



the **GOSPEL**PROJECT.

FROM ONE NATION TO ALL NATIONS

ADULTS / LEADER GUIDE / SPRING 2024 / VOL. 11 / ESV



GOD'S WORD TO YOU

A SUMMARY OF THE BIBLE

In the beginning, the all-powerful, personal God created the universe. This God created human beings in His image to live joyfully in His presence, in humble submission to His gracious authority. But all of us have rebelled against God and, in consequence, must suffer the punishment of our rebellion: physical death and the wrath of God.

Thankfully, God initiated a rescue plan, which began with His choosing the nation of Israel to display His glory in a fallen world. The Bible describes how God acted mightily on Israel's behalf, rescuing His people from slavery and then giving them His holy law. But God's people—like all of us—failed to rightly reflect the glory of God.

Then, in the fullness of time, in the person of Jesus Christ, God Himself came to renew the world and to restore His people. Jesus perfectly obeyed the law given to Israel. Though innocent, He suffered the consequences of human rebellion by His death on a cross. But three days later, God raised Him from the dead.

Now the church of Jesus Christ has been commissioned by God to take the news of Christ's work to the world. Empowered by God's Spirit, the church calls all people everywhere to repent of sin and to trust in Christ alone for our forgiveness. By God's grace in Christ, repentance and faith restores our relationship with God and results in a life of ongoing transformation.

The Bible promises that Jesus Christ will return to this earth as the conquering King. Only those who live in repentant faith in Christ will escape God's judgment and live joyfully in God's presence for all eternity. God's message is the same to all of us: repent and believe, before it is too late. Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe with your heart that God raised Him from the dead, and you will be saved.

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THE EDITOR

Our God is a God of all nations. He loves every one of His created beings and desires that all people would come to know Him and trust Him.

But God's example for us is a hard one to follow. We don't always like all people, let alone trying to love all people. Pride in us seeks to divide, to create us-and-them situations, to think one group is higher or lower than another group. This is not a new dilemma for the church. Our minds may desire unity and reconciliation, but our hearts don't easily follow at times.

But as believers, the Holy Spirit helps us. God is in us and with us to help us love our brothers and sisters, even when the world would tell us not to. Even when culture says getting on top is the way to go, and stepping on others is okay, the Spirit digs into our hearts and reminds us of Jesus—of how He could have been king on this earth, but He chose submission and sacrifice; how He could have demeaned and destroyed His enemies, but He chose grace and gentleness. Humility is the way of the Master. We need to follow in this way.

When we love all people well and don't discriminate against others, the world notices. It sees the unique oneness in diversity of God's people. It's compelling, and people turn to Jesus. And it starts the cycle that brings the gospel to the nations, so that the nations would be one under Christ's lordship, and together we may bring the gospel to more nations. All so God's family may be complete and reconciled to Him and to one another. That is the mission. That is the goal. So let's consider what we can do next to obey Christ's command to "Go and make disciples of all nations!"

Y Bonesteele

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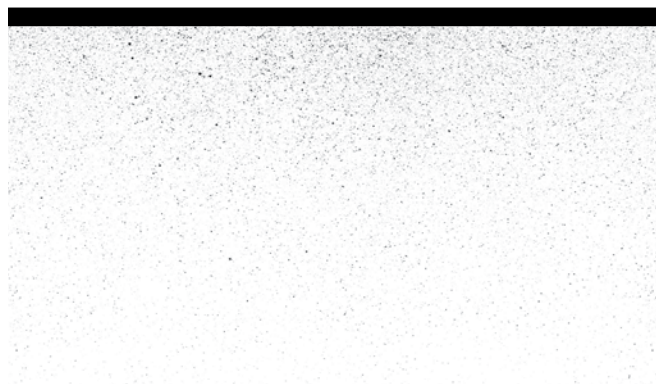
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3 WAYS TO ENCOURAGE PRAYING SCRIPTURE

by Dwayne McCrary

When growing up, the worship service in my church featured the reading of a Bible passage followed by a pastoral prayer. The Bible passage may have been “read” in one of several ways. We may have listened to a passage read, been asked to locate the passage in our Bibles and encouraged to follow along, or read the passage in some type of responsive format. The person leading that time would then voice a prayer based on the Bible passage. For example, if we had read 1 Corinthians 13, he may have emphasized the unfailing love of God, thanking Him for loving us even when we fail to love Him back in the same way. He may have included a confession that our love was incomplete compared to God’s love. The individual may have asked for help to demonstrate to God the same kind of love He demonstrates to us. I did not know it at the time, but our church was being taught to pray Scripture through that element in the worship service.

