a period of intense difficulty. You'll often hear stories of alcoholics who became sober after hitting "rock bottom." Or you'll hear stories of marriages that began to find healing after a particularly rough period. That could be an important prompt for your group members, and one that connects their story to the story of the Philippian jailer.

DEEPER STUDY QUESTIONS

9. While these disciples of John the Baptist had received a baptism of repentance, they had not been baptized into Jesus Christ. For them, baptism was simply an opportunity to change their lives around. However, their baptism did not bring salvation or the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Baptism is a symbol of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. When we are plunged beneath the water, we die to our old lives and rise to a new life in Christ, one marked by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Paul gave these men a second baptism so that they would be united with Christ and would receive the Holy Spirit.

10. This is a difficult question that does not have a clear answer from Scripture. From this story, we can conclude that if a person is not baptized into Jesus Christ, then they should likely seek to get baptized again. Here are some questions to help identify situations in which a person might seek to be baptized again: Before you were baptized, did you understand the decision you were making? Did you repent and intend to live a life following God? Did you know that this was a lifelong commitment and decision? Did you place your faith in Jesus Christ? Were you pressured by another person to become baptized or was it your decision?

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Take some time right after the group watches the video to discuss what your different group members thought were the highlights of the teaching and testimony. There are no right or wrong answers here, but there is an opportunity to discuss some things that were important or maybe missed by others.

1. The best definition of "witness" might be found in the courtroom. A witness is someone who has observed a situation or person. If you're trying a crime in a court of law, you might call witnesses to the stand in order to report on what they've seen. In an effort to discover the truth of what happened, we need people who were present in order to tell us the story.

In the context of Christianity, a witness is someone who has seen and experienced the power of God. They have observed the effects of the Holy Spirit. They have felt how the Father can transform a heart. None of us are like the apostles who saw the risen Lord with our own eyes. Nonetheless, the words of John 20:29 still ring true: Then Jesus told him, *"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*

People who tell others about Jesus are called "witnesses" because their job is to tell others the truth about what they have experienced. They report what they have seen and what they have felt.

2. The key to unlock this question is to help people think beyond the limits of geography. Many will answer with some island nation like Papua New Guinea or the Maldives. However, it helps us to think about those

who are the most unreachable groups of people— even people in our own backyards. The purpose of the question is to ponder who we would consider to be the furthest from the gospel, and then to think about what first step we would take to close that distance.

3. Pentecost was a perfect occasion to share the gospel because the Jews who had traveled to Jerusalem for the festival would eventually go home. And if those people accepted the gospel after hearing Peter and the apostles preach, then they would take the gospel home with them.

However, that's only part of the equation. The other half is that all of the people in Jerusalem that day were Jewish. And all of them would be acquainted with the Old Testament and with the concept of the Messiah. As we will see in a later question in this session, if you read about the missionary journeys of Paul that are detailed in the second half of the book of Acts, you'll see that he had a pattern. Every time Paul entered a foreign city, he first went to the local Jewish synagogue. In Paul's mind, he could communicate the gospel easiest to Jewish men and women, people who already understood many of the concepts he was teaching. So, the Holy Spirit picked His spot carefully and launched the mission of preaching the gospel on a day when it would have the biggest impact.

4. Allow your group members an opportunity to consider various barriers that prevent us from sharing the gospel. The conversation may naturally go to differences that divide people. Beyond language, we could also consider gender, age, personality, political views, and nationality as potential barriers between us and other people. When we consider the task of sharing the truth of the gospel, we do need to keep in mind that many of our words can get "lost in translation." Even if you're speaking the same language as another person, you may not be on the same page in a conversation. The Apostle Paul understood this truth well when he wrote in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23: *"Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not*

free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings."

However, the Holy Spirit helps us through these differences. In Luke 12:12, Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will teach us what to say. The Holy Spirit is uniquely able to bring unity where once there was division and to build a bridge between people who may be far away from one another. The Holy Spirit also enables us to communicate in the language of love and compassion, a language that is universal.

