

Extra Notes for Leaders and Facilitators

- These teaching outlines are divided into 9 weeks, where each week covers 6 chapters of Luke or Acts (aside from the last week, which is 4 chapters). Not every event or teaching is covered in the outline, but there is one Scripture passage from each chapter. Each week begins with an overarching lesson overview and a summary statement for each chapter within the week. The lesson overview and summary statements are designed to help you see one way the biblical chapters for the week are united together so that each week feels more like 1 lesson rather than 6 mini lessons that just happen to be placed together.
- You will not be able to cover all the teaching points and all of the reflection questions each week, so skip what you need and prioritize either the teaching points or reflection questions based on the dynamics of your class and your own teaching style. I would recommend you review the document ahead of time and determine which points and/or questions you want to prioritize. Also, some of the teaching points may not necessarily be things you would read to the whole group, but are things that would be helpful for you to read as preparation before the meeting.
- As with all studies and discussions, the purpose of this is growing in faithfulness to Jesus and not simply reading all of the material. Do not feel rushed or pressured to cover everything in this outline for the sake of covering it. Use your judgement and flexibility in shepherding your group in growing as disciples of Jesus. The teaching outline is designed in this way in order to accommodate different styles of groups which necessitates the outline being longer than what one group can cover in a standard meeting time.
- In the document, I use the abbreviation (v.) for verse. For example, v.33 means verse 33.
- If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to Mattie Bryant, Pastor of Discipleship at mattie.bryant@cantonfmc.org

Congregation-wide Reading Guide- Read one chapter per day (except Sundays). Use Sunday to worship and to reflect on all you have read during the week.

Sermon Date	Weekly Chapter Reding Dates	Chapters to Read
7/26	7/27-8/01 (Mon-Sat)	Luke 1-Luke 6
8/02	8/03-8/08 (Mon-Sat)	Luke 7-Luke 12
8/09	8/10-8/15 (Mon-Sat)	Luke 13- Luke 18
4 8/16	8/17-8/22 (Mon-Sat)	Luke 19- Luke 24
8/23	8/24-8/29 (Mon-Sat)	Acts 1-Acts 6
8/30	8/31-9/05 (Mon-Sat)	Acts 7- Acts 12
9/06	9/07-9/12 (Mon-Sat)	Acts 13-Acts 18
9/13	9/14-9/19 (Mon-Sat)	Acts 19-24
9/20	9/21-9/24 (Mon-Thurs)	Acts 25-28
9/27	N/A	N/A

Week 1: Luke 1-6

Lesson Overview: Luke 1–6 declares the arrival of Jesus and repeatedly asks the question: How will people respond now that God's promised kingdom has arrived through Christ? Each chapter presents a different response that God desires from His people.

Luke 1: God's kingdom is received through humble faith and obedience.

Luke 2: God's kingdom is lived out when we prioritize our relationship with the Father.

Luke 3: God's kingdom involves a life of genuine repentance and transformation.

Luke 4: God's kingdom requires faithful obedience amid temptation.

Luke 5: God's kingdom calls people to leave everything and follow Jesus.

Luke 6: God's kingdom produces people who reflect the mercy and love of God

Luke 1:26-38 (Mary's Response to God's Call)

Summary: God's kingdom is received through humble faith and obedience.

- The angel Gabriel appears to Mary and announces that she will give birth to Jesus, the promised Messiah and eternal King. Through this announcement, Luke reveals that God is fulfilling His promises to Israel/the Jewish people and bringing His kingdom into the world through the person of Jesus.
- Mary's response is remarkable. Though she does not fully understand how God's plan will unfold and does ask questions about how this will happen, she ultimately responds with humility and obedience: "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled" (1:38).
- Mary's humble obedience shows that the Kingdom of God is not given to the powerful or knowledgeable, but to those willing to say yes to God before they can see the full picture.
- The arrival of God's kingdom calls for a response of faith and obedience. Before Mary understands every detail of what will occur in the future, she willingly submits herself to God's purposes, even knowing that others will mock and criticize her for being pregnant and carrying a baby before she has been married to Joseph.
- REFLECT: What is an area of your life where God may be asking you to trust Him before you fully understand His plan?
- REFLECT: What can you learn from Mary's willingness to surrender her future to God?

Luke 2:41-52 (Jesus in the Temple)

Summary: God's kingdom is lived out when we prioritize our relationship with the Father.

- The final story of Jesus' childhood in Luke's Gospel reveals an important aspect of His identity. At twelve years old, Jesus remains behind in the Temple while His parents return home.
- When Mary and Joseph find Him, Jesus responds, "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (2:49).
- The young Jesus does not choose the Temple over His family out of rebellion. He chooses it because His identity is rooted in the Father. Our priorities reveal what we believe about who we are and who we belong to. Example- Someone who primarily sees themselves as an athlete will do everything they can, including working out for long hours to optimize their athletic capabilities, and someone who most values their identity as a business owner will do everything they can to see the business succeed, even if it takes immoral or unethical decisions. Because Jesus knows that His identity is found in the Father, He prioritizes His relationship with the Father.
- This story of Jesus in the temple also reveals a pattern that will continue throughout Luke's Gospel. Jesus consistently lives in close relationship with the Father, including spending time in prayer with the Father, and also orders His life around the Father's purposes.
- As followers of Jesus, we are invited to develop the same priority for our relationship with God. God's kingdom is lived out in our lives when our relationship with God and our identity as a follower of Jesus is prioritized over the other identities we could claim and actions we could carry out.
- REFLECT: Who are you? What gives your life meaning, purpose, and value?
- REFLECT: In what specific ways have you seen your relationship with God deepen during seasons when you intentionally made this your highest priority?

Luke 3:7-14 (John's Call to Repentance)

Summary: God's kingdom requires a life of genuine repentance and transformation.

- John the Baptist prepares people for the coming of Jesus through a message of repentance.
- John the Baptist makes it clear that repentance is more than feeling sorry for sin. True repentance produces visible change. Those with extra possessions will share with those in need. Tax collectors will stop exploiting people. Soldiers will stop abusing their power.
- True repentance is always visible in the ordinary decisions of everyday life, not just in moments of emotion.

- John the Baptist challenges the crowd not to rely on their religious heritage, family name, or status before God. Instead, they must personally respond to God's call through repentance and faith that leads to life transformation.
- The arrival of God's kingdom requires that all turn away from old ways of living and embrace a new life shaped by obedience to God.
- Repentance is not merely changing our minds. It is changing the direction of our lives.
- REFLECT: If someone who knew you well was asked whether your faith was producing visible change in how you treat people and live out your daily life, what would they actually say? What would you want them to say?
- REFLECT: Is there an area where God may be calling you to repent or change your direction and follow Him more faithfully?

Luke 4:1-13 (The Temptation of Jesus)

Summary: God's kingdom is found through faithful obedience amid temptation.

- Immediately following His baptism, Jesus is led into the wilderness where He faces temptation from the devil.
- Satan's three temptations offer Jesus comfort, power, and status/influence.
- Jesus refuses each one by returning to the Father's word.
- In our lives, faithfulness amid temptation is often less about grand moral failures and more about small, repeated choices to trust God's way over an easier alternative that seems pleasurable or better but that leads to long-term compromise in our faithfulness to God.
- As the old saying goes, "Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay."
- Jesus shows that faithfulness is not determined by the absence of temptation but by obedience in the midst of temptation. Faithfulness is found by choosing to live according to the ways of God rather than the ways of the world.
- The arrival of God's kingdom creates conflict between God's ways and the values of the world. Followers of Jesus must learn to trust God's truth even when competing voices offer easier alternatives.
- REFLECT: What temptations (comfort, power, status, influence, or something else) most often pull you away from faithfulness to God?
- REFLECT: How can Jesus' example encourage you to remain faithful during seasons of testing?

Luke 5:1-11 (The Calling of the First Disciples)

Summary: God's kingdom calls people to leave everything and follow Jesus.

- After a miraculous catch of fish, Peter recognizes that he is standing in the presence of someone far greater than himself.
- Peter's encounter with Jesus first revealed his own sinfulness and unworthiness.
- Likewise, when we encounter Jesus, it can lead us to stand in awe at His holiness as we come to a deeper understanding of the places in our lives that do not reflect the holiness and perfection of God. However, when Peter recognizes his own sinfulness, Jesus does not send him away nor reject him. Instead, Jesus gives Peter an invitation to follow Him and become a fisher of people.
- The first disciples respond by leaving everything and following Jesus. The disciples realize, though they do not fully understand the details, that encountering Jesus and being asked to be His disciple is more significant than anything else they could be doing.
- Luke presents discipleship as more than admiration of Jesus or appreciation of His teachings. It is a complete reorientation of life around following Him.
- The arrival of God's kingdom invites people not simply to believe certain truths about Jesus but to follow Him with their entire lives.
- REFLECT: What is Jesus asking you to leave behind in order to follow Him more fully?
- REFLECT: How would your life look different if Jesus became the center of every decision?

Luke 6:27-36 (Love for Enemies)

Summary: In God's kingdom, people reflect the mercy and love of God to others.

- In this section, Jesus describes the character of those who belong to His kingdom.
- Jesus commands us to love enemies, do good to those who hate us, and show mercy even to those who mistreat us.
- The values of God's kingdom often stand in contrast to the values of the world. Kingdom citizens demonstrate mercy, generosity, humility, and love, even when such responses are costly. The measure of love is not how well we treat those who are good to us, as anyone can do that. The measure of love is how well we treat those who hurt us.
- By living in the way described above, we reflect the character of the Father who is kind to the ungrateful and wicked (verse 35).
- The ultimate goal of living in God's kingdom is not simply a change in behavior but becoming people who increasingly reflect the character of God in the world.

- In verse 36, we see that the reason this way of life is made possible is because the Father is already merciful to us.
- REFLECT: Who is a difficult person that God is calling you to love more fully? What would that love look like in practice?
- REFLECT: What does it require for you to love or forgive an enemy? How does loving and forgiving enemies reveal the transforming work of God's kingdom in a person's life?

Week 2: Luke 7-12

Lesson Overview: In chapters 7-12, Luke presents the ways disciples are called to follow in the way of Jesus within everyday life.

Luke 7: Followers of Jesus live from a deep awareness of God's forgiveness and grace.

