

Life Together

Agape Lessons

2018-2019



1. Message from the Shepherds

On behalf of the shepherds we want to thank you for accepting the invitation to be Agape Group leaders. We believe that this ministry has great potential for the continued growth of our congregation, and we appreciate your willingness to accept this responsibility.

Your work will enable us to take the gospel outside the walls of our church building and into our community, and we are confident that as you sow the seed of the Word our God will produce a harvest. Any time Christians gather in homes for a serious discussion of the Scriptures it is a positive and healthy thing, but we believe that under the direction of the leaders of the Agape Groups ministry it can be an effective evangelistic tool as well.

During the preparation for this ministry the shepherds reviewed the programs of other churches to study their approach. However, the Cabot congregation has a long history of small groups, and this new approach is in many ways a return to some of the things we have practiced for many years.

But more than that, it is an effort to go back to some of the practices of the New Testament church in the first century. Our prayer is that through Agape Groups we will restore some of the evangelistic concern and success of those early Christians, and as your shepherds we appreciate and support your part in this good work.

- The Shepherds



2. Vision Statement

The Agape Groups ministry is a program of small groups of 8 to 12 people meeting in homes for Bible study, encouragement, and evangelism. They are called “Agape groups” because we want and expect to develop stronger love for one another (by using the groups for encouragement), others (by using this format for evangelism), and God’s Word (through a life-related study of Scripture).

The purpose of Agape Groups is found in a commandment from Christ: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love (*agape*) one another: just as I have loved (*agape*) you, you also are to love (*agape*) one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love (*agape*) for one another” (John 13:34-35). Our goals are to lead non-Christians to Jesus, and to lead Christians into a deeper awareness of what it means to be his disciple.

The purpose of this manual is to provide you with the essential information you need to establish and maintain a group that accomplishes these goals.

3. What Can I Expect as an Agape Group Leader?

- **Personal growth** - Paul told his friend Philemon, “*I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ*” (verse 6). The unique nature of faith is that it only becomes “complete” when it is shared with others; we believe that as an Agape Group leader you will find your own understanding of the gospel enhanced and deepened, as you lead others in considering the example and teachings of Jesus.
- **Deeper relationships** - In the New Testament “fellowship” refers to more than simply coffee and donuts- it describes the partnership of sharing the good news of all that Christ has done for us (Philippians 1:5). Because you have agreed to share in this outreach effort, we believe that you can expect to experience that deeper level of fellowship, as together we seek to know Christ and to make him known.
- **God’s blessings** - Jesus promised that as we share his gospel, “*I am with you always*” (Matthew 28:20). We will never be more aware of the presence of Jesus than when we are serving as his ambassadors by sharing the gospel with others! (2 Corinthians 5:18-20, Acts 11:21). It is a thrilling thing to see God’s Word come alive in the lives of people who take it seriously, and we believe that in the Agape Group studies you will come to share in that joy.



- **Frustrations** - Jesus cautioned his disciples that when they represented him, they could expect a variety of responses (Matthew 10:40-42). As an Agape Group leader, you can expect to know the joy of seeing good and honest hearts open up to the Word (1 Peter 1:22-23), and the disappointment of seeing individuals struggle with the demands of discipleship and ultimately reject the invitation of Jesus (cf. Luke 18:18-30).
- **Support** - You can expect the full support of the elders and of the Agape Group leadership as together we use this ministry to build up the church and to reach our community. We are committed to providing every resource possible to make your work effective, and to assisting in the resolution of any problems you may encounter.

4. Visitors

A primary purpose of Agape Groups is to reach the Cabot community for Christ. From the very first meeting, encourage members of your group to invite friends, neighbors, co-workers, etc. In addition, don't overlook the potential contacts from among the many individuals who visit our congregation! Every guest who attends a worship service is indicating some level of interest; Agape Groups provide a marvelous opportunity to build on that interest by giving them a chance to get to know some of our folks, and to know the message of the gospel, in a more in-depth way!

5. Curriculum

The text will be God's Word. Agape Group members will examine and discuss a passage of the Bible. The lessons for this year are provided at the back of this guide (starting on page 12). You may choose to lead all the lessons yourself, switch off with your co-leader, or rotate among the men in the group who are comfortable leading a lesson.