5. It is difficult for us to say for sure what Philip encountered during his ministry to the Samaritans, but it is helpful to walk in his sandals and try to see what he may have seen. He probably received some hostility toward his message. We do know that there were some differences between the beliefs of the Judeans and the Samaritans. In John 4:19-26, we see a Samaritan woman who talks about some of those differences. However, the Samaritans believed in the Messiah, something that united them to the Jews.

The Samaritans likely wondered what Philip may have been hiding, what he wasn't telling them. They probably distrusted his motives and intentions. They were probably looking over their shoulders and making sure no one was coming to attack them. Or perhaps the Samaritans believed that Philip was simply trying to trick them. For this question, it's helpful to think about how others perceive us. Do they distrust us? Do they carry skepticism when considering our words? Will they ultimately walk away regardless of what we say?

6. Allow time for group members to recall and share stories of when someone came to faith in the Lord. This question does not need to focus on anyone you personally have brought to the Lord. It could be a story as simple as watching another person get baptized. When discussing the work of evangelism, it is easy to let difficulties and doubts weigh us down. What lifts our spirits is the difference evangelism makes in the world. There is no joy or victory sweeter than watching someone receive salvation from their sins.

7. This is another question designed to help group members place themselves in the sandals of Paul in order to see what he saw 2,000 years ago. What we are asking for is feelings and emotions, because our feelings and emotions can often be hindrances for us when sharing the gospel. If we were faced with Paul's task to witness to the city of Philippi, some of us would be afraid. Others would feel anger at the wickedness they saw in that pagan city. Some would feel ashamed and inadequate, believing they were not the right person for the job. Still, others would feel exhilarated by the challenge of witnessing to people they had never met. If you wish, you can easily follow-up and ask what is keeping the members of your group from sharing the gospel with others.

8. Allow time for group members to recall and share stories of when they had an opportunity to share the gospel. We should not use this time to criticize the members of the group or say, "You should've done this," or "You should've said that." It is helpful for us to look back on prior opportunities to share the gospel and assess for ourselves how we would have done things differently if given another chance. If we can learn from sharing our faith in the past, then we can become more effective evangelists in the future.

DEEPER STUDY QUESTIONS

9. In this story, we see Barnabas and Saul (who will later be called Paul) being "set apart." The Greek word is *aphorizo*, which means "to appoint for a specific job." At the time, Barnabas and Paul were members of the church of Antioch. However, their ministry needed to extend beyond the borders of that city. Therefore, they were appointed for the work for sharing the gospel with the world. They would become missionaries to the regions of Galatia and Phrygia and Asia Minor.

They fasted and prayed in order to devote themselves to the Lord and to ensure that sending out Barnabas and Paul was His will. For the Christians (and for the Jews as well), the practice of fasting was meant as an act of humility. By depriving yourself of food, you sought to depend on God in order to supply your needs. By fasting, these church leaders were sacrificing their comfort in order to humble themselves

before the Lord to seek His will and desire. Prayer, too, was directed toward discerning what God was telling these church leaders. So, then, we can begin to draw a clearer picture of what was happening: In the church at Antioch, the elders got the sense that something wasn't quite right. They entered a period of fasting and prayer, in order to diminish their own wills and desires and in order to elevate the Lord's will and desire. During their fasting and prayer, they received a word from the Lord, that He was appointing Barnabas and Saul to become missionaries and to share the gospel throughout the world.

When we consider the work of evangelism, we need to be careful that our motives do not obstruct God's motives. What we desire cannot come before what God desires, for what He desires is the good of all. Therefore, it is helpful to go through times of fasting and prayer to see what God has "set us apart" in order to do and to ensure we continue to follow His will.