Luke 8: Followers of Jesus testify to the restoring power of Jesus in every broken place.

Luke 9: Followers of Jesus deny themselves and follow Jesus wholeheartedly.

Luke 10: Followers of Jesus serve others through sacrificial love and compassion.

Luke 11: Followers of Jesus pursue transformed hearts, not merely religious appearances.

Luke 12: Followers of Jesus faithfully steward all that God has entrusted to them.

Luke 7:36-50 (The Forgiven Sinner)

Summary: Followers of Jesus live from a deep awareness of God's forgiveness and grace.

- Jesus willingly dines at the house of a Pharisee, yet the Pharisee does not appropriately honor Jesus.
- On the other hand, Jesus does not push away the repentant sinner. He welcomes her act of worship.
- A recognition of our own sinfulness should lead us to adoration, worship, and praise of Jesus. The grace Jesus gives leads to a transformed heart that loves God rather than a heart that is focused on the self.
- The Pharisee's response of criticizing Jesus's association with the sinner, shows how pride and the seeing of ourselves as better than others, can blind our heart to our need for the generous grace of God.
- In verse 48, Jesus shows his authority not to just improve someone's life but to erase shame and forgive sin.
- REFLECT: How can your pride or judgment of someone else blind you to your own need for forgiveness?
- REFLECT: What would it look like for you to regularly, perhaps daily, remember and worship God for the forgiveness He has shown to you?

Luke 8:26-39 (Healing a Man with a Demon)

Summary: Followers of Jesus testify to the restoring power of Jesus in every broken place.

- Jesus has authority over all demons, evil, and spiritual darkness. There is none who can rival Jesus in terms of power and authority. Similarly, because of the reach of

Jesus's power we can say there is no part of our lives that is too broken for Jesus to restore. Even the man possessed by a demon, who is completely broken, rejected by people, and cut off from society experiences restoration.

- However, not everyone celebrated Jesus's healing (v. 35-37). People feared Jesus because there was something about his actions that disrupted the status quo. Also, the demons cast out of the man then entering the pigs who drowned represents a financial loss for the community in the form of dead pigs. The value of the pigs is preferred to the healing of a man. Jesus restores what is broken, which means prioritizing life over financial gain and disrupting the brokenness in our systems and changing the habits that we have grown accustomed to living with so that life can more fully be found for us and for others.
- The healed man leaves and is instructed to share with others of what Jesus has done for him (v. 39)
- The crowd's fear is a sobering reminder that genuine restoration can be threatening to those who do not want change. Followers of Jesus should expect that testifying to His restoring power, as the healed man was called to do, will not always be welcomed, even by those who claim to want healing. Nonetheless, the call of the followers of Jesus to testify to Jesus's healing through personal stories and through joining with God in His work of bringing justice and healing does not change.
- REFLECT: How can you find yourself reluctant to embrace what Jesus is doing because of the ways that it pushes against your desire for what is normal or comfortable?
- REFLECT: What testimony would you share with others relating to what Jesus has done in healing or redeeming you?

Luke 9:18-27 The profession of Peter and call to discipleship

Summary: Followers of Jesus deny themselves and follow Jesus wholeheartedly.

- The question of who Jesus is uniquely personal. Jesus is not interested in who others in the culture or others in one's family say He is. Jesus desires to know who Peter, specifically says Jesus is (v. 18-20)
- The profession of Jesus's identity as the Messiah (v.20) is then followed by a description of Jesus's calling which includes a life of suffering, rejection, and death before the victory of the resurrection (v. 22)
- The calling of the Messiah mirrors the calling of disciples who must whole-heartedly deny their own comforts, embrace suffering, and surrender control of their life in order to follow where Jesus leads (v. 23)

- Spiritual gain often looks like loss to the world while gain according to the world's eyes often leads to spiritual loss and a luke-warm faith.
- REFLECT: Who do you say that Jesus is?
- REFLECT: Are you willing to whole heartedly embrace a life of suffering and a life of denial of the comforts or pleasures of the world in order to follow Jesus?

Luke 10:25-37 (Loving One's Neighbor)

Summary: Followers of Jesus serve others through sacrificial love and compassion.

- The question of "who is my neighbor?" (v. 29) is the entirely wrong question to ask. This question seeks to limit or put boundaries around one's call to love others., as evidenced by the lawyer asking the question for the purpose of trying to justify himself (v. 28) and likely his limited or conditional love for others. The better question, the one asked in (v. 36) is "how can I be a neighbor?" by serving someone else. The word "neighbor" shifts from being the object of one's care as in (v. 29) to being a verb (v. 36) that one lives out through their actions.
- The priest and Levite, the religious leaders, choose to "pass by on the other side of the road (v. 31-32), demonstrating that they saw the beaten man, but chose not to act. However, the Samaritan is moved to action. One's religious status is not determined by title but by action.
- The Samaritan asks the inn keeper to do whatever is needed to care for the beaten man, and the Samaritan will return to pay the cost (v. 35) Loving one's neighbor involves the unconditional/sacrificial use of resources and the willingness for one's own plan and schedule to be interrupted for the sake of caring for someone else.
- REFLECT: Is my schedule and life interruptible, or am I too preoccupied with my own plans to see the needs of others?
- REFLECT: Who is God calling me to be a neighbor to?

Luke 11:37-44 (Purity in Religion & Woes to Pharisees)

Summary: Followers of Jesus pursue transformed hearts, not merely religious appearances.

- Purity is not found merely in outward appearance nor in ritualistic actions. Purity is found in the character of one's heart, which then leads one to act in genuine love towards God and one's neighbor.
- Jesus condemns religious acts meant to gain public respect or recognition but do little to foster a deeper relationship with God. The issue is pride and a life that desires praise but that is not being transformed by the religion one professes. In our

lives, we have the same danger to focus on outward appearance over the transformation of the character of our hearts.

- Followers of Jesus are not merely concerned with appearing righteous, but with becoming whole and not settling for religious activity without inward transformation.
- In Jewish law, walking upon an unmarked grave (v. 44) is dangerous because it defiled someone or made them ceremonially unclean without the person realizing that they had been defiled and made unclean. Thus, one of the reasons Jesus uses this line is to show how the Pharisees pride and attitude of religious superiority can contaminate the religious life of the community. Our actions and lifestyle do not just affect us. They can harm the people around us.
- REFLECT: What are contemporary examples of appearing religious but without the inward heart transformation?
- REFLECT: Is your pursuit of following Jesus focused more on outward actions or the inward transformation of the heart? In other words, where are you managing your appearance/reputation instead of doing the hard and uncomfortable work of seeking inward transformation?

Luke 12:13-21 (Storing up Treasures)

Summary: Followers of Jesus faithfully steward all that God has entrusted to them.

- Greed is not merely about the amount of stuff one has but rather a posture of the heart that desires more goods or that finds ultimate satisfaction in one's possessions/money.
- We are not told the value of the inheritance by the person of the crowd in v.13. We only see how the focus on possessions is a detriment to one's spiritual state and how it can divide families, such as in the conflict likely to occur between the one from the crowd and their brother.
- Jesus reverses the values of the world by stating that life is not found in one's possessions or material goods (v. 15)
- The parable of the rich man demonstrates one who rests in the security of their possessions. The man is not concerned with living a life of faithfulness to God as this man believes the measure of success is found in possessions and not in dependence and trust in God and His grace.
- Stewardship is one of the most concrete forms of discipleship. How we view our money, time, and possessions is not separate from following Jesus. The way we use our time, money, and possessions can help reveal whether we are following Jesus wholeheartedly or only following Him in the areas that are convenient.

- REFLECT: Where do I see greed in my heart? Where do I find ultimate comfort, security, or satisfaction in the possessions, status, or money that I have?
- How is God inviting me to become more fully dependent upon Him rather than being dependent upon the things that I have?

Week 3: Luke 13-18

Lesson Overview: The Kingdom of God, “the upside-down Kingdom” reverses our values and expectations in all areas of life.

Luke 13: The Kingdom of God begins with Jesus moving towards us.

Luke 14: The Kingdom of God confronts misplaced priorities and reaches out to the unexpected.

Luke 15: The Kingdom of God welcomes the lost and restores the unworthy.

Luke 16: The Kingdom of God overturns our measures of success and what matters.

Luke 17: The Kingdom of God calls for faith in uncertainty and shows that true healing comes when we recognize the nature of grace.

Luke 18: The Kingdom of God justifies the humble and pulls down the self-righteous.

Luke 13:10-17 (Healing on the Sabbath)

Summary: The Kingdom of God begins with Jesus moving towards us.

- In this instance of healing, Jesus makes the first move in seeing and calling out to the crippled woman. There is no indication that the woman has an extraordinary measure of faith, yet she receives a gift of healing that she did not deserve or even ask for.
- From Jesus’s interaction with the crippled woman, we see the prevenient grace of God that moves towards us before we ever choose to move towards God.
- We tend to assume that our relationship with God begins with our movement toward Him, through our decision, our prayer, or our seeking. Luke 13 subverts that assumption. The woman does not seek Jesus out, yet Jesus sees her, calls her, and heals her. The kingdom begins not with our reaching up to God but with God coming down to us.
- Note that in this exchange between Jesus and his opponents, Jesus does not abolish the practice of Sabbath. Rather, Jesus reaffirms how certain life-giving activities (such as works of healing and caring for animals or by extension children) may be performed on the Sabbath when the need presents itself.
- This understanding of certain work being performed on the Sabbath is affirmed by those in the synagogue who water their animals on the Sabbath (v. 15). Thus, the real issue in this passage is not that Jesus healed on the Sabbath, but that Jesus

demonstrated His power and authority to heal, which is a power not possessed by Jesus's opponents.

- The Pharisees are threatened by the ways Jesus can move towards and initiate restoration to those the Pharisees were not concerned with.
- REFLECT: In your life, how have you experienced God's grace moving towards you when you may not have been actively seeking or pursuing God?
- REFLECT: How should knowing that the Kingdom begins with Jesus moving towards us change the way we think about people in our lives who seem far from God?

Luke 14:15-24 (Parable of the Great Banquet)

Summary: The Kingdom of God confronts misplaced priorities and reaches out to the unexpected.