This year we will be studying Abraham as part of our congregational theme *Preparing for Eternity*.

6. Characteristics of Agape Group Leaders

Qualifications

- Spiritual maturity.
- Commitment.
- Ability to lead a discussion (not simply lecture).



- Ability to relate to people.
- Willingness to learn.

Those were the characteristics that we were looking for when we asked you to serve in this capacity. In addition, here are some phrases which describe an effective group leader.

- Portrays a servant's spirit (Matthew 20:26-28, John 13:12-17).
- Shares the concern of Jesus for the lost and burdened (Matthew 9:36-38).
- Committed to get involved with other people's lives (Philippians 2:4).
- Listens with a caring ear (James 1:19).
- Patient with the process and with individual group members (1 Thessalonians 5:14).
- Capable of coping with conflict within the group.
- Capable of distinguishing between your own personal needs as the leaders and the needs of the group (Philippians 2:1-3).
- Is comfortable with group silence (John 8:6-8).
- Able to facilitate the discussion in a way that can involve all group members in the communication.
- Accountable to group members and others to constantly improve leadership skills.
- By both teaching and example lead others to a closer walk with Jesus (Philippians 4:9).

A Word of Encouragement:

If, along about now, you are feeling a bit inadequate to the task, you're in good company! The truth is, all of us feel that way when we first become involved in a ministry like this. The Bible gives us three principles to encourage us:

_____ CREATES EXPERTISE (Acts 6:1f.)

GOD SUPPLIES THE _____ (Romans 12:3-8, 1 Peter 4:10)

JESUS HAS PROMISED HIS _____ (Matthew 28:20,
Exodus 3:12, Joshua 1:9)



2 Corinthians 4:7 “We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is _____ and not _____”

7. Making Meetings Evangelistic

We are asking everyone who signs up for the “Agape Groups” program to make a commitment to invite their friends and neighbors on a regular basis. As a group leader, you can remind them regularly of the purpose of the meetings by saying “This is something we really want to share with others. Who do you know who would benefit from our study?” Possible candidates would include friends, non-Christian spouses, co-workers, parents of your children’s teammates, any acquaintance who is asking spiritual questions or going through personal struggles, etc. The point is- Don’t overlook people who might be interested, and don’t be too quick to “write off” folks! (cf. John 4:7f.).

Whenever your group meets and no visitors are present, **rehearse the following invitation:** “*Hey, have I told you about my small group? It’s a group of us who are meeting over at Joe and Ruth’s on Sunday nights for a Bible study. Anyone is welcome to participate. We’re going through the gospels right now, and our discussions have really helped me understand what the Bible is all about. It has meant a lot to me, and I think you might enjoy it. We meet from 5 to 6 p.m. would you like to come with me next Sunday night?*”

Remind your group that it may be awkward the first time. These feelings are normal. But, like everything else we do, **it gets easier the more we do it.** Even evangelism takes practice!

8. Welcoming Newcomers

Treat guests as part of the group *from their first introduction*. In fact, their introduction can set the tone for their inclusion in the group by communicating the equality of all participants. Don’t make first-time visitors uncomfortable by “spotlighting” them; that is, by drawing undue attention to the fact that they are visitors. Examples:

AWFUL: “Good evening, everyone! John & Mary are first-time visitors to our group, and we are so glad to have visitors with us. Let’s all remember to invite visitors- the other groups are beating us! So- John & Mary, tell us all about yourselves!”

BAD: “John & Mary have never been here before, so let’s all introduce ourselves to them”



BEST: “Before we begin our study, let’s make sure we all know one another. Let’s go around the circle and tell who we are. I’ll begin- my name is Joe”.

Another way to make our visitors relaxed, and become “connected” from their very first meeting, is to ask for some basic information about each member of the group. We all get to know others more easily when we know something about them which can provide a memory “hook”. Here’s an easy way to do that without putting a “spotlight” on first-time visitors:

“It’s good to see everyone here tonight. We may not all know each other, so before we begin our prayer request time I want us to go around the circle and each tell our name and where (NOT WHEN!) you were born. I’ll begin: My name is Cory Spruiell, and I was born in Searcy, Arkansas.”