10. While many people would have been more astounded by a miracle performed before their very eyes, Sergius Paulus was a wiser man. It takes quite a bit of power to cause a man to go blind. It takes quite a bit more to forgive sins. This question is a good opportunity to discuss how the miracle of forgiveness is far more powerful than the miracles of physical healing we see in this world. We might read the stories of the Gospels and become impressed with Jesus' ability to heal the sick, give sight to the blind, walk on water, and even raise the dead back to life. But by far the most powerful thing Jesus ever did was give His life on the cross so that our sins could be forgiven. He opened the way to salvation through His sacrifice. Nothing that has ever happened in the history of the universe is more important than that.

Session Six: Prayer and the Holy Spirit

Please remember these notes are only for reference **if NEEDED**. They are a supplement to the discussion. The goal is not to get to the answers provided below, but instead to engage in open and honest discussion. Please give adequate time for group members to respond to the questions before referring to these notes.

Take some time right after the group watches the video to discuss what your different group members thought were the highlights of the teaching and testimony. There are no right or wrong answers here, but there is an opportunity to discuss some things that were important or maybe missed by others.

1. In this prayer, we see that the apostles actually did very little “asking.” They opened by praising the Lord for His creative power. They remarked at the prophecy the Holy Spirit had spoken centuries earlier that was now coming true before their very eyes. They spent time in prayer, seeing how God’s truth was becoming real right before them. They affirmed that the Lord spoke truly. When they finally get to their petition, they ask for the Lord to give them boldness to continue to speak the word of the Lord. They ask for the ability to perform miracles, in order to strengthen their message during this difficult time.

Here’s what they don’t ask for: They do not ask the Lord to take away the struggle before them. They do not ask the Lord to end their persecution or suffering. They do not ask the Lord to make everything better for them. Instead, they ask for courage to walk forward despite the resistance they were facing. They ask for the ability to preach the truth of the gospel more effectively.

2. This prayer of the apostles is a good model for us to follow in our prayers. There are a number of ways in which this prayer can help us pray through our difficulties: (1) Through prayer, we remember that God is Almighty and all-powerful. We serve the God who created the universe. No situation is too difficult for Him. When we remember this,

we can find peace as well as hope that we can make it through any situation no matter how difficult. (2) Through prayer, we remember that God is in control. Instead of asking the Lord to take away difficulty, it might help us instead to ask for the courage and strength to walk through the difficulty. (3) Through prayer, we can put the problem into perspective and envision potential solutions. Rather than let a difficult situation overwhelm us, prayer allows us to take a step back and look at things from God’s perspective. (4) Through prayer, we can find courage to tackle the difficulties in our life. Prayer does not erase tough times. Instead, prayer helps us to walk through them.

3. Allow your group members time to consider and respond to how they would describe a Spirit-filled person. You will likely get very different portraits from different groups members, and that is okay! The Holy Spirit moves through each of us in different ways, since all of us have different gifts and different functions in the church (1 Corinthians 12:12-31). From the context of this story, you will likely talk about how Spirit-filled people are often connected to the Lord through prayer. You might discuss how they speak with boldness and confidence in the gospel.

4. In order to give some color to this question, you can refer to a parable that Jesus told in Luke 18:1-8...

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’

For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually wear me out with her coming!’”

And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they

get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

We might give many answers for why our prayer should be constant. For one thing, any healthy relationship requires a consistent line of communication. When we are communicating with the Father through prayer, we know that our relationship with Him is in a good place. For another thing, constancy of prayer is a sign of the importance we place upon our faith and upon our connection to the Father. It's a sign that instead of viewing the Father as a vending machine, we view Him as the Creator we worship.

But the persistent widow teaches us something we wouldn't realize at first, because in this story she gives us an example of perseverance and faith. Our prayers should be constant because prayer develops character. And in particular, constant prayer forms us into people who persevere and who are faithful to God.