When we use Scripture as the basis for our prayers, we align with God’s heart and His wants. In Jeremiah 12, the prophet began his prayer with a statement about God being righteous and fair when a case is brought to Him. Jeremiah would know this by experience and through studying the Scriptures. Scripture informed his prayer as he praised God for His consistent character and trustworthiness. Jeremiah then followed with a complaint about wicked people being blessed while he and God’s people suffered. The prophet was trying to align his heart (what he wanted and viewed as fair) with the heart of God (what God wanted and viewed as fair).

Praying Scripture also keeps prayer from being the same thing week in and week out. Prayer times can become routine and border on boring. We read the list, update the list, add to the list, read the list to God, or invite someone else to read the list to God, then dismiss

the group. It is an easy pattern to follow, so we keep on doing it. If we use the Bible passage studied that day to guide our prayer time, we remove the routine and potential boredom that comes with a routine.

As Bible study leaders, we can take the same initiative as the leaders in the local church in which I grew up in helping the people in our groups learn to pray Scripture.

MODEL PRAYING SCRIPTURE

If we are not careful, we can fall into the habit of treating a prayer time as creating a to-do list for God over the next week. We collect the needs and then organize them so God will be aware of what He is to do for us before we regather to create another list for Him. We may still collect prayer needs, but we may do so focused on the passage studied that day. For example in Jeremiah 12, we may ask for people to share a recent event in which God’s righteousness was seen, and then ask for the group to identify something in their lives that challenges their faith in God. We may then lead the prayer time stating that, like Jeremiah, we too know that God is righteous and point to what was shared. We could then explain we too face challenges that confuse us. Make sure to conclude that, like Jeremiah, we bring these requests with a desire to know God’s heart and a commitment to follow Him faithfully. With this approach, we are letting the passage inform how we pray, providing a model for the group. How could you use the Bible passage in your next group time as an outline for gathering prayer requests?

PROVIDE PRAYER PROMPTS

One thing discovered while teaching preschoolers is that they expect you to stop and pray for someone when they mention it.

They would rather not wait until the end of class but would prefer you pray in the middle of walking, making a temple out of blocks, or forming two fishes and five loaves out of play dough. Why should we feel the need to wait when it comes to teaching adults?

As we prepare to lead the group time, we can look for natural ways to encourage the group to pray based on the Bible text being studied. Let's go back to Jeremiah 12. Suppose the group plans direct us to lead the group to identify situations that might cause you to wonder if God is just. What if we added a prayer prompt at this point? We could direct the group to silently express to God why the situations listed cause them to question God's justice. We may direct the group to pray something like, "God, I know You are _____ (just, righteous, all powerful), but _____ makes me wonder, and I need your assurance." Point out that God answered Jeremiah. Lead the group to examine verses 5 and following. Review the group plans for your next group time, looking for a place to add a prayer prompt.

GIVE OPPORTUNITIES TO RESPOND ALOUD

We could certainly invite people to pray silently, but we should not ignore the value of inviting people to voice their prayers aloud. Overusing silent prayer may communicate that we believe prayer to be strictly private when we find the early church involved in prayer as a community. Allowing people to respond to the prompts aloud can encourage others in the group who may be timid or less confident. Remind people to be concise and current when responding aloud. Providing a clear prompt like the one suggested above can help. How can you encourage more people in your group to voice a prayer aloud? What barriers might you need to address?



Imagine for a moment what might happen in your church if every adult group found a way to pray based on Scripture. What might that do in the life of your church? What if that happened in other churches? As Bible study leaders, we can help our group be more in tune with God's heart and desires as we lead them to pray Scripture, using the Bible passages we study.