- The banquet begins with an offer of grace. The invitations are sent out based on the generosity and goodness of God and not because any person has earned or was deemed worthy of a seat at the table.
- Some argue that the excuses given by those first invited to the banquet (v. 18-20) would have been seen as legitimate for the cultural standards of the time. Deuteronomy 24:5 even states that being recently married (the excuse given in v. 20) is an appropriate reason to avoid being sent to war.
- However, these excuses, no matter how appropriate culturally or not, are not accepted in the Kingdom of God. The buying of land or oxen or getting married are not in themselves bad, yet the problem arises when one's attachment to these things prevents one from fulfilling their ultimate priority of living in obedience and worship to God.
- Anything that prevents or distracts us from living out our number one priority of loving and serving God is an idol.
- The host demonstrates the danger of spiritual complacency or luke-warm faith by becoming angry at those who choose a life other than one of ultimate devotion to God.
- The great reversal in the Kingdom of God is seen as the host then invites those who the culture would deem as unworthy for a great banquet (v. 21).
- Yet, even after the first round of invitations is extended to the "unworthy guests" there is still more seats that God desires to fill, leading invitations to be sent to those on the roads (v. 23). God, in His compassion and generosity, desires that all people be given an opportunity to respond and to accept the invitation to live in His Kingdom.

- To summarize, this parable contains two reversals. First, some who had the ability to own land, cattle, or marry are kept out, which is a reversal of the assumption that the respectable and established will automatically have a place in the kingdom. Second, those the culture considers unworthy are welcomed, a reversal of the assumption that God's invitation follows social hierarchies. The upside-down kingdom both closes doors that people assumed were open to those with influence and opens doors that people assumed were closed to those who lacked status.
- REFLECT: What things in your life can become excuses that keep you from living in full obedience and service to God?
REFLECT: How might God be calling you to share the Gospel with someone who might be seen as overlooked or a part of verses 21-22?

Luke 15:11-31 (Parable of the Prodigal Son)

Summary: The Kingdom of God welcomes the lost and restores the unworthy.

- The younger son deeply insults his father by requesting his share of the inheritance early. This would be the modern-day equivalent of telling one's parents that they wish they were already dead because all one cares about is the money their parents can provide.
- The younger son then continues deeper into his life of rebellion by wasting his father's money.
- Once the son recognizes the error in his ways, he repents and seeks to become one of his father's servants. The son cannot see a way where he would be welcomed as part of his father's family on account of his past actions, which leads him to seek the status of a servant.
- The father runs to the son and welcomes him back. The father does not give time for the son to provide a long-winded apology. He simply hears the son's confession and begins planning his return celebration.
- Pastor and author Henri Nouwen writes in his book *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, that once the younger son is welcomed home, he is called to ultimately grow into the role of the father, offering forgiveness to those who will wrong him. This understanding of the rebellious son who receives grace becoming the father who offers grace is reflective of the journey of a follower of Jesus. Every Christ-follower begins as the younger son, who is in need of grace, and once we accept this grace and allow God to work within us, we become conformed to the character of Christ and begin to offer to others the love and grace that we have first received from God.
- In this parable, we also see the resentment of the older son, who refuses to join in the celebration of the family. The older son sees the father's love for the younger

one but fails to realize that he is also loved by the father. The older son is easily moved to jealousy and bitterness because he does not recognize that the father's love for the younger son does not negate the father's love of him, the older son. Further, the older son does not see a need for celebration at the younger son's return, as the older son and some of us may say that this party celebrates or at least negates the seriousness of the son's sin. However, in this story, the father's decision to have a party is not presented as something for us to evaluate or judge but something for us to replicate in our own lives, even as it may rub against our American (not Kingdom) understanding of fairness and justice.

- REFLECT: In what ways can you reflect the perspective of the older son, believing that some are unworthy of coming to faith in Christ and experiencing the forgiveness and restoration that is found in Him?
- REFLECT: How is God calling you to embody the posture of the father by offering forgiveness and a second chance to someone who has wronged you?

Luke 16:19-31 (Rich Man & Lazarus)

Summary: The Kingdom of God overturns our measures of success and what matters.

- The rich man demonstrates an indifference to the suffering of the poor. The rich man's posture towards the poor is in direct contrast with the posture of the heart of God who comforts and extends grace, even to the lowest in society.
- Verse 25 represents the theme throughout the Gospel of Luke of the difference between seeing with worldly eyes and seeing with spiritual eyes. The rich man who saw with worldly eyes relished in his temporary comforts while forgetting the ultimate state of his soul. Meanwhile, Lazarus who experienced distress on earth is now experiencing a reward.
- This parable goes on to challenge the understanding that those who prosper or who have material success are blessed by God. The rich man had wealth, yet he was condemned in judgement for his ways of living. One cannot assume that seeing someone with success on this earth equals them being favored or looked upon positively by God.
- The rich man believes that his brothers still living on earth would repent should Lazarus appear to them (v. 27-28), yet we see in Abraham's response, that the issue with the rich man's brothers (and also the rich man) is not that they did not have enough information or evidence to lead them to a new way of life based on kingdom values. The Old Testament has provided them with ample information. The problem for the rich man and his brothers is that they appear unwilling to respond to the voice of God as it has already been revealed to them.

- The reversal of the Kingdom has already occurred and now is the time to respond by valuing the eternal and giving of one's life in service to others, not in service to one's own desires.
- REFLECT: How does this parable counter assumptions you may have made about the relationship between someone's success and the favor they have in the eyes of God?
- REFLECT: How does this parable convict you of distortions in your own understanding of success?

Luke 17:11-19 (The Response to Grace)

Summary: The Kingdom of God calls for faith in uncertainty and shows that true healing comes when we recognize the nature of grace.

- In the lepers crying out to Jesus (v. 13) they demonstrate their own insufficiency and need for one greater than themselves. They don't act like this problem is one they can fix on their own (as we are prone to do). Rather, they wholeheartedly and unashamedly seek out the power that can only come from Jesus.
- The lepers' healing does not happen immediately once Jesus speaks to them. It occurs as they are walking back to the priest (v. 14). In our lives, we often want certainty. We will trust God once He has done the thing we have asked Him to do in the way we have asked Him to do it. Yet, these lepers are not healed until they leave Jesus's sight and walk in obedience to His words. If our faith is predicated or based on us first seeing results, then we really don't have faith in God. We only have faith in what God can do for us. The Kingdom reversal happens as we choose to believe before we can see.
- Once Jesus physically heals them, only one returns to offer thanksgiving for the act Jesus has done. Only one out of the ten shows the response of gratefulness for what Jesus did for them. There is never a time when we deserve the grace or healing of God. It is always freely given out of God's goodness, and ought to lead us to respond with praise and thanksgiving for the invaluable gift we have received.
- Jesus, addressing only the grateful leper, states in verse 19 that his faith had made him well. All of the lepers had already been healed physically, yet the leper who returns experiences a spiritual healing that the other lepers did not receive. The Greek word "sozo" translated in this verse in English as "made well" is also translated in many other places in the Bible as meaning "salvation" or "to save." Only the leper who comes back to Jesus in praise after the healing has occurred experiences a deeper healing, the being made well, of his soul. When we offer our

worship and thanksgiving to God, we experience God redeeming and transforming us.

- REFLECT: Where is God calling you to a step of obedience, even when you are not certain of the outcome?
- REFLECT: What is one blessing in your life that you haven't recently thanked God for? How can you offer God praise for that blessing this week?

Luke 18:9-14 (Call to Humility)

Summary: The Kingdom of God justifies the humble and pulls down the self-righteous.

- In verse 9, we see the purpose of this parable is two-fold. It is meant to address a) people who trust in their own righteousness, meaning that they believe they can become holy and/or earn salvation on account of their own works and b) people who see themselves as better than others.
- The Pharisee embodies both of these traits. First, the Pharisee is presented as believing his salvation and holiness can occur on account of fasting and tithing. The Pharisee mistakenly believes that one can be made worthy of receiving salvation and holiness through one's works.
- The Pharisee embodies the second trait by believing that he is inherently better and more worthy than tax collectors and others. For the Pharisee, his religious achievement or religious productivity has produced pride and feelings of superiority.
- However, in this story, the tax collector, who recognizes his own brokenness and need for mercy is forgiven and justified.
- Humility does not mean having low self-esteem. Rather, humility involves a right recognition of reality, which will include recognizing a) the great need all persons, including me, have for Jesus in order to be made holy/receive salvation and b) the recognition of all persons as being created in the image of God, of immeasurable worth to God, and thus worthy of my love and respect.
- REFLECT: What does it feel like to come to God in the same manner as the tax collector with nothing to offer and no solid track record or good actions to point to? Is that posture easy or difficult for you, and why?
- REFLECT: Where do you find yourself thinking that you are better or more worthy than another person or group of people?

Week 4: Luke 19-24

Lesson Overview: These chapters reveal Jesus as the promised Messiah or King and shows the various ways His followers are called to respond to Him.

Luke 19: Worship the Humble King.

Luke 20: Submit to the King who owns all things.

Luke 21: Remain faithful to the King who empowers us to persevere.

Luke 22: Surrender to the King who first surrendered His will for us.

Luke 23: Receive and extend the grace of the forgiving King.

Luke 24: Proclaim the victory of the historical King.

Luke 19:28-40 (Entry to Jerusalem)

Summary: Worship the Humble King.

- The disciples are closely involved with Jesus's entry into Jerusalem: they retrieve the colt, place their cloaks on the colt, place Jesus on the colt, and joyfully praise Jesus as He rides upon the colt. The great involvement of the disciples in the story that marks the beginning of Jesus's crucifixion may symbolize preparation and point to the persecution that the disciples will partake in after Jesus's resurrection.
- Jesus's ride into Jerusalem on a colt rather than a great horse shows that true power is seen in humility.
- Verse 37 reveals that those gathered to praise Jesus are a "multitude of disciples." The passage goes beyond just using the generic word of "crowd" in order to show that those who recognized Jesus as the King were those who had been closely following Him.
- Jesus's refusal to follow the Pharisees request to quiet the disciples (v. 39-40) points to the truth that Jesus's identity cannot be hidden indefinitely. His identity will be somewhat revealed upon the crucifixion and resurrection, and it will be fully revealed in the time that is coming when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord (see Philippians 2:9-11).
- The outflow of experiencing Jesus as the humble King is one of worship as seen through the actions of praise offered by the disciples.
- REFLECT: How does Jesus's ride into Jerusalem on a colt challenge your understanding of what it means to have power?