5. The purpose of this question is to get each group member to use their imagination and to place themselves in the room when the Holy Spirit descended. You can even have your group members close their eyes and try to envision it. Use all five senses to create a full sensory picture. The sound of a violent wind could make us think that there was a

Jerusalem. The tongues of fire hovering over the apostles' heads would have made you think something supernatural was taking place. The whole scene has almost an apocalyptic feel to it, that if you were there, you would think that something universe-altering was taking place. And in fact, it was!

6. The mission of preaching the gospel had to be launched by the Holy Spirit. If not, then anyone could point to the Christian movement and say that the origin was with man and not with God. If you point to many religions around the world, the commonality they share is a single person started them. Islam was begun by Muhammad. Buddhism was begun by Siddhartha Gautama, also known as the Buddha. Mormonism was begun by Joseph Smith.

But the Christian church was inaugurated by God Himself. The Holy Spirit launched it. Our faith does not have an origin in man, but instead in God. It was essential for the apostles to begin their mission in prayer and with the power of the Holy Spirit in order to show this wasn't their idea or a scheme they had devised. Instead, this was the will of God.

In the same way, anything we attempt for the kingdom of God should begin with prayer and with the support of the Holy Spirit. This is how we can know that we're not beginning anything in order to satisfy our own wants or desires. Instead, this is how we stay attuned to God's will and purpose.

7. For this question, some in the group might actually be able to detail their own experiences of being compelled or led by the Holy Spirit. For others who have not felt that pull, this is an opportunity to imagine what it might be like. One thing is sure: The experience of being compelled by the Spirit cannot be entirely comfortable. When the Spirit is the one driving us forward, that means we are out of control. This was very likely what Paul experienced, a sense of unease and discomfort, knowing he was being led to go to Jerusalem and he would be arrested there for the gospel he preached.

There is nothing more anxiety-inducing than the unknown. When we look into a dark room, our imagination runs wild with what might be hiding there. When we look to the future, we can become overcome with all of the terrible things that might happen. For Paul, looking forward to his trip to Jerusalem could not have been reassuring. That is why he needed courage to walk forward. From where did his courage come? There are many sources we could identify: (1) the truth of the gospel message he preached; (2) the power of God, who created the universe; (3) the guarantee of his salvation through Jesus Christ; (4) the presence of the Holy Spirit; (5) the believers in Jerusalem who would receive him.

8. Allow your group members time to open up and speak about their own experiences of receiving prayer from the Lord. Some stories will be difficult to relate, so move forward with kindness and allow each person the space to share.

DEEPER STUDY QUESTIONS

9. At the core, every bias is an assumption. Many people will never think about their personal biases. They simply fold into what people assume is true. For Peter in this story, he assumed without consideration, that the gospel was only for the Jewish people. He also assumed what he was taught as a child (don't eat unclean animals), was more important than what God tells you to do in the moment.

The act of prayer is designed to open us up, to open doors in our minds and hearts that have long been closed. When we communicate with the Father, we open everything that constitutes who we are and allow Him to speak to even the darkest corners of our hearts. As Peter opened himself up to the Father in prayer, the Father responded by challenging Peter's bias.

Prayer is a wonderful opportunity for us to test what we assume to be true. Through a prayerful conversation with the Father, we can talk through our struggles, open our hearts to what God has to say, and hear truth from Him.

10. In Genesis 11, we see the story of the Tower of Babel. In this story, we see that mankind aspires to ascend to heaven in order to sit in the place of God. Since their motives in building this tower were likely impure, the Father confounded them by confusing their language. By the end of the story, all of mankind ended up speaking different languages, such that they could no longer understand each other.

In Acts 10, instead of seeing a story of division, we see a story of unity. We see Cornelius and his household—men and women who were Gentiles—speaking in tongues through the Holy Spirit. In light of the story of Genesis 11, we can see this was a sign that God was bringing them together. Through the Holy Spirit, people groups who were divided by language or culture can be brought together.

This is what Paul writes about in Ephesians 2:19-22, *“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of*

the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”

In the story of the Tower of Babel, mankind was divided when they tried to become God. In the story of Peter and Cornelius, mankind was united when they sought to follow God.