Dwayne McCrary is manager of Adult Ongoing Bible studies at Lifeway.

EVERY KNEE WILL BOW

“And Every Tongue Confess That Jesus Christ Is Lord”

by James Jackson

+

In college, I spent one summer as a missionary in Florida through what is now known as the North American Mission Board. My friend and I served five different churches in the Sarasota area, assisting with VBS, neighborhood canvassing, and anything else the church found for us to do. On Sundays, we would lead the worship service. My friend, Chuck, was always the preacher, and I always led the music.

Chuck had been licensed to preach just a couple of weeks before the summer started, and he only had one sermon, which I heard five times. His text was Philippians 2:5-11 and focused on how one day every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil. 2:10-11).

Chuck was a big farm boy from Dawsonville, Georgia, and he was normally reserved, keeping his emotions to himself. Still, every week, one line from his own sermon would bring him to tears. Forty years later, I can still see him on that platform, tears streaming down his face, as he said, “And on that day when every knee bows, I believe that even those who spent their lives hating Jesus, and rejecting Jesus, and spitting in the face of Jesus will look at Him and bow before Him. And even as they are being led to hell, they’re gonna look over their shoulders and in that moment they will worship Him.”

OPPONENTS WILL BOW

Did you know that in the Gospel of Mark, the only ones who acknowledged Jesus as the Son of God (other than Mark himself, in the introduction) were demons (3:11; 5:7) and the Roman centurion who oversaw His execution (15:39)? None of these were in Jesus’s corner. Neither were the Pharisees, who opposed the apostles in Acts 5. Yet, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord, according to the apostle Paul. That doesn’t necessarily mean the Pharisees ever surrendered to His lordship. They were stating an objective fact, not a heartfelt conviction. Likewise, the demons are beyond redemption. What their tongues confessed was not a confession of faith, but an inescapable reality.

Philippians is not the first place this phrase is found in Scripture. Centuries before Paul, God, through the prophet Isaiah, said that every knee would bow to Him (Isa. 45:23). Isaiah went on to say that one day all who are enraged against God would come to Him and be put to shame (v. 24). Every knee will bow, whether they want to or not.

Even those who spent
their lives hating
Jesus, and rejecting
Jesus, and spitting in
the face of Jesus will
look at Him and bow
before Him.

SERVANTS WILL BOW

One of the most meaningful ceremonies at our church is the ordination of new deacons. Deacons and their spouses either kneel at the altar or sit in chairs as our deacon body lays hands on them and prays over them. From that moment on, these deacons serve our congregation, meeting needs and extending the pastoral ministry of the church.

Today's deacons are joined in spirit with deacons throughout the history of the church, going all the way back to the original seven deacons chosen in Acts 6. When they kneel at their ordination, they are acknowledging the lordship of Jesus in their lives and pledging themselves in service to Him, regardless of what that might entail. For Stephen, that meant becoming the first martyr (Acts 7). Notice what happens at his death. Acts 7:60 says he knelt down and cried out to the Lord. Just as in Isaiah 45:24 where those who hate God will still come and bow the knee, all the descendants of Israel too will come glorify the Lord (v. 25).

ALL NATIONS WILL BOW

One of the first deacons, Stephen, became the first martyr. Another deacon, Philip, became the first missionary when the Holy Spirit directed him to talk to the Ethiopian eunuch. The eunuch was traveling home on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. As Philip drew near the man's chariot, he heard the eunuch reading the words of the prophet Isaiah, all about this mysterious servant

who was like a lamb led to the slaughter and deprived of justice (Acts 8:32-33). The eunuch wanted to know who the prophet was talking about, and Philip excitedly told him about Jesus, beginning with Isaiah 53.

It's possible that Philip even told the eunuch that the prophet Isaiah also wrote that every knee would bow and every tongue would swear allegiance to God. Philip could have easily pointed out Isaiah 45:14, which says that Egyptians, and those from Cush, and Sabeans (those from the ends of the earth) would one day confess that the God of Israel is the one true God. Cush was another name for biblical Ethiopia. Thus, in the same passage where Isaiah referenced that every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, men of stature from Ethiopia would be among the first to do so. You may have Acts 8:37 in the body of the text, or it may be in a footnote. Either way, before he was baptized, the eunuch would have confessed Jesus as Lord.