- REFLECT: How might God be inviting you to more fully worship Him through specific acts of devotion and/or the way you live your life?

Luke 20:9-19 (Parable of the Tenants)

Summary: Submit to the King who owns all things.

- One of the reasons the tenants may refuse to give the proper share of the produce to the servant of the vineyard owner is because the tenants have forgotten that they are only stewards of land that ultimately belong to the vineyard owner (God).
- The tenants desire to use all of the land according to their purposes and for their gain. They have forgotten their call to be stewards in using the land in a way that serves and brings glory to God. In other words, they have neglected their call to submit to the King who owns all things.
- When the tenants receive warnings from the slaves (the prophets) and from the vineyard owner's son (Jesus), they refuse to repent from their selfishness and greed.
- The tenants go so far as to kill the vineyard owner's son, foreshadowing the religious elite crucifying Jesus because they see Jesus as a threat to the power structure and way of life that has been created specifically to benefit them.
- The purpose of this parable, as seen in verse 19, is to speak against the scribes and priests. However, rather than hearing this parable today as only a condemnation against other people, we should also hear this parable as inviting us to consider the places in our lives where we have rejected Christ and are not fully submitting to Him as the Lord of our lives.
- REFLECT: What area of your life is not fully submitted to the reign and lordship of Jesus?
- REFLECT: Submitting to a King who owns all things means releasing the illusion that any part of your life is ultimately yours to control. What area of your life is hardest to hold with open hands, and what would it look like to genuinely surrender that to God?

Luke 21:12-19 (Enduring Persecution)

Summary: Remain faithful to the King who empowers us to persevere.

- Jesus tells His disciples to expect that they will face persecution. The world does not agree with the values and teachings of Jesus and thus one should not be surprised when they experience those in the world fighting against them.
- Further, particularly in the context of America where there is typically freedom of religion, we should not expect that the world will support or promote Christian values. Example- It is unreasonable to expect that America will legislate us taking a

weekly Sabbath. Rather, this is a choice each person and family must make for themselves in choosing what to say “yes” to and also what to say “no” to.

- Yet, in the midst of persecution and trial, we are promised to receive supernatural strength from Jesus in order to know what to say and how to respond. When we are in situations where we want to show peace while also remaining faithful to our convictions, we should actively seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in order to discern how to respond.
- Jesus concludes this section by promising that though there will be current trials and hardships, these do not compare to the good found in eternal salvation through Jesus Christ. Thus, stay focused on what matters for eternity and be willing to lose everything that doesn’t matter or have eternal value. Remain faithful to the King and trust that He will give us the strength to persevere.
- REFLECT: When have you experienced a disconnect between the way you wanted to live as a Christian and the way you felt someone in the world or the culture was pressuring you to live?
- REFLECT: What would it look like for you to seek wisdom and guidance from the Holy Spirit when you are unsure of how to respond in a situation where someone is going against your values as a Christian?

Luke 22:39-46 (Prayer of Surrender)

Summary: Surrender to the King who first surrendered His will for us.

- Jesus acknowledges His own desire to avoid the cross that is set before Him (v. 42). Jesus shows us that faithfulness can still involve experiencing temptation and desiring to act in a way that is contrary to God’s will.
- However, Jesus concludes His prayer by saying “not my will but yours be done.” From these words, Jesus surrenders His desire to avoid the suffering of the cross to the Father and ultimately prays for the Father’s will, regardless of what it is, to be done.
- Faithful wrestling with God involves both a) a recognition of our wants and desires and b) a surrendering of these desires to God as we choose to trust that God’s will is ultimately the one we will follow.
- As Jesus prays, an angel appears to strengthen Him (v. 43), which shows God’s desire to empower those who desire to do His will. The strength God provides rarely looks like allowing us to avoid the struggle. Rather, it often looks like giving us the strength to follow God’s will in the middle of the trial.
- In verse 46, Jesus closes His prayer with a readiness to obey the Father’s will. The circumstances have not changed, the cross is still coming, yet Jesus rises in prayer

with a resolve to meet the trial ahead. Jesus's prayer did not change His circumstances. Yet, His prayer changed Him and made Him ready for what was ahead. Sometimes, the greatest miracle God performs in prayer is changing us and shaping our character through it.

- REFLECT: What is a situation in your life where you are feeling the tension between desiring to follow your own will and trusting and submitting to God's will? How will you choose surrender to the King in this situation?
- REFLECT: Has there been a time when prayer changed your perspective, attitude, or character even though your circumstances remained the same? What did God teach you through that experience?

Luke 23:32-43 (The Reach of the Cross)

Summary: Receive and extend the grace of the forgiving King.

- In this section, one sees the reach of the forgiveness of the King.
- First, Jesus prays in verse 34 for the forgiveness of those who were killing Him.
- In this moment, Jesus does not rebuke those who mock Him throughout verses 35-40, nor does Jesus ever take back or express regret over the prayer of forgiveness He prayed in verse 34. Jesus's prayer for forgiveness for these people endures even as the people do not have a change in their heart or actions. Jesus shows a forgiveness that is unconditional in that it is not based on how the other people respond to the act of forgiveness that He takes.
- Jesus also shows saving forgiveness to the criminal on the cross who recognizes Jesus's identity. The criminal acknowledges his own unworthiness and the ways that he is deserving of the punishment of death. Jesus's response to this criminal is one of grace as He grants the criminal eternal life even though the criminal himself admitted that he is not worthy of being saved from death.
- Personally receiving the grace of the forgiving King leads us to allow that grace to reshape how we extend forgiveness to others, including those who have not asked for our forgiveness and who will not appreciate it.
- REFLECT: Jesus forgives the criminal who had nothing to offer and who was not worthy of forgiveness. Is there something in your past that makes it hard to fully receive God's forgiveness for yourself? What would it mean to let the forgiveness of the King be for you personally and not just for others?
- REFLECT: How do Jesus's actions towards the mocking crowd demonstrate unconditional forgiveness? How is God calling you to offer this kind of forgiveness to someone else?

Luke 24:44-49 (The Summary of the Gospel)

Summary: Proclaim the victory of the historical King.

- Jesus is the fulfillment of all the Scriptures of the Old Testament (v. 44). His life is rooted in actual historical events that have fulfilled the prophecies of the coming Messiah. Christianity is more than a belief system or folklore tale. It is built upon God acting in the world, particularly seen in God taking on human flesh through the life and person of Jesus.
- Verses 46-47 is a high-level summary of the Gospel that Christianity proclaims centered upon the historical act of Jesus in the crucifixion and resurrection and the call for humanity to repent from sin, experience forgiveness, and be sent as witnesses who proclaim the new life that can only be found in Christ. From this summary, we see the Christian faith as initiated by the King's coming to us and offering His life for us. Then people are called to follow Him through turning from their old ways of living, and through grace, being empowered to live in freedom from sin and to allow this new life to affect how they live with others by bearing witness to who Jesus is and what He has done.
- REFLECT: How do you generally think of Christianity? Do you tend to think of it as a system of doctrines and beliefs, a system of stories, or as God's historical acts within the world?
- REFLECT: Who is God calling you to share your faith with?

Week 5: Acts 1-6

Lesson Overview: The church is born not through human initiative but through the power and work of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1: Seek the power of the Spirit.

Acts 2: Participate in the community the Spirit creates.

Acts 3: Follow the Spirit in speaking Jesus in the broken places He sends you.

Acts 4: Trust the Spirit when the mission meets opposition.

Acts 5: Rest in the Spirit's power to carry on what has been started.

Acts 6: Serve others through the power of the Spirit.

Acts 1:3-9 (Ascension of Jesus & the Need of the Holy Spirit)

Summary: Seek the power of the Spirit.

- In the storyline of Luke-Acts the last instructions Jesus gives to His disciples before He ascends into heaven are related to receiving the Holy Spirit.
- These instructions Jesus gives are not presented as suggestions or optional instructions. Rather, in verse 4 the word “command” is used to illustrate the necessity of the disciples receiving the Holy Spirit to carry out their mission. Even though the disciples had lived with and received instruction from Jesus for 3 years, this was not enough to carry out the mission. We may know a lot of things about Jesus, and we may even spend a lot of time at church, but none of these things can substitute for having a personal relationship with Jesus where we experience the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.
- EXTRA INFO: The mission Jesus gives to the disciples in Acts 1:8 has four interconnected categories. Jerusalem (their local community- for us this would be Cherokee County), Judea (the larger region the disciples are a part of- for us this would be the state of Georgia or perhaps all of the Southeastern United States), Samaria (the overlooked or outcast- for us this may be kids in foster care, people experiencing homelessness, etc), The end of the earth (people throughout the world, even in far away places and small indigenous tribes, who have not yet heard the Gospel). The word “and” rather than “or” between each of these four categories that Jesus discusses reminds us that while every Christian may not be called to serve as an international missionary, every Christian is called to support/pray for the work of the church in all four areas. The church cannot decide that there is

enough work to do in our own region and then negate the call to preach the Gospel to the end of the earth, as this is not an option given by Jesus in His command.

- The mission is then carried out by receiving power from the Holy Spirit. Just as a lamp cannot work unless it is plugged in, the mission of God cannot be carried out unless disciples are filled with the “power source” found in the Holy Spirit, who dwells within every follower of Jesus.
- Jesus’s ascension into heaven symbolizes the baton of earthly ministry being handed from Jesus to all the disciples who would come after Him. However, the earthly ministry that Jesus has given to us is not one we do in our own strength but through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- REFLECT: Do you see the presence of the Holy Spirit as integral for living a faithful life and serving as a faithful witness in the world?
- REFLECT: When was the last time you devoted yourself to praying for God to once again pour out His Holy Spirit upon you or to make you more aware of the ways the Holy Spirit was working in your life? What might God be saying to you through your answer to this question?

Acts 2:42-47 (The Community of Believers)

Summary: Participate in the community the Spirit creates.