Some variations on this: *“Please tell your name and.....”*

“your favorite dessert”.

“what you did on your very first job”

“what you think would be the ideal vacation destination”

“the last sporting event you attended, and who won”

9. Personal Bible Studies

If someone is attending Agape Groups on a regular basis it may become apparent that they would benefit from a personal Bible study. If so, ask them if they would like to have a Bible study with you. There is a simple personal Bible study attached to this guide (page 11) for the use of anyone in the group who would like to lead one with a visitor. The conversation might go like this:

“I really appreciate what you had to share during the study tonight, and I can see that you are interested in what the Bible says. I know that this is a group study, but I don’t want to neglect your needs. I was wondering if there’s any way I could help you in your relationship with the Lord?”

If need any help moving from the group study to a personal Bible study contact Chuck Ball, Cory Spruiell, or one of the Shepherds. They can help guide you through it.



10. Structure of a Typical Meeting

- Welcome and introduction of participants
- Bible study
- Prayer Requests
- Reminder to invite visitors
- Prayer for visitors and future contacts
- Supper (optional)

11. Tips for Leading a Small Group Discussion

- “Prime the pump” – start with the ice breaker question. These are open-ended questions with no one right or wrong answer. They are purely opinion type questions. They serve two purposes: start the conversation casually and they help us get to know one another. Sometimes, you can even move from chit-chat to Bible study without anyone realizing it!
- Ask open-ended questions – Yes/no questions stifle conversation. Ask questions that are based on the text but don’t necessarily have one right answer. Examples: in the story of the Prodigal Son, “What would make a boy from a good home rebel like he did?” or In Luke 7 when Jesus raises the widow of Nain’s son, “we aren’t told why Jesus raised the boy as we are in other miracle accounts. What does this story tell us about Jesus?” These kinds of questions are not uncomfortable to answer but force us to discuss the text.
- Affirm every person who answers – Nobody wants to give a stupid answer. Thank everyone for giving an answer.
- Take advantage of group members who ask questions – When a member of the group asks you a question redirect it to the group. It’s EASY conversation! Example: “I have talked enough, what do you all think?”



- Say “I don’t know” – Not knowing the answer to a difficult question is probably every leader’s worst fear. When this happens, you should first ask the group if someone else does know (“I’m not sure about that, does anyone else know”). If no one else knows, always promise to figure it out and come back to the group with an answer next time. You can always ask a minister or shepherd to help with difficult questions.

There is a lesson and hosting schedule on page 40 of this guide.



Outside the Walls

October 21, 2018 and April 7, 2019

Outside the Walls provides us with the unique opportunity to show the Cabot community that we care. Take this opportunity to serve someone who is not a Christian and doesn't have a church home. Here are some ideas to get the creative juices flowing.

- Yard work for an elderly or disabled person.
- Yard work, house work, minor repairs for the spouse of a deployed service person.
- Host a free car wash.
- Host bingo at a nursing home.
- Take gift baskets to police/fire departments.
- Prayer walk the schools, city hall, fire stations, police department
- Help a local organization with yard work, minor repairs, upkeep, etc. Here are some contacts:
 - o Options Pregnancy Center
 - o Beyond Boundaries, Equine Assisted Therapy
 - o Any of the schools
 - o Safe Haven
 - o Cabot Animal Shelter
 - o Cabot Parks and Recreation



Personal Bible Study
(See page 7)

This plan is a simple one to remember because all the Scriptures come from Romans. It is also easy for the person to whom you are sharing Christ to remember the text for future reference. Here is an example of how a conversation might go.

The last part of Romans 6:23 presents the greatest news ever given to men and women. “The gift of God is eternal life in Christ our Lord.” This is a free gift with no strings attached. You can have that gift today. It is the gift of eternal life.

Romans 3:23 says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” This presents the condition of our lives today. We are sinners. The most important word in the verse is “all.” We are all sinners when we stand before a holy God. You are a sinner. Everyone you know is a sinner. I am a sinner. Most of know we sin. We do good things, but we sin, and our sin separates us from God. So God sent Jesus Christ to forgive our sin. The next Scripture in Romans explains the result of that sin.