Session Seven: Service and Leadership

Please remember these notes are only for reference **if NEEDED**. They are a supplement to the discussion. The goal is not to get to the answers provided below, but instead to engage in open and honest discussion. Please give adequate time for group members to respond to the questions before referring to these notes.

Take some time right after the group watches the video to discuss what your different group members thought were the highlights of the teaching and testimony. There are no right or wrong answers here, but there is an opportunity to discuss some things that were important or maybe missed by others.

1. Allow every group member an opportunity to contribute to both lists in order to get a composite picture of a great leader and a great servant. After you've compiled the lists, draw special attention to where they match up. Use that to talk about how great leaders are often servants, and how great servants in turn, are often leaders.

Some similarities you might see between great leaders and great servants: shows humility, speaks the truth with boldness, seeks to do what is right, works well with others, listens to feedback, seeks to put others first, speaks with kindness, works with joy, exhibits patience.

2. There is only so much time in the day, and as much as we might want to meet every need that arises in the church, the truth is we cannot. We have to be stewards of what God has given us, both our energy and our time. The Twelve Apostles received a mission from Jesus Christ Himself: to preach the good news of the gospel. Every hour that the Apostles spent on overseeing the distribution of food was an hour taken away from sharing the gospel. The Apostles had to weigh what they were called to do, and for them, they could not ignore the charge given to them by their Lord.

There is another way to look at this question. As we read, we see that

this conflict in the church became an opportunity for seven men to serve and to rise to a position of leadership within the growing church community. If the Apostles sought to take care of the issue with the widows themselves, then they would be taking away an opportunity from the seven deacons to step up and find what God wanted to do through them. Instead of taking care of everything themselves, they empowered faithful men to serve and to lead in the church.

3. In order to answer this question, the group will need to use a bit of creativity since this isn't expressly detailed in the story. Here's one way this all could have taken place.

Stephen began to oversee the distribution of widows in his community. Other believers and other Jews would have seen the compassion of Jesus through how he treated the poorest around them. Stephen became the hands and feet of Jesus, showing kindness to widows who could not take care of themselves in that period of history. As the community saw Stephen's compassion and humility and willingness to serve, they would have listened to what he had to say. They would have asked him questions, about his faith in Christ and about how he understood the Scriptures. Soon, Stephen would find himself beginning a preaching and teaching ministry in Jerusalem, a position of leadership.

Use your creativity in your group to put together a story of how Stephen went from a deacon (remember that the Greek word *diakonos* means "table-waiter") to a powerful preacher of the gospel and a leader in the early church.

As we put together details to form a story, we can ask how positions of service turn into positions of leadership. The plain truth is that we choose to follow people who care. We follow people who are willing to get their hands dirty. We follow people who exhibit the qualities we want to have. We follow people who follow Jesus.

4. The "heart" of a person in the New Testament is a symbol for their motives and desires. When it comes to service and leadership, we need to consider the motives of the people we serve with and the motives of the people we follow. Over time, a person's heart will always be

revealed. Jesus said in Luke 6:45, “The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.”

If a person seeks to lead in order to have power or in order to receive acclaim or in order to become wealthy, then these are not good motives. And over time, those motives will lead to bad leadership. If a person seeks to serve in order to gain their salvation or in order to gain approval from others, then again these are not good motives. And over time, those motives will lead to bad service.

Our hearts need to be aligned with God’s heart. Our desires need to be aligned with His desire. Our motives should be His motives. When we lead and when we serve, we should do so in order to lead others to salvation. We should do so in order to show the love God has shown to us. We should do so in order to make Jesus famous in our world.

5. This is another question that will require quite a bit of creativity with a dash of grace. In this story, the Lord is the one who selects the Twelfth Apostle, and so of course, He would not make a mistake in choosing Matthias. But what if the story went differently, and it was up to the apostles to select? What if they chose the wrong man? This is an interesting scenario worth considering.