- After Peter’s Spirit-filled preaching to those gathered in Jerusalem, 3,000 people repent from their sin, profess their faith in Jesus Christ, are forgiven of their sin, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- It should first be noted that the community created by the Spirit in Acts 2:42-47 likely involves a diverse group of people with varying nationalities as we see in Acts 2:5 that the Jews who gathered at Pentecost who heard and some of whom who positively responded to Peter’s speech included people from “every nation under heaven.” Thus, the Spirit’s work of uniting people together can surpass our cultural and ethnic differences.
- In Acts 2, beginning with verse 42, gathering in community with others is assumed to be the natural progression after someone converts to Christianity. The Scripture leaves no room for a Christian faith that is not practiced and lived out with other believers. However, even deeper than this, the Scripture leaves no room for a Christian faith where Christians may “attend” church but are not actively participating in and sacrificially involved in the life of the church.
- The Christian community the Spirit creates involves devotion to the teachings of Jesus, encouraging one another, praying for one another, living out of one’s spiritual

giftedness, giving of one's own resources to support those in need, and eating together in homes.

- This first community also shared their possessions and held everything in common with one another. Though the church no longer practices this exact understanding of property and material goods, this practice reveals the work of the Spirit in leading people to be united together under the name of Jesus to the extent that they were willing to forsake all claims to individual ownership of goods in order to further the mission of the church.
- The community the Spirit creates is in itself an outward witness to the world of the power of God's grace, as the very act of the disciples gathering together and living in united fellowship with one another led to more being saved every day (v. 47).
- REFLECT: Do you think of church as something you attend or something you participate in? Explain your answer.
- REFLECT: How might God be calling you to more fully engage in Christian community for the sake of growing in your own faith and becoming a deeper witness for the world?

Acts 3:2-10 (Peter Healing a Lame Man)

Summary: Follow the Spirit in speaking Jesus in the broken places He sends you.

- The lame man has likely spent years laying in front of the temple as he is unable to work and totally dependent on others to provide for his needs.
- When Peter and John see and acknowledge this lame man, they first demonstrate the way the Holy Spirit works in leading us outward in mission to the outcast, the lost, and the broken. The same Spirit who gathered believers for fellowship in Acts 2 leads them out in Acts 3 to engage with those outside of the Christian community.
- Peter offers the lame man the strongest and most powerful gift possible in giving him the opportunity to hear the name of Jesus and experience the redemption of Jesus, made tangible in this situation through God healing this man of his physical disability.
- All people who follow Jesus have the great gift of being able to speak Jesus into the lives of others.
- There are times when God will call us to serve someone else through providing physical goods or services to someone in need, yet even then, we must look for opportunities to share the Gospel and allow God to work through us in leading people to Jesus. Food or money can help someone for a time, but Jesus provides eternal joy and peace that lasts even in the midst of trials and hard circumstances.

- God is in the business of using us to restore broken people and thus we must be in the business of being in relationship with and sharing life with the broken people who God desires to redeem.
- The Spirit leads us in being used as His instruments to restore brokenness because it provides a witness of God's power to heal what we thought was beyond restoration. In verse 10, those gathered are amazed as they see this man who was lame now able to walk.
- REFLECT: How do you see this relationship between being in fellowship with others (Acts 2) but also being witnesses of Jesus out in the world (Acts 3) at work in your own life? Do you tend to get off-balance and over prioritize either an Acts 2 or Acts 3 life to the extent that you neglect the other aspect of the Christian life?
- REFLECT: What would it look like for you to be more intentional in building relationships with people who others may overlook or ignore?

Acts 4:13-20 (Opposition to the Gospel)

Summary: Trust the Spirit when the mission meets opposition.

- Because of the Spirit's work in the life of Peter and John, other people notice there is something different about them. Being with Jesus should change us so that other people can see it. Peter and John are "ordinary and unschooled" (v. 13) but God is using them to lay the foundations for a movement that would change the world.
- The religious leaders feel threatened by this new Jesus movement, and they are afraid of losing their power. They see the evidence of the Holy Spirit at work, through the lame man who now walks, and they fear this movement will spread quickly.
- Even though Peter and John are told to keep quiet about Jesus, they refuse. Peter and John do not complain about experiencing opposition and persecution nor do they worry that the resistance they are experiencing means that something is wrong.
- Instead, Peter and John choose to continue to trust in the leading of God, which will lead them to continue preaching the Gospel and experiencing even more persecution.
- When the Gospel is boldly demonstrated and proclaimed, it will cause opposition. We should not fear or stop what we are doing, but rather we can continue to trust in the leadings of the Holy Spirit?
- REFLECT: By your character and the way you interact with others, would people take note that you have been with Jesus? Why or why not?
- REFLECT: Has there been a time in the past when have you experienced opposition or push back on account of living out your faith? Is there an action God is calling you

to take now to be a more faithful follower and witness of Jesus, but that you know will lead to push back or opposition from others?

Acts 5:33-39 (Gamaliel in the Temple)

Summary: Rest in the Spirit's power to carry on what has been started.

- The religious leaders are once again threatening the disciples for preaching the Gospel of Jesus, yet the disciples refuse to stop their work.
- As the leaders decide whether they should put the disciples in jail, Gamaliel, a Pharisee, speaks a great truth about the work of God. All activity that is planned and initiated by humans will ultimately fail and fizzle out. For all human activity, once the leader and perhaps a few successors are killed, the movement will die. This is true in the revolts mentioned in the Scripture. It is also true in the great nations that no longer exist (The Roman or Ottoman Empire.) It is true in fashion and cultural trends that last for a season but are then forgotten about.
- However, the movement of Christianity is not dependent on any one human person. Disciples will be killed, other Christian leaders will become unfaithful, resources will feel depleted. Even then, God will raise up others to preach the Gospel and we are promised that the gates of hell will not prevail against God's Church (see Matthew 16:18).
- When we feel like Christianity is dying, perhaps because a church closed, a pastor left or retired, or certain people's faith is not as strong as we would like, we are still promised that the Christian faith will continue on.
- We can rest and trust in the power of the Spirit to continue the mission of God in the world. This is a mission that we are invited to participate in, but it is not a mission that is dependent upon any one person. The light of God will never cease to shine, and that is a promise we can find hope in, even when we see loss, unfaithfulness, or people around the world experiencing persecution and being killed on account of their faith.
- REFLECT: How does knowing that the movement of God will never be stopped give you hope in your own Christian walk?

Acts 6:1-7 (Choosing Seven Servants)

Summary: Serve others through the power of the Spirit.

- The church recognizes that one ethnic group of Jewish widows was being overlooked for the daily food distribution. Rather, than choosing to ignore the problem or overstressing those called to the ministry of proclamation of the Word, they identify people who can serve the church through caring for the widows.

- The calling to serve is not left to “less spiritual” or less mature Christians. One of the conditions for being chosen for the responsibility of caring for the widows is to be “full of the Spirit and wisdom” (v. 3).
- The call to serve and the call to preach both require the filling of the Holy Spirit. One role is not more “spiritual” or more important than the other. Those called to serve must do so out of the power that comes from the Holy Spirit who leads us in serving well.
- REFLECT: Do you see a call to serve others as less, the same, or more important than a calling to preach or lead in the church?
- REFLECT: How could the understanding that a call to serve is less important than a call to preach lead those called to serve to neglect the need to seek and be filled with the Holy Spirit?

Week 6: Acts 7-12

Lesson Overview: The Spirit works to expand the church and carry out the mission of God.

Acts 7: The Spirit sustains those who bear witness at the cost of their lives.

Acts 8: The Spirit uses scattering to carry the Gospel into new places.

Acts 9: The Spirit transforms the most unlikely people into witnesses.

Acts 10: The Spirit tears down walls so that the Gospel may be proclaimed to all.

Acts 11: The Spirit makes people clean and holy.

Acts 12: The Spirit moves through prayer to accomplish the mission of God.

Acts 7:54-60 (Killing of Stephen)

Summary: The Spirit sustains those who bear witness even at the cost of their lives.

- We see in the prior verses of this chapter the Holy Spirit empowering Stephen to preach the Gospel through his speech even as the leaders of the Sanhedrin are preparing to kill him.
- Then, in the selected passage, the Holy Spirit sustains Stephen in being faithful to Jesus in the imminent face of death.
- The Spirit sustains Stephen by providing him with peace and hope as Stephen is given a picture of Jesus's place in glory sitting in heaven at the right hand of the Father (v. 55).
- The Spirit sustains Stephen in surrendering his very life to Jesus, trusting that faithfulness to Christ is worth more than everything else, including one's life.
- The Spirit sustains Stephen in maintaining the character of Christ to the end of his life as Stephen follows in the way of Jesus in asking for the forgiveness of his killers.
- The Spirit does not stop the religious leaders from killing Stephen, but the Spirit does sustain Stephen in being a faithful witness as he endures persecution and ultimately death.
- REFLECT: Stephen's circumstances did not change, but the Holy Spirit sustained him in remaining faithful. Can you think of a time when God sustained you through a difficult situation rather than removing you from it? What did you learn about God's presence and faithfulness?
- REFLECT: The sustaining work of the Holy Spirit included leading Stephen in forgiving his enemies who were killing him. Think of a person who has hurt you. How might the Holy Spirit be leading you in offering forgiveness to that person?

Acts 8:1-8 (Scattering of the Church)

Summary: The Spirit uses scattering to carry the Gospel into new places.

- Up until this point, the Christian movement was primarily contained to Jerusalem. However, the persecution Christians experience at the beginning of chapter 8 lead to them leaving Jerusalem.
- The dark and challenging circumstance of persecution is used for good as the Spirit uses the now scattered disciples to preach the Gospel in new places. Without the scattering of the disciples, the Gospel would not have been carried by disciples out from Jerusalem and to Judea, Samaria, and ultimately the end of the earth.
- There may be times when we find ourselves in new places, perhaps because of challenging circumstances, or perhaps because of good and positive things in our lives. In these new places, the Spirit can still use us to be His witnesses and to share our faith with others. We may be in a new church and serving in new ways, yet these new relationships we have are an opportunity for us to carry the Gospel with us.
- The scattering of the Church reminds us that the Church and the proclamation of the Gospel is meant for all places. God is always sending people out from their current place of living to new places, where the Gospel has not yet been preached and where there is not yet a large Christian presence. If the Gospel is to be carried to the end of the earth, then this implies that there are people the Spirit is sending to be witnesses in these new places.
- REFLECT: When has there been a time when you found yourself in a new place or context? How did you see God at work through this new experience?
- REFLECT: God calls some to be witnesses to the Gospel among people groups where the Gospel has not yet been preached and where there is no Christian presence. Are you one of the people God is sending as a missionary to a people group or place in the world where the Gospel has not yet been heard?