One way or another, every knee will bow. On the day of judgment there will be those who bow the knee in adoration, saying, "Because of You, Jesus, I am justified to enter Your presence." Others will bow the knee in acknowledgment, saying, "You are Lord; I can no longer deny that."

Which will you be?



THE OPPOSED APOSTLES

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Preaching Jesus requires conviction (Acts 5:25-32).
2. Preaching Jesus causes opposition (Acts 5:33-40).
3. Preaching Jesus prompts joy (Acts 5:41-42).

Background Passage: Acts 5

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

Jesus had instructed His disciples to preach about Him, a mission they strove to be faithful to even when their lives were in peril.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Jesus commanded His followers to be witnesses of the salvation from sin that can be found in Him alone. But Jesus never promised it would be easy; just as Christ experienced rejection and suffering, so will His followers. Suffering for Christ is cause not for despair but rather for joy, knowing that God uses our sufferings, like Christ's, for His glory (Heb. 12:2).

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because Jesus suffered on our behalf, we seek to stand firm for the cause of the gospel in the midst of suffering, praying that God might use all of our adversity to bring glory to Himself.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.



INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **When have you seen someone preach the gospel well and what made it effective?** (they were clear and concise; they defended it well; they didn't condemn but welcomed people; they stuck to the main message of Jesus)

TRANSITION: Despite what some experts might think, there is no special code or formula for church growth. The church preaching the gospel is God's ordained plan for church growth. Through telling others about how Jesus left heaven to come and save His people from their sins because of His great love and mercy, people will come to Christ. In Acts that is how we see the church grow, and the disciples did so with conviction, even amid persecution.

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session as you call attention to **PACK ITEM 2: EARLY CHURCH EXPANSION MAP**, showing where Jerusalem is and where the apostles started preaching.

- The book of Acts describes the growth of the church from Jerusalem out toward the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). But as the disciples preached, the religious leaders opposed God's will for the gospel to go forth. In Acts 5, these leaders thought they could keep the apostles from preaching by throwing them in jail. However, an angel of the Lord opened the jail so they could escape and continue preaching. The church continued to grow through the sovereign Lord pouring out His Spirit on people as they came to trust in Christ. But this happened in the midst of persecution and opposition.



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ministrygrid.com/gospelproject | gospelproject.com/leader-training.

POINT 1

PREACHING JESUS REQUIRES CONVICTION (ACTS 5:25-32).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 5:25-32** from his or her Bible.

25 And someone came and told them, “Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.”

26 Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people. **27** And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, **28** saying, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.”

29 But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. **30** The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. **31** God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. **32** And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

EXPLAIN: Use the points below and **verses 25-28** to explain the following (Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG] p. 22):

Like the apostles, we need conviction to spread the good news of Jesus Christ despite all the obstacles that may come our way.

- In Acts 5:17-24, the apostles were put on trial and sent to prison, but the Lord once again confirmed His plan by sending an angel to release them from prison. In one sense, the angel of the Lord was “re-commissioning” them to continue preaching the gospel.
- The next morning the religious leaders discovered that the men they threw in prison were again preaching in the temple. The apostles knew that the message they had been given led to eternal life and could not be contained by a prison or corrupt leaders. It needed to be declared with bold conviction, even in the face of opposition.
- Do you notice what the first charge against the apostles was? Verse 28 says, “you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching.” Peter and John were put on trial for teaching about Jesus. Before Jesus ascended to heaven He said, “you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The apostles were arrested for doing the exact task that Jesus had given them.
- The council brought a second charge against the apostles in verse 28. The council said the apostles intended “to bring this man’s blood upon us.” Their statement was ironic because, during Jesus’s trial, they said in Matthew 27:25, “His blood be on us and on our children!” In an even deeper way, they were responsible for Jesus’s death because of their sins.