The second part of Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death.” When we think of a “wage” we think of something we earn from work. Sin earns death or eternal separation from God. This is what we deserve because of our sin.

The solution to this is found in Romans 6:1-4. “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

This Scripture beautifully explains how our sin is forgiven. It portrays a life of faith. I have placed my faith in Jesus. You can trust Him. You can trust in His death and resurrection for your salvation. This Scripture also portrays a life of repentance. When we trust Christ for salvation we have to make a conscience decision to turn away from sin and walk toward Jesus instead. Lastly, this Scripture portrays baptism. It explains that when you are baptized, you share in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. [You might share the story of how you came to Christ and your own baptism]. Do you think you are ready to be baptized?



Be Devoted to One Another

(Acts 2:42-47)

9/16/18

Read Acts 2:42-47

[42] And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. [43] And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. [44] And all who believed were together and had all things in common. [45] And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. [46] And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, [47] praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (ESV)

The Jerusalem church was an infant. In Acts 2:42-47, we read about the practices of the church immediately following the day of Pentecost. It is the first summary we have of an early Christian community. As such, we can learn a lot about what was important to them and what should be important to us.

- What are some characteristics this young church that stand out?
 - 1) A learning church – “They devoted themselves to the apostle’s teaching.”
 - 2) A fellowshipping church – They ate in one another’s homes.
 - 3) A praying church – They prayed together.
 - 4) A growing church – “And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”
- Immediately preceding this passage, Luke says that 3,000 people were added to the church in one day (Acts 2:41). The Jerusalem church was very large and brand new. With that in mind, how do you think the church then was different than it is today? How is it the same?
- What does it mean that they “had all things in common?”¹

¹ “Though some people have referred to this situation as “early communism,” this is clearly not the case, since (1) the giving was voluntary and not compelled by the government, and (2) people still had personal possessions, because they still met in “their homes” (v. 46) and many other Christians after this still owned homes (see 12:12; 17:5; 18:7; 20:20; 21:8, 16; Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philem. 2; 2 John 10). Further, Peter told Ananias and Sapphira that they did not have any obligation to sell their property and give away the money (Acts 5:4). In contrast to communist theory, the abolition of private property is not commanded or implied here. (See 1 Tim. 6:17-19; but also 1 Tim. 6:6-10.) On the other hand, there is a voluntary generosity in sharing possessions that is seen as commendable.” (ESV Study Bible, Note on Acts 2:44, 2085).



I (Cory) sometimes say I was converted by the “casserole committee.” Every (good) church has one of these; a group of ladies who bring hot meals to those suffering from sickness or grieving the death of a loved one.

In 2001, I was ten years old, new to attending church, and my grandmother had just passed away. In the days following her passing, our dining room table became loaded with food. It made a big impact on my ten-year-old self. I remember wondering why these “strangers” cared about us.

Since that time, I have benefited from the teaching, fellowship, and prayers of the church in numerous other ways.

- Share a story of when the local church (this one or another one) had an especially big impact on you.

We will leave the application of today’s lesson rhetorical. Ask yourself what you can do to make the Cabot church look more like the Jerusalem church. How can you contribute to the church’s knowledge of the Scriptures, fellowship, prayer life, and growth?

In a sense, we apply Acts 2:42-47 by participating in Agape Groups (and anytime we are together), because we are learning, fellowshiping, and praying together. This is the example set by the Jerusalem community.

Reminder: Discuss ideas for Outside the Walls which is coming up on 10/21/18. Ideas can be found on page 10. You are not limited by these suggestions, but they may be helpful.

Prayer Requests:



We Need Each Other

Acts 4:23-31

10/7/18

Background:

At our last meeting we discussed the response to Peter's first sermon in Acts. It resulted in the development of the church at Jerusalem. This week we will talk about the response to Peter's second sermon.