Acts 9:10-21 (Calling Saul)

Summary: The Spirit transforms the most unlikely people into witnesses.

- God sends Ananias to restore the sight of Saul and to ultimately send Saul out as a witness to Jesus.
- However, Ananias, knowing that Saul has been a persecutor of Christians, is understandably reluctant to go and meet Saul.

- Ananias sees Saul through the lens of his past and presumes that Saul's past will determine his present and future actions, yet God sees Saul knowing the ways that the Spirit will work to transform Saul and make him into a preacher to the Gentiles.
- There are times when we think that there is something that makes us ineligible to be used by God. We think someone's past history disqualifies them or that they are not smart enough, not educated enough, not a prominent enough leader, or not having the right personality to be used by God.
- However, Saul demonstrates that the Spirit transforms the most unlikely people into witnesses.
- Once Saul is prayed for and filled with the Holy Spirit in verse 19, he goes out in verse 20 and immediately begins his mission. The transformation the Holy Spirit does in people's lives may take a long time, but in some cases, it happens in an instance as within what could be the span of a week, Saul goes from killing Christians to preaching the Gospel.
- REFLECT: How do you see yourself as an unlikely choice to be a witness for Jesus? Is there someone who you know who you see as an unlikely choice to be a witness for Jesus? If so, in what ways do you see this person as unlikely to be called to this role?
- REFLECT: How does the story of Saul challenge the perspective of people being unqualified to be a witness for Jesus?

Acts 10:34-45 (Peter & Cornelius)

Summary: The Spirit tears down the walls so that the Gospel may be proclaimed to all.

- In verse 28, Peter recognizes that according to a Jewish law, he as a Jew, should not be associating with Cornelius, a Gentile. However, in v. 34, Peter sees that God does not show preferential treatment to people of certain nations or ethnic groups.
- Salvation is not found in one's status or cultural background but in repenting from sin and living in the way of Jesus. In v. 36, Peter shows that salvation is not for only some people because Jesus is Lord and died not for some but for all. Thus, all may receive salvation and become united as one in Christ.
- As Peter is preaching, the Holy Spirit is poured out upon Cornelius and his Gentile family, demonstrating that all people have the potential to become followers of Jesus should they respond positively to the Gospel. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit is seen as evidence that Cornelius and his family are true followers of Jesus.
- Further, the Holy Spirit being poured out on Gentiles shows that there are not two tiers in Christianity where one group is more blessed or more gifted by God than

others. All may turn to Jesus and be filled with the presence and power of God through the Holy Spirit.

- The Spirit, in leading Cornelius and Peter to meet, breaks down walls created by the Jewish law so that all have an opportunity to hear and respond to the Gospel.
- REFLECT: What are some specific types of people who you would not choose, or at least who would not be your first choice, in associating with?
- REFLECT: How might the Holy Spirit be leading you to serve and to share the Gospel with these people?

Acts 11:1-9 (Peter in Jerusalem)

Summary: The Spirit makes clean and holy.

- Peter retells the story of his encounter with Cornelius to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. Those staying in Jerusalem had not seen the extent of the ways the Gospel was spreading among Gentiles. These believers in Jerusalem criticize Peter for associating with the Gentiles. The issue described in v. 3 of Peter eating with one who does not follow Jewish law is greater than just an issue of who Peter can share a meal with. The core issue at hand is whether Jew and Gentile Christians can be united as one and seen as a part of the same body, even if the Gentile Christians do not uphold the Jewish laws.
- The concern for one who follows Jewish law is whether a Gentile Christian is “clean” according to the law or whether a Jewish person eating with a Gentile Christian (who does not uphold the law) would lead to defilement and being made unpure.
- In this story, Peter recounts that God makes things clean. Becoming clean or pure or holy, does not happen through adherence to laws but through being in relationship with God. One cannot make themselves clean or holy on their own by doing certain actions, even if they are “religious” activities. Only God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, can purify someone’s heart.
- We cannot work or will ourselves into holiness. Becoming holy or clean is a gift that one receives through a relationship with God.
- REFLECT: How would you define what it means for a Christian to become "holy"? How does this work of becoming holy occur?
- REFLECT: How does this passage, along with Acts 10, contribute to or correct your understanding of holiness?

Acts 12:5-11 (Peter’s Rescue from Prison)

Summary: The Spirit moves through prayer to accomplish the mission of God.

- In this section, it can be easy to focus on God miraculously rescuing Peter from prison. However, the Scripture intentionally begins with the line that the “church was earnestly praying for him” (v. 5).
- These prayers offered by other Christians were used by God in a way that led to Peter’s release from prison and ultimately being sent back out to continue preaching the Gospel in the world.
- The Holy Spirit uses our prayers to advance the mission of God in the world. There is truth in the saying that “prayer is not all we do, but it is the first thing we do.” Or, to put it another way, if we don’t have time to pray, then we probably don’t have time to do faithful and fruitful mission work as God’s movement among people often begins through prayer and not with our acts of service and proclamation.
- There are members of the body of Christ throughout the world who are currently in prison and persecuted for their faith just as Peter was imprisoned for his faith in the Scripture passage. One of the greatest gifts we can offer to these members of the body is our prayers for God to sustain and deliver them from their persecution.
- REFLECT: Based on the way you spend your time and live your life, what would this reveal about the relationship or lack of relationship you see between prayer and a life of mission and being a witness of Jesus?
- REFLECT: How might God be calling you to be more intentional in praying for persecuted believers and for the mission of God to be carried out in the world?

Week 7: Acts 13-18

Lesson Overview: Faithfulness to God's calling requires enduring even through challenges.

Acts 13: Speak truth, even when it is hard.

Acts 14: Empower others to lead, even when it is outside of your comfort zone.

Acts 15: Hold fast to the Gospel at all times, even in conflict.

Acts 16: Rejoice in God, even in times of suffering.

Acts 17: Preach the truth of the Gospel even while looking for ways to connect it to what God is already doing within a culture or within someone's personal life.

Acts 18: Persevere in your calling, even when you are afraid.

Acts 13:4-12 (Paul Confronts Elymas in Cyprus)

Summary: Speak truth, even when it is hard.

- Paul and Barnabas are sent by the Holy Spirit to Seleucia and then to Cyprus. Paul and Barnabas don't happen to find themselves in Cyprus by chance. They are sent there to do ministry through the workings of the Holy Spirit. So too, when we follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit, we will never find ourselves in a place by accident. We will always be somewhere for a purpose that God has given to us, even when we are not yet sure what that purpose will be.
- Upon arriving in Cyprus, Paul & Barnabas are asked to preach the word of God to a proconsul or governor of an area of Rome. However, Elymas seeks to prevent the governor from hearing the faith.
- Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Paul is given the ability to speak truth to Elymas, which includes the message that he is an enemy of God for trying to stop the spread of the Gospel.
- Speaking truth is not always popular or easy but it is necessary so that the Gospel can be preached and received by people who have been previously influenced by the lies of the world. In this case, Paul speaks truth to Elymas and blinds him for a period of time so that the Word of God can then be rightly preached and demonstrated to the Roman governor, who will then believe in Jesus.
- In other cases, speaking truth may look like lovingly holding a family member accountable for their actions or having a conversation with a friend about why you will not engage in a certain activity (gossip, cheating, excessive indulgence, etc) because it does not reflect the call of Christians to follow in the way of Jesus.

- Speaking truth requires allowing the Holy Spirit to fill you with courage and discernment so you are able to speak, even when you are having hard conversations or speaking something that will not be popular.
- REFLECT: When has someone else loved you enough to speak the truth to you, even if it required a hard or uncomfortable conversation?
- REFLECT: Is there a truth-filled conversation that God is calling you to have with someone else?

Acts 14:21-25 (Empowering Others to Lead)

Summary: Empower others to lead, even when it is outside of your comfort zone.

- This passage provides an account of the work of Paul and Barnabas in visiting places they had already evangelized and encouraging the church in these areas.
- Paul and Barnabas are operating on the understanding that they cannot stay in these places preaching the Gospel and making disciples for long periods of time, as the Holy Spirit is continually sending Paul and Barnabas out to spread the Gospel in new places. Because Paul and Barnabas are not staying in these places for long, they must appoint others from the area to disciple new converts and evangelize those who do not yet know Jesus.
- Paul and Barnabas recognize that the role of disciples is to make more disciples. As such, they do not need to stay in the places they visit for an extended period to carry on the work of evangelism and disciple-making because those who have first converted to Christianity and thus been empowered by the Holy Spirit can carry on the work in these areas.
- One of the ways the Holy Spirit uses us is to empower others to grow in their faith and to provide them with opportunities to lead just as Paul and Barnabas appointed elders to lead in the church.
- However, the work of the church is not limited to a select few people, as even the elders appointed in 14:23 would not have been able to do all the work of the church on their own.
- The church is designed to be made up of people who are Kingdom contributors, not spiritual consumers.
- All of us have a place to serve and to participate in the work of sharing our faith and discipling other people. As we disciple others, we do so knowing that God will use us to empower these newer people so that they then become leaders and disciple-makers in their own right just as Paul and Barnabas built up others who could be appointed as elders and who would then disciple the next generation of Christians.

- Many of us may not always be comfortable with this type of calling of discipling and empowering others, but we know that this calling is not carried out by ourselves but through the Spirit working through us.
- REFLECT: How are you being a Kingdom contributor rather than a spiritual consumer?
- REFLECT: Who is God calling you to disciple and what will you do about it?

Acts 15:1-5 (Jerusalem Council)

Summary: Hold fast to the Gospel at all times, even in conflict.