THE COUNCIL

The highest assembly of elders with both Pharisees and Sadducees. With 71 members, it is presided over by the high priest. In the first century, they had authority over Jewish affairs, under the watchful eye of the Roman government.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“The first need of every one of us is for salvation. But if you confine the Christian to a matter of personal salvation, then you are not only encouraging other people to go wrong in their thinking, you are putting a very grievous limit upon the glory of this great gospel. This is a Gospel for the universe. It starts with personal salvation, but it does not end with it.”²

—Martyn Lloyd-Jones
(1899–1981)

COMPARE: On one side of a board, write: “What the Angel Commanded: Go and speak to the people all the words of this Life.” On the opposite side, write “What the Religious Leaders Wanted: Not to teach in this name.” Compare the result of obedience to the religious leaders with the result of obedience to God. (if following the commands of the religious leaders, people would be condemned spiritually, but their lives may have less earthly trouble, but more trouble with God; obeying God, however, would bring blessing and joy and the growth of the church)

ASK: (DDG p. 22):

From Day 1 in the DDG: **Those who oppose the gospel message are opposing God. How does this encourage you in your Christian witness?** (knowing God is ultimately in control; knowing God is always victorious; knowing I am not alone, but God is with me)

TEACH: Use **verses 29-32** to teach the main idea below (DDG p. 22):

Obedience to God, not man, is of utmost importance; this includes obedience to God’s command to preach Jesus.

- The church must preach the gospel because repentance and forgiveness are found only in Jesus. If the church were to stop preaching the gospel, there would be no hope for the world. Eternal life is found only through the work of Jesus. Only through belief in Christ’s perfect life, death on the cross, and resurrection will anyone be saved.
- Peter explained that Jesus has been “exalted” to God’s right hand, demonstrating that He has authority and power. Peter expanded further on Jesus’s identity “as Leader and Savior” (v. 31).
- Peter and the apostles continued preaching Jesus because He is the One who is truly in charge of all things. Instead of submitting to the sinful desires of corrupt leaders, the apostles must submit to Christ.
- Peter told them that they were guilty of their sins, yet he offered repentance and forgiveness found in Jesus. Peter used the opportunity provided in court to preach the gospel to their accusers.¹ Not having the Holy Spirit (v. 32), the rulers completely missed Jesus.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 22)

How is the apostles’ conviction on display here? (they would not stop preaching Jesus; they were not willing to back down; they ultimately said they must obey God, not man)

TRANSITION: Conviction to Christ is good, but will often lead to opposition.



HANGING ON A TREE

Scan this QR code for an explanation of the biblical significance of Jesus’s being hung on a tree in His crucifixion.

POINT 2

PREACHING JESUS CAUSES OPPOSITION (ACTS 5:33-40).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 5:33-40** from his or her Bible.

33 When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. **34** But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while. **35** And he said to them, “Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. **36** For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. **37** After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered. **38** So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; **39** but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!” So they took his advice, **40** and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

COMPARE: Compare and contrast the responses of the people at Pentecost (Acts 2:37) with the response of the religious leaders in Acts 5:33. Ask, “What are other types of responses to the gospel message?” (needing more information; wanting to debate; acknowledgment of some truths but not all; needing time to think or research more)

HIGHLIGHT: Use **verse 33** and the points below to highlight the following (DDG p. 22):

Serving the Lord faithfully will lead to great opposition at times.

- The gospel message demands a response. Peter and the apostles shared the good news about Jesus with the religious leaders. They spoke of repentance and forgiveness found in Christ. However, the religious leaders did not want to hear any more. Instead, they were filled with hate and wanted to put the apostles to death. The wording used to describe their anger could also mean, “they were cut into pieces.” The gospel message cut them to the heart and instead of repenting and finding forgiveness in the Lord Jesus, they were filled with hate.
- The gospel will either humble you or enrage you. Back in Acts 2, many were humbled by the gospel. They repented and placed their faith in Christ. Here in Acts 5, however, the religious leaders were filled with rage.
- The reason for the rage can be traced back to Acts 5:17. Earlier, the apostles were doing many signs and wonders leading people to be

healed and to come to faith in Christ. Acts 5:17 says, “But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and [were] filled with jealousy.” This jealousy only got worse as the apostles continued to preach Christ, eventually turning into murderous anger.