Peter and John heal a lame man at the temple gate (Acts 3:1-10). When those nearby recognize the lame man and that he is now able to walk they congregate around Peter and John (Acts 3:11-12). Peter sees and seizes an opportunity to preach the Gospel to those who gathered. While Peter's first sermon made the case for Jesus as the Messiah, "this one was primarily a call for Jews to repent of their rejection of Jesus as Messiah and focuses the argument on the Torah."²

As he was preaching, Peter also captured the attention of the Jewish leaders who then had Peter and John arrested for preaching about Jesus (Acts 4:1-4). Even though the Jewish leaders judged Peter and John to be uneducated, common men, they are impressed by their boldness and release them from jail (Acts 4:5-22). This brings us to our text for today.

Read Acts 4:23-31

[23] When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. [24] And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, [25] who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit,

*"Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples plot in vain?
[26] The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed'—*

² ESV Study Bible note on Acts 3:11-26.

[27] for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, [28] to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. [29] And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, [30] while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” [31] And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. (ESV)

We don't know who these “friends” were that Peter and John run to after they are released from jail. Perhaps they were the other disciples, a church community, or just some personal friends. The Greek word simply means “their own.”

- Why do you suppose they went to their friends after they were released?

Their friends respond with the words recorded in Acts 4:24b-30.

- How is this response different than what you might expect?
- Why do you think they respond this way?

In 4:29 they indicate their willingness to go against the threats given to Peter and John by the Jewish leaders in chapter 3.

- What gives people an extra amount of courage when in like company?
- Describe a time when you were comforted by friends during a hardship.
- What kinds of troubles does the church face today?
- How does individualism undercut the mission of the church?
- How can the church serve one another as Peter and John's friends served them? What are some practical ways we can respond to a brother/sister in need?

Martin Luther wrote, “The Kingdom is to be in the midst of your enemies. And he who will not suffer this does not want to be of the Kingdom of Christ; he wants to be among friends, to sit among roses and lilies, not with the bad people but the devout people.”

- What do you think he is referring to?
- Why is so easy to remain only among like-minded people?
- When is it appropriate to be with our “enemies”?

Reminder: Discuss ideas for Outside the Walls which is coming up on 10/21/18. Ideas can be found on page 10. You are not limited by these suggestions, but they may be helpful.



Prayer Requests:

- Pray that you will have the opportunity to share the Gospel with or encourage someone during your Outside the Walls project.
- Pray that our church family would become a source of comfort and friendship to those who need it.



Be One

Acts 4:32-5:11

11/4/18

Ice Breaker: If you were gifted a large sum of money, what would you do with it?

Read Acts 4:32-5:11

[32] Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. [33] And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. [34] There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold [35] and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. [36] Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, [37] sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. (ESV)

[1] But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, [2] and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. [3] But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? [4] While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God." [5] When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. [6] The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.

[7] After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. [8] And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." [9] But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." [10] Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. [11] And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things. (ESV)

- Why were the Christians here "of one heart and soul"?
- Compare/contrast Barnabas with Ananias and Sapphira.
- What motivated Barnabas' actions?
- What motivated Ananias and Sapphira's actions? What was their "crime"?
- What is the most selfless thing a someone has done for you?



Barnabas appears in for the first time in this passage. Examples are given throughout Acts and the Epistles of Barnabas living up to his nickname, Son of Encouragement (Acts 9:27; 11:25-26; 15:36-39)

- Who is your “Barnabas” (encourager)?
- How can the church today do a better job of meeting one another’s needs?

One thing this passage teaches us is that why we do something is just as important as what we do?

- Why do our motivations matter? (Hint: Joel 2:12)

Selfishness is a powerful tempter. One preacher said, “all sin is derived from selfishness.”

- What are some things that keep you motivated to act more like Barnabas than Ananias and Sapphira?

Prayer Requests:

- Pray for the ability to be more selfless

Chosen to Serve

Acts 6:1-7

11/18/18

Read Acts 6:1-7:

[1] Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.³ [2] And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. [3] Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. [4] But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." [5] And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. [6] These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

[7] And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. (ESV)

- Why do you think the Hellenists were being ignored?
- Why didn't the apostles want to serve tables? Was this selfish?
- When leaders were selected to take over the responsibilities of serving the widows, who does the selecting?
- What are the qualifications to serve?
- Notice that all the men selected have Greek names. Why is that significant?

Satan keeps us from God's good work in many ways: tempting us to do nothing, tempting us to do something destructive or sinful, etc. But have you ever considered that Satan might keep us from God's work by tempting us with God's work? Sometimes he tempts us with something good to do, but we aren't good at it.