- The early church once again experiences conflict relating to how Gentiles (those who are not Jewish) can convert to Christianity. Some say that the Gentiles are not true Christians and thus not true recipients of salvation unless they are circumcised and uphold all of the Jewish law.
- In this conflict, there is the possibility of the Christian church being split in half where one sect requires followers of Jesus to uphold the Jewish law, and the other sect does not.
- However, instead of a divided church, the disciples who had seen God's work among the Gentiles proclaimed the work God had done through people who did not uphold Jewish law and the end result is that the council determines that Gentile Christians can be saved without following the whole of the Jewish law.
- The council holds fast to the Gospel, which proclaims that salvation comes by faith alone in Christ and cannot be generated through one's own obedience to the law.
- Salvation is a gift graciously given by God to those who receive Christ as their Lord and Savior. Thus, obedience to the law cannot be used to earn the salvation that God freely gives in grace.
- Salvation occurring by grace through faith does not grant license for Christians to act however they please, yet this passage reminds us that salvation and the gift of eternal life are not earned on account of one's works.
- Salvation cannot be earned through church attendance, acts of service, or engagement in spiritual disciplines.
- By holding fast to the Gospel at all times, the Christian community is able to be united in their devotion and trust of a generous and loving God rather than compromising on the truths of the Christian faith and allowing for other matters to overshadow the ultimate matter of salvation coming by grace and through faith and surrender to Christ.
- REFLECT: What are some ways that you can be tempted to add requirements to salvation beyond faith in Christ? How does Acts 15 challenge those attitudes?

- REFLECT: How does this council's focus on the Gospel teach you to navigate conflict or disputes in your own life?

Acts 16:22-33 (Rescue of Paul and Silas from Prison)

Summary: Rejoice in God, even in times of suffering.

- Paul and Silas are beaten and thrown into prison, yet in prison Paul and Silas do not complain or throw a pity party for their present circumstances. Instead, they pray and sing hymns to God (v. 25)
- Paul and Silas chose to rejoice even in their suffering.
- The call of God upon the life of every person is a call that will involve suffering and hardship. Enduring times of trial is often a sign that we are being faithful to our calling and not a sign that we are doing something wrong. On some level, suffering cannot be avoided if we are to live out the Christian faith with boldness within our communities.
- From Paul and Silas, we see that in our suffering, we are called to continue to pray and to give thanks to God for His enduring faithfulness.
- In this passage, Paul and Silas are freed from their prison chains through a great earthquake, yet Paul and Silas do not leave the prison.
- In verse 30, the jailer asks Paul and Silas how to be saved, yet at this point, the Scripture passage does not give any indication that Paul and Silas have directly evangelized or shared their faith with the jailer. Rather, Paul and Silas's worship and prayer to God during their imprisonment served as a witness for the jailer to become curious about the Christian faith and to then ask Paul and Silas about the salvation that they have.
- Our choosing to worship, to maintain peace, and to look to God, even in suffering, serves as a witness for others to see the joy we have that is not dependent upon our external circumstances and then to be led to ask about the reason for the hope that we have.
- REFLECT: Do you see suffering or enduring hardship as a natural part of the Christian life? Why or why not?
- REFLECT: What is your first response to times of suffering or hardship? What would it look like for you to choose to respond first with worship and prayer?

Acts 17:22-31 (Paul in Athens)

Summary: Preach the truth of the Gospel even while looking for ways to connect it to what God is already doing within a culture or within someone's personal life.

- When Paul addresses those in Athens, who were not Christians, Paul first admits that they are religious people and have an altar to “an unknown God.” Paul recognizes that even in places that are not Christian, God is already at work in some way.
- The work of God in people who are not yet Christians is “prevenient grace.” Prevenient grace is the grace that goes before someone is even fully aware of God. This grace prepares people to come to a greater knowledge of God and awakens them to their longing for something greater than themselves. The Athenians had a desire for God, yet their desire was misdirected and took the form of worshipping idols.
- In verses 24-31, Paul proclaims the uncompromising truth of the Christian faith and the need for repentance, yet he does so by looking for ways to connect Christianity to the surrounding culture and the ways God's prevenient grace is already at work.
- Paul references the altar the Athenians have built (v. 23) and positively references a poet the people would have been familiar with (v. 28).
- Not all people will respond to Paul’s preaching of the Gospel, yet some do respond positively (v. 34).
- From Paul’s speech, we see the importance of helping people to see how faith and the truth of the Gospel connects to someone’s current situation and to what God is already doing in that person’s life.
- For example, a person who feels like they do not belong and do not have a meaningful identity, may first connect most deeply with the understanding of Christians as being sons and daughters of God. Someone who enjoys songs or stories about redemption and people overcoming difficult circumstances may most deeply connect with the ways that God gives new life and hope to broken and hopeless sinners.
- As we share our faith with others, God’s prevenient grace reminds us that God is already at work in that person’s life in some way, and our calling is to help them see and respond to what God is doing.
- REFLECT: How does recognizing God's prevenient grace change the way you view and interact with people who do not yet know Christ?
- REFLECT: Who in your life might need to hear the Gospel in a way that connects with their current struggles, questions, or circumstances, and how might you help them see God in this situation?

Acts 18:5-11 (Paul in Corinth)

Summary: Persevere in your calling, even when you are afraid.

- Once again, Paul is persecuted and beaten, this time while he is preaching to Jews in Corinth.
- He then goes to others in Corinth, where many are baptized and saved.
- At this point, Paul may be afraid, or at least tired and weary from the violence he has endured from others as God chooses to come to him in a vision to encourage him to continue on in his calling to preach.
- Paul is able to take comfort in this vision from God because God reassures Paul that he will not carry out his calling alone as God will remain with him, and in this case, God tells Paul he will find favor in the city and will not experience any more attacks.
- In our lives, as we seek to be faithful followers of Jesus and share our faith with others, there will be times when we experience obstacles or are afraid of what the future will hold.
- However, even then, we also know that God will remain with us. This promise of God being with us is one we can hold on to and find strength in as we persevere even when we are fearful.
- REFLECT: In the past, when have you experienced God's presence sustaining you through a difficult or challenging season?
- REFLECT: What fears, discouragements, or obstacles are you facing, and how does God's promise to be with you encourage you to remain faithful to your calling?

Week 8: Acts 19-24

Lesson Overview: These chapters demonstrate what it looks like to be a faithful witness to God within the world.

Acts 19: Faithful witness will disturb what it encounters.

Acts 20: Faithful witness involves a single-minded focus to carrying out one's calling.

Acts 21: Faithful witness includes a willingness to suffer.

Acts 22: Faithful witness tells of how Jesus has changed your life.

Acts 23: Faithful witness is sustained by God.

Acts 24: Faithful witness does not soften the Gospel's call for the sake of the powerful.

Acts 19:23-27 (Conflict in Ephesus)

Summary: Faithful witness will disturb what it encounters.

- Demetrius expresses concern because Paul's message in Ephesus calls people to refrain from worshipping at idol temples. Demetrius's concern expressed in v. 25-26 is about the financial and economic implications of the spread of Christianity. If people no longer see value in worshipping at these idol temples, then Demetrius's business will suffer.
- Demetrius goes on in v. 27 to express a concern that people turning from false gods will lead people across Asia to no longer see value in journeying to Ephesus and worshipping at the temple of Artemis, which would lead to a decrease in tourist dollars for those who work in Ephesus.
- From these words of Demetrius, we see that when people offer faithful witness, this disturbs everything that it encounters.
- Faithful witness disturbs economic systems built on the worship of false gods, yet in our world, faithful witness disturbs and calls out those who take advantage of people who have no voice or power. Faithful witness also calls out a culture of materialism where success is determined by how much money one has, how many possessions one accumulates, or the status one has on account of their titles.
- A faithful response to the Gospel even disturbs the lives of those who receive it, as the Gospel leads one to examine one's own life and re-orient their whole being towards following Jesus, leaving behind practices and attitudes not conducive to the Christian faith and calling followers to daily take up their cross and deny the self.

- REFLECT: What are some modern-day beliefs, practices, or systems that the Gospel disrupts? How might God be calling you to play a part of this disruption?
- REFLECT: The Gospel also disrupts and seeks to transform the life of every follower of Jesus? Where is God calling you to more fully leave behind a habit, attitude, priority, or source of identity in pursuit of following Jesus?

Acts 20:22-25 (Paul's Farewell Speech in Ephesus)

Summary: Faithful witness involves a single-minded focus to carrying out one's calling.

- Paul is preparing to leave the Christians in Ephesus, and he gives a speech to those in Ephesus before he leaves.
- Paul feels called to go to Jerusalem, and he knows that in his future travels he will face suffering and imprisonment.
- Paul understands that being a faithful witness and following the Holy Spirit will lead him into a life of pain and hardship, yet Paul does not avoid this suffering set before him.
- Paul's single focus in life is being a faithful witness and carrying out his calling to preach the Gospel, regardless of the consequences to his own life. In Paul's discernment of whether to go to Jerusalem and continue preaching the Gospel, Paul does not analyze the pros and cons nor does he consider how this decision will impact him. Instead, Paul focuses on living out his calling, regardless of everything else. Paul has prioritized a life of faithful witness over personal comfort, pleasure, control, and security.
- Paul even tells those in Ephesus that he expects to never see these people again because he believes he will be killed for his faith before he has an opportunity to return to Ephesus.
- Paul's faithful witness and steadfast commitment to his calling reminds us of the radical forsaking of one's desires that is involved in being disciples of Jesus Christ.
- REFLECT: Where in your life are you holding on to a desire for comfort, pleasure, control, or security? How is God calling you to surrender that desire to Him?
- REFLECT: What would your life look like if you had a single-minded focus towards living out your calling and being a faithful witness of Jesus?

Acts 21:27-36 (Paul Arrested in Jerusalem)

Summary: Faithful witness includes a willingness to suffer.

- Paul is arrested and beaten in Jerusalem. The crowd gathered desires to kill him
- Those in the crowd are shouting different, contradictory things (v. 34). Some believe Paul had taken non-Jewish people (Greeks) into the temple (v. 28), but this belief is

based on a false assumption, as no one actually saw Paul lead the Greeks into the temple. They only saw Paul with these Greeks in the city of Jerusalem.

- The crowd does not fully understand what Paul has actually done in his ministry. They have been caught up in “mob mentality” and all they know is that they desire to kill Paul.
- In this passage, Paul shows us that faithful witness involves a willingness to suffer, even when pain is being inflicted by people who don’t understand or care about the actual beliefs and practices of Christianity.
- Further, this is not the first time that a crowd has gathered around Paul and has sought to kill him. There have been many times when mobs have gathered around Paul and beaten or imprisoned him. Each time of persecution represented a time when Paul could have given up, determining the pain was not worth it. However, Paul endures and remains faithful, even in the face of constant and severe persecution.
- REFLECT: Where is an area of your life where you feel like you are misunderstood? What would faithful witness look like for you in this area of your life?
- REFLECT: Paul’s persecution and abuse is on-going and not a one-time event. Where in your life might God be calling you to see ongoing difficulty not as a reason to quit, but as opportunity to regularly choose to remain faithful to Christ?