- In trying to silence the apostles, the religious leaders were opposing God. The very God they thought they were serving.

ASK: (DDG p. 22)

How should we respond when people are filled with rage because of what we believe as Christians? (with humility and kindness; with love because of what Christ has done for us; with grief and compassion)

EXPLAIN: Use **verses 34-40** to explain the following (DDG p. 22):

God protected His people, reminding the opposition that if the plan was of man, it would fail, but if of God, it would succeed.

- Gamaliel was a respected leader among the Pharisees. He told the council to use caution in dealing with this new movement. Gamaliel calmed the council's fears, but by comparing the apostles to religious zealots—Theudas and Judas of Galilee—he was saying more than he knew.
- Gamaliel reminded the council that movements of human origin will not last forever. However, if a movement was of God, then there would be nothing they could do to stop it.
- Gamaliel inferred that once leaders of a movement die, then those movements would come to an end. Without their leader, the followers usually lost all their zeal and went home. What Gamaliel failed to realize was that Jesus was no longer dead. Jesus had conquered death. Instead of Christianity dying off, it grew and spread to the ends of the earth.
- Though Peter and John were beaten, God protected them, through Gamaliel, from being killed.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 22)

What does enduring persecution teach us? (to trust the Lord's perfect plan; to remember that Jesus promised the world would oppose His disciples; to remind us that we suffer like Jesus)

TRANSITION: Though they were beaten, the apostles had an interesting response to their persecution.

GAMALIEL

Meaning, “God rewards with good,” he was a highly respected Pharisee, and he probably was the same Gamaliel whose teachings Paul sat under (Acts 22:3).

POINT 3

PREACHING JESUS PROMPTS JOY (ACTS 5:41-42).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 5:41-42** from his or her Bible.

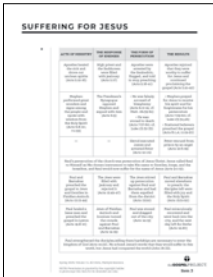
41 Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. **42** And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.

DIG: Pass out **PACK ITEM 3: SUFFERING FOR JESUS** and say, “Throughout the book of Acts, crises were followed by times of great expanse of the church as described in this chart. In smaller groups of 3-4, discuss, ‘Why do you think these times of crises produced much fruit and growth in the church?’” (in times of trouble, we trust in God more; when we feel helpless, we turn to a God who is almighty; trials can bring more unity against opposition; true faith comes out when that faith is mocked or persecuted)

EXPLAIN: Use **verse 41-42** to explain the following (DDG p. 22):

Despite opposition, disciples can find true joy in obeying Christ.

- The apostles rejoiced in their persecution because their hope and joy were not rooted in their circumstances but in their faith in Christ. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus promised that His followers would be persecuted and face hardships. Jesus even said, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:10). The apostles were full of joy because Jesus promised they would face suffering, and this promise also included blessing.
- A major theme throughout 1 Peter is suffering. Peter wrote that Christians should rejoice while sharing in the sufferings of Christ so “that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you” (1 Pet. 4:13-14). Peter’s writings about rejoicing during suffering were not theoretical; he truly lived what he wrote.
- Notice how they were rejoicing because “they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name” (Acts 5:41). They suffered for the name of Jesus Christ and considered it an honor because Jesus is worthy.
- The apostles knew that they must “obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). The persecution they faced did not silence their sharing of the gospel. The apostles not only continued rejoicing in the face of persecution, but they also continued preaching! Many of the apostles would continue preaching and sharing the gospel all the way to their deaths as martyrs.



- The suffering the apostles experienced led to growth for the church. The way we respond to our suffering can be a powerful witness to the watching world. If we are always complaining and grumbling when faced with difficulties, we can harm our witness.

ASK: (DDG p. 23)

How does the apostles' joy in the midst of suffering encourage you?