If they selected a person with impure motives to be an Apostle, then that man may have taught false doctrine. He may have used his position to extort money from others. He may have fallen into saying what people wanted to hear, rather than what they needed to hear, infecting a large portion of the church with false teaching. He may have thrown a huge monkey wrench into the church just as it was beginning to grow. He may have caused great controversy, such that his faction of believers would split off from the main body of believers.

Spend time using this hypothetical scenario to talk about qualities that are undesirable for someone who would take over such an important position.

6. Allow your group members time to examine their own hearts. This is not an opportunity to allow group members to criticize each other. At the same time, this is not a chance for anyone to engage in tearing him or herself down. Instead, this is a chance for us to examine how we need to move forward in our spiritual life.

One of the ways in which we can motivate others to “step up” their spiritual walk is by raising the stakes. If people depended on you having a strong relationship with God, then how would you meet that challenge? If others listened to your wisdom, then how much more would you read God’s Word to ensure that you were giving good insight?

7. From these verses, we can paint the following picture of Barnabas: (1) He was an encourager, someone who lifted others up rather than tear them down. (2) He was a generous man who took action in order to care of the needs of others. (3) He sees the potential in people, even in a man who used to murder Christians. (4) He is bold and speaks the truth people need to hear. (5) He will stand up for others when no one else will. (6) He was an effective teacher of Scripture. (7) He was trustworthy. (8) He was a joyful person and shared that joy with others. (9) He was good. (10) He was Spirit-filled. (11) He was faithful. (12) He was an effective evangelist who shared the word of God and brought others to Christ. (13) He was willing to collaborate and co-lead with Saul, meaning he didn’t hoard his influence. (14) He did what was in the best of interest of the church under his leadership.

Even though Barnabas featured all of these good qualities, he knew that Saul would assist him in his ministry. Perhaps Barnabas saw that Saul was a more effective teacher of Scripture than he was. Or maybe Barnabas realized that Saul was able to challenge sinfulness and call out wrongdoing better than he could.

8. Allow each group member the time to process this question. If discussion has a difficult time moving forward, you can prompt people with questions as such: Who here feels like they could give wisdom or advice? Who here feels like they could work with persistence to help others? If group members have trouble identifying their strengths, you can look up lists of leadership traits and read through them to help boost the conversation.

DEEPER STUDY QUESTIONS

9. From this verse, we can learn the following things about the motives of “wolves” who want to lead the flock of God astray: (1) They want to deceive others. (2) They want to destroy the faith of others. (3) They want to twist what is true. (4) They want to gather as many followers as they can. (5) They want to increase their wealth. (6) They want great gain without hard work. (7) They want to receive more than they give.

From this list, we can learn about the reasons why people want to lead others away from Christ. Some find joy when lying to others and confusing them. Others like to tear people down without building them back up. Many false teachers are simply interested in gaining a large audience in order to raise their level of influence. Even more false teachers are in it for the money, seeking to deceive people so they open their pocketbooks.

The commonality we can see with these “wolves” is that they gain more than they give. They’re unwilling to sacrifice.

10. There will always be many men and women who will seek to warp the truth of the gospel for selfish gain. Fighting false teaching is extremely difficult, because false teaching often follows the commonly accepted truth of the day. As Paul once wrote in 2 Timothy 4:3-4, *“For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”*

For 2,000 years, the church has had to fight against the messages that people want to hear. That’s why humility and hard work are essential for maintaining the truth. Why? Because that’s how believers give credence to their message.

False teachers often seek gain without hard work and seek prestige and power. On the other hand, Christian leaders are expected to be servants. They are expected to follow the example of Christ, who stooped down in order to wash the feet of his disciples. They are

expected to work hard and to carry themselves with humility. And all of this is to give trustworthiness to the message of Christ, standing out from the false teachers of the world who are only in it for themselves.