Acts 22:3-16 (Paul Testifies in Jerusalem)

Summary: Faithful witness tells of how Jesus has changed your life.

- Paul testifies in Jerusalem before the crowd who was seeking to kill him.
- In Paul’s speech, he speaks the truth about what Jesus had done in his life.
- Paul shares his life before encountering Jesus where he was a zealous persecutor of Christians. Then, he shared how he encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus, and the calling he now has to preach the Gospel.
- Paul speaks boldly and truthfully about how he has encountered and been changed through the work of Jesus, even as he is speaking to people who desire to kill him.
- Paul’s choice to defend the Christian faith to his accusers by sharing his own testimony shows us the power our stories have to be used by God to share the Gospel and change someone else’s life.
- REFLECT: When has hearing a testimony from someone else encouraged or strengthened you in your own faith journey?
- REFLECT: Share your testimony of how God has changed your life.

Acts 23:12-24 (The Plot to Kill Paul)

Summary: Faithful witness is sustained by God.

- The Jews make a plan to kill Paul and thus silence his testimony about Jesus. However, God is working in the background, orchestrating a way for Paul to avoid this deadly ambush of men.
- God works through the son of Paul's sister (v. 16), a centurion (v. 17-18), and the Roman commander who hears of this plan and makes arrangement for Paul to safely be evacuated from his current location (v. 23-24).
- God sustains Paul by preserving his life so that his faithful witness to the Gospel can continue for the present time. God's protection, evidenced through those who keep Paul safe from the Jews plotting to kill him, enables Paul to continue on in his mission and witness.
- God's work in this passage through ordinary people rather than through a more direct and obvious miraculous intervention reminds us of how God often works in small or unseen ways, sustaining and enabling us to live as faithful witnesses.
- In our own lives, we do not always recognize all of the ways that God is at work, yet we can trust that, even when we are in challenging situations, God is sustaining us and working all things for His glory, our good, and others' gain.
- REFLECT: When has there been a situation where you did not realize how God was at work in your life until you were on the other side of that experience?
- REFLECT: Where in your life does it currently feel like God is absent? How might God be sustaining you and showing you His grace within this situation?

Acts 24:22-27 (Paul & Felix)

Summary: Faithful witness does not soften the Gospel's call for the sake of the powerful.

- Felix, the governor of the region, has the power to determine whether Paul will be released from prison or not.
- However, in a conversation Felix has with Paul, we see Paul speaking the truth of the Gospel, particularly as it relates to righteousness (living a holy life), exercising self-control, and being prepared for the judgement to come.
- Paul's words strike fear in Felix (v. 25) and the result is Felix sends Paul back to being imprisoned, where he hopes to receive a bribe from Paul.
- Paul could have strategically spoken words that would have allowed him to find favor with Felix by offering Felix compliments and flattery, or Paul could have spoken of the gift of salvation and eternal life but without discussing the need for holiness and self-control. However, Paul does none of these things. Instead, Paul presents to Felix the fullness of the Gospel, choosing not to compromise on truth, even as he is speaking to someone who holds power over him.

- The goal of Paul's conversation is to be a faithful witness to Jesus Christ, regardless of how Felix reacts to the message.
- Paul's faithful witness reminds us that the Gospel message and our call to proclaim it does not change, even when we are with those who have power or who can affect things within our life.
- Whether we are speaking with a close friend, a stranger, a community leader, or someone who has authority over us, we are called to share the truth of Christ with both grace and courage, trusting God with the results of our conversations.
- REFLECT: In what situations might you be tempted to soften, avoid, or alter how you talk about your faith in order to gain acceptance or approval from someone else?
- REFLECT: How does Paul's conversation with Felix encourage you to remain true to your faith, even when you are interacting with someone who you see as powerful or important?

Week 9: Acts 25-28

Lesson Overview: As the book of Acts comes to a close, we see the power of the Gospel cannot be stopped, no matter the circumstance.

Acts 25: The Gospel cannot be contained by those who hold political power.

Acts 26: The Gospel demands a response from every person.

Acts 27: The Gospel cannot be stopped, even when interrupted by storms or shipwrecks.

Acts 28: The Gospel story continues through us.

Acts 25:23-27 (The Entrance of Agrippa)

Summary: The Gospel cannot be contained by those who hold political power.

- Agrippa is a Jewish king who enters with “great pomp and circumstance” (v. 23). Agrippa and those with him are presented as having a great deal of status, power, and influence.
- Paul is the prisoner, whose fate hangs in the balance of the decisions of others. Paul has no worldly power or influence.
- However, in the following chapter (chapter 26) it will be clear that Paul, though lacking in worldly power, has all he needs through the power of the Gospel.
- The ways this passage describes the status and “pomp and circumstance” given to Agrippa serves to stand in contrast with Paul’s lowly position as a prisoner.
- However, though governors and kings may have the power to determine Paul’s fate, the Gospel that Paul preaches is far too powerful to be contained or stopped by any person, no matter the political power that they may have. Those who we think have power and control still are not strong enough to silence the Gospel message.
- REFLECT: How does the contrast between Agrippa and Paul challenge your understanding of power or success?
- REFLECT: How can focusing on whether or not you have external power, status, or influence keep you from living into the power you are given through the Gospel?

Acts 26:25-29 (Paul on Trial)

Summary: The Gospel demands a response from every person.

- In Acts 26, it appears that Paul is on trial and must give an account of his life so that the rulers can determine his fate.
- However, Paul uses his speech as an opportunity to preach the Gospel and proclaim of how Jesus has changed his life.

- In the section 26:25-29, we see a great reversal in that it appears that it is not Paul on trial but King Agrippa. The king is no longer the one who is asking questions to someone else but the one who must respond to the question of what he will do with the Gospel he has now heard. The king is now in the spotlight, as opposed to Paul, even if just for a short moment, and must decide whether he will accept or reject the teachings of Jesus.
- The one who holds political authority must now choose whether he will submit to the spiritual authority of Jesus.
- Paul's work of trying to persuade King Agrippa to become a Christian shows that when the Gospel is proclaimed, every person must choose how they will respond.
- When the Gospel is presented, one cannot remain as a neutral or third party observer. One must choose whether to accept the Christian faith, which involves repentance and belief in Jesus, or whether one will outright reject or simply choose to ignore the truth one has been told.
- The Gospel is not just abstract information or a subject of discussion. It is a personal invitation that demands a response.
- REFLECT: Where in your life are you tempted to remain a "neutral observer" toward Jesus, perhaps discussing or even appreciating His teachings, but not fully surrendering your life to Him?
- REFLECT: How might the dynamics of our small group change if all of us were more fully committed to the Gospel as an invitation to respond to rather than just seeing it as a topic of discussion?

Acts 27:21-26 (Storms as Paul Sails for Rome)

Summary: The Gospel cannot be stopped, even when interrupted by storms or shipwrecks.

- Paul and the others who are with him are on a boat sailing for Rome, where Paul will testify before Ceasar, who is the Emperor of Rome.
- On Paul's journey to Rome, the ship he is riding is caught in the middle of a storm. Everyone apart from Paul who is on board the ship believes that all hope is lost and none of them will safely make it to land.
- However, Paul receives a word from an angel of God who tells him that Paul and all the men on board the ship will be saved and that none will die. The reason the angel gives for this promise of safety involves the graciousness of God yet also the need for Paul to testify in Rome before Ceasar.
- The call God has upon Paul's life includes him preaching the Gospel in Rome to the leader of the Roman Empire, which was at the time the most prominent empire of the world.

- Because God has called Paul to the task of preaching the Gospel in Rome, no setbacks, not even a storm and shipwreck, will prevent God from using Paul to carry out this task.
- In our own lives, there are times when God will call us to bear witness to the Gospel through sharing our faith, serving someone else, or choosing trust and surrender over certainty and having all the answers ahead of time. As we live in this way, we will face obstacles and challenges. We may face our own “storms” that seem to derail or interrupt our calling. Yet, even then, we can trust that when God calls us to bear witness to the Gospel, then this calling will not be stopped. God will lead us in carrying out what He has called us to. The way God leads us will include challenges and God's leading will likely not look like the picture we had in mind, but God is greater than any obstacle we will face along the way.
- REFLECT: As you seek to faithfully bear witness to the Gospel, what challenges, obstacles, “storms,” or interruptions are you currently facing?
- REFLECT: How does this passage from Acts encourage you to trust in God to lead you through these challenges so that He can continue using you as witness of the Gospel?

Acts 28:24-31 (Paul in Rome)

Summary: The Gospel story continues through us.

- The final words in Acts record Paul continuing to live out his calling by proclaiming the Gospel, where some receive this message and some reject it (v. 24).
- The book of Acts does not include the final fate of Paul and his court trial because though Paul has been featured prominently throughout the second half of Acts, the book of Acts is not a story about Paul. The book of Acts is a story of how God has worked through many disciples in proclaiming through word and deed the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The protagonist in Acts is not Paul (or Peter or any other disciple) but God.
- Though the tradition of the church believes that Paul was likely killed in Rome as a martyr of the Christian faith, the Spirit of God is not dead nor has the power of the Gospel been quenched.
- The mission is not yet finished, nor is the work of the church completed. This story is not over. It continues today through us.
- We have now been given the calling to carry on the work of being faithful witnesses and proclaiming the faith that was first proclaimed to us.
- You are a part of the story, and your part matters for the mission of God in redeeming the world.

- REFLECT: How is God calling you to participate in His mission?
- REFLECT: Who is God calling you to invite to join you in carrying out the mission?

Wrap-Up Reflection Questions

- REFLECT: How has this series given you a fuller understanding of who God is? You may want to consider your understanding of God as a whole or how God reveals himself in Scripture specifically as Father, Son (Jesus), and Holy Spirit?
- REFLECT: How has this series challenged your understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus and to live out your faith in the world?
- REFLECT: What is the one overarching thing that God has said to you throughout this series on Luke-Acts? How will you live your life differently because of this way that God has been speaking to you? How can your small group support you as you seek to make this change in your life?