(we know that others have suffered before us, and the Lord has preserved them; suffering is an opportunity to reveal where our true joy is found; suffering for Christ is a great honor)

READ: Understanding that God revealed His glory through Jesus and that we can rejoice and be glad as we do all things for His glory, even through persecution and opposition, read the key doctrine below (DDG p. 23):

Key Doctrine #27: God's Glory: The glory of God is His manifest work, the way He represents His perfect character through His activity. It also refers to His excellent reputation and is given as one of the reasons we are to praise His name. Another sense of the word is the inherent beauty of God, the unbearable brightness and beauty of His being as He radiates His own attributes and characteristics for all to witness. The Scriptures speak of humanity as having "fallen short" of God's glory (Rom. 3:23) because we have rejected the purpose for which God created us—to glorify Him.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 23)

Like the disciples, how can we put God's glory first in our daily life?

(make Him a daily priority; evaluate all our actions by what brings Him the most glory; obey Him and His Word; be a part of growing His kingdom in all we do)

TRANSITION: Even with the loss of comfort and the threat of martyrdom, Jesus's followers continued to preach about Him. Despite the opposition they faced, Jesus's followers continued to preach the gospel with conviction and joy.

MY RESPONSE

SAY: Jesus commanded His followers to be witnesses of the salvation from sin that can be found in Him alone. But Jesus never promised it would be easy; just as Christ experienced rejection and suffering, so will His followers. Suffering for Christ is cause not for despair but rather for joy, knowing that God uses our sufferings, like Christ's, for His glory (Heb. 12:2). Because Jesus suffered on our behalf, we seek to stand firm for the cause of the gospel in the midst of suffering, praying that God might use all of our adversity to bring glory to Himself.

HEAD:

The way we respond to suffering demonstrates whether our trust in God is genuine. We will not always be perfect in our response to suffering, but we should seek to bring Him honor and praise by the way we respond. Our Savior suffered; therefore, we should be prepared to trust in God's goodness toward us in the midst of suffering.

What about God's character allows us to trust Him in times of suffering?

HEART:

The apostles were imprisoned; however, they did not respond in anger to those who wrongfully imprisoned them. They instead shared about the forgiveness found in Jesus. Even being flogged, they rejoiced because their joy was rooted in Christ. We, too, can praise God for the blessings and the trials in our lives.

What about your current suffering or trials can you praise God for?

HANDS:

No amount of suffering should deter believers from proclaiming the life-saving gospel of Jesus Christ. When people ridicule you for following Jesus, see it as an opportunity to be emboldened to proclaim the only message of salvation. We should seek to share the good news of Jesus Christ and suffer for Him because He alone is worthy.

To whom can you share the gospel this week, perhaps someone you know who may be antagonistic toward it?

PRAY: Father, we thank You for the life that You have given us through Your Son, Jesus Christ. We pray that You would strengthen our faith to see opposition to the gospel in our lives as opportunities to make much of Jesus's name.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"People who consider themselves blessed when they suffer for Christ never desert, no matter how hard the battles they have to fight."³

–J. I. Packer (1926–2020)

EXTRA

POINT 1: PREACHING JESUS REQUIRES CONVICTION (ACTS 5:25-32).

+ **COMMENTARY**

“See, how these people were instructed both by deeds and by words, and yet they paid no heed, that their condemnation might be just. For to this end did God suffer the Apostles to be brought to trial, that both their adversaries might be instructed, and all might learn, and that the Apostles might be invigorated to boldness of speech. ‘And they hearing that, were cut to the heart.’ (v. 33.) The others (on a former occasion) ‘when they heard these things were pricked;’ here they were cut (as with a saw) ‘and desired to slay them.’”⁴

+ **COMMENTARY**

“It is not surprising that, with such spectacular ministry by the apostles, the Jewish leaders ‘were filled with jealousy’ (v. 17). The success of the apostles upset the peace that reigned in the community as these leaders lost their power and control over the people. They had to respond with a corresponding show of power. As often happens, they used political power to attack the church rather than spiritual power (v. 18). Yet their plans are foiled through an angelic rescue (v. 19).”⁵

+ **OPTIONAL DISCUSSION**

An early church leader by the name of John Chrysostom said, “There is nothing dreadful to him that fears God; but all that is dreadful is for others.”⁶

Ask your group, “What do you think of this quote? Do you agree or disagree and why?”

EXTRA

POINT 2: PREACHING JESUS CAUSES OPPOSITION

(ACTS 5:33-40).

+ COMMENTARY

“We flatter ourselves if we imagine we have known anything like the oppression they knew. But we also make a mistake if we imagine we are immune. We do face waves of opposition, though they are more subtle. Sometimes we do not even know they have overwhelmed us. But the enemy knows and celebrates because we no longer speak and teach ‘the full message of this new life’ (v. 20).”⁷

+ COMMENTARY

“The temple leaders almost decided to dispose of the believers as they had done with Jesus, but a highly respected teacher named Gamaliel intervened. Beginning with a short history of other failed movements, he reminded the men that their noninterference policy had served them well in the past. As each would-be messiah or populist movement had surfaced, the Sanhedrin had refused to lend its support for fear of Rome’s wrath. But they had also avoided taking sides with Rome to avoid angering the people. In each case, the deceptive leader was killed, his movement fell apart, and the crisis passed without the Sanhedrin’s involvement (5:35–37). Gamaliel therefore reasoned that if this movement didn’t have God behind it, the crisis would resolve itself. If, on the other hand, these Jesus followers had God on their side, the council would be wise to stay out of the Lord’s way (5:38–39).

While Gamaliel acted in the interests of communal self-preservation, he uttered more truth than he realized. As a leader of Israel, he was admitting that only divine power could help a group of simple, uneducated, unarmed civilians expand under the suffocating domination of Rome. Because the council wanted to remain free of Roman dominion as much as anyone, they saw no reason to quash any movement that might prove successful—that is, so long as Rome didn’t blame the Sanhedrin for failing to keep the peace. So far, this troublesome movement had remained politically peaceful.”⁸

+ OPTIONAL DISCUSSION

Amy Carmichael, a missionary in India, wrote the poem, “No Scar?”:

“Hast thou no scar?
No hidden scar on foot, or side, or hand?
I hear thee sung as mighty in the land,
I hear them hail thy bright ascendant star,
Hast thou no scar?

Hast thou no wound?
Yet I was wounded by the archers, spent,
Leaned Me against a tree to die; and rent
by ravening beasts that compassed Me, I swooned:
Hast thou no wound?

No wound, no scar?
Yet, as the Master shall the servant be,
And, pierced are the feet that follow Me;
But thine are whole: can he have followed far
Who has no wounds nor scar?”⁹

Ask your group, “What do you think she meant by this poem?”

POINT 3: PREACHING JESUS PROMPTS JOY (ACTS 5:41-42).

+ COMMENTARY

“Not only did the punishment not deter the Christians (verse 42). It also filled them with joy. They had suffered ignominy and physical pain, and therefore in a very real sense they cannot have been feeling happy. Yet at the same time their reaction was one of joy because they had been regarded by God as worthy to take their share of suffering for the sake of the gospel, or, as it is put here, for the sake of the Name (21:13; 3 John 7), i.e. of Jesus. Here we have a concrete example of that ‘rejoicing in suffering’ which should be the hallmark of the Christian under persecution (1 Pet. 4:13; cf. Matt. 5:11f.; Rom. 5:3f.; 2 Cor. 6:10; 1 Pet. 1:6f).”¹⁰

+ ILLUSTRATION

“During China’s Boxer Rebellion of 1900, insurgents captured a mission station, blocked all the gates but one, and in front of that one gate placed a cross flat on the ground. Then the word was passed to those inside that any who trampled the cross underfoot would be permitted their freedom and life, but that any refusing would be shot. Terribly frightened, the first seven students trampled the cross under their feet and were allowed to go free. But the eighth student, a young girl, refused to commit the sacrilegious act. Kneeling beside the cross in prayer for strength, she arose and moved carefully around the cross, and went out to face the firing squad. Strengthened by her example, every one of the remaining ninety-two students followed her to the firing squad.”¹¹

When we are faithful to Christ in the midst of persecution, we not only find joy in obedience but in also knowing we can inspire others to join us in faithfulness.

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