- Whether spiritual in nature or not, how have you been kept from doing something good because you got distracted doing something that was good but that you were not very effective at?
- Why don't we all have the same gifts?

³ The Hellenists are Jewish Christians whose first language is Greek instead of Hebrew.



Read verse 5 again. I think this is the biggest miracle in the Bible! Two things strike me about this verse.

1) All the names are Greek (as we have already noted) and 2) The whole church agreed on something!

- What caused the whole church to agree?
- What can the church do today to find such consensus?

Prayer Requests:

- Pray that the church would be effective in its ministry to those in need.



Be Faithful
Acts 7:51-8:3
12/2/18

Background: Soon after Stephen is chosen as one of the seven to distribute food to the widows (see lesson from 11/18/18) he faces opposition from the Jews (6:9). They accused him of blasphemy against Moses and God. They are outraged because they heard Stephen say that Jesus would destroy the temple. Jesus did say this but it was an allusion to his death and resurrection (Mark 14:58; John 2:19-21). The Jews ask him if the accusations are true. Stephen responds with a lengthy summary of the biblical story starting with Abraham. At the end of his summary, he says this:

Acts 7:51–53

[51] “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. [52] Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, [53] you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.” (ESV)

His comment makes the Jews mad and leads us to the text that is our focus today.

Read Acts 7:54-8:3

[54] Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. [55] But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. [56] And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” [57] But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. [58] Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. [59] And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” [60] And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep. (ESV)

[1] And Saul approved of his execution.

And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. [2] Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. [3] But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. (ESV)

- Why do you think God gave the vision that appears in v.56?

In his vision, Stephen notices that Jesus is standing beside God. Elsewhere in Scripture Jesus is described as sitting beside God.

Mark 16:19

[19] So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. (ESV)

Psalms 110:1

*[1] The LORD says to my Lord:
“Sit at my right hand,
until I make your enemies your footstool.” (ESV)*

Hebrews 1:13

[13] And to which of the angels has he ever said,

*“Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”?* (ESV)

- Why is this difference significant? (possible answers: Jesus stood out of respect for someone willing to die for their faith, he stood ready to welcome Stephen to heaven, he stood as Stephen’s advocate before God, he stood in judgement of Stephen’s murders.)⁴
- In 7:60 Stephen asks God not to hold his stoning against the perpetrators. What enables him to have this attitude?

None of us have been stoned (obviously) and probably none of us have had to endure any real persecution for our faith. Perhaps someone in the group has been made fun of for their faith. But it may be that our changing culture will eventually create an environment where the persecution of Christians is acceptable.

⁴ Adapted from David L. Roper, *Acts 1-14*, Truth for Today, 269.



- What should our response be if that happens? (After a few answers are given read at Luke 23:34 and 23:46).

Luke 23:34

[34] And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments. (ESV)

Luke 23:46

[46] Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last. (ESV)

Augustine said, "The church owes the preaching of Paul to the prayer of Stephen." (Notice 8:1)

- What did Augustine mean by this?

Prayer Requests:

- Pray for the strength to forgive those who persecute us.



Share Your Faith

Acts 8:26-40

12/16/18

- Describe your faith journey. How did you come to Christ?

Read Acts 8:26-40

[26] Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place. [27] And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship [28] and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. [29] And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." [30] So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" [31] And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. [32] Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this:

*"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter
and like a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he opens not his mouth.*

[33] In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth."

[34] And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" [35] Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. [36] And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" [38] And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. [39] And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. [40] But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea. (ESV)

This is a pretty straightforward text. Phillip is called by the Spirit to share the Gospel with the Ethiopian eunuch and he does. The eunuch is baptized as a result.

- How comfortable are you sharing your faith?



- Whenever you feel like you should share your faith, what do you say?
- What do you think it means to share the Gospel?
- Why don't people share their faith more often?

Talking about our faith is sometimes awkward. It shouldn't be. Christians are in possession of the best news in the world and we shouldn't be too timid to share it.

I think there are two main reasons why sharing the Gospel freaks us out. 1) We do not intentionally practice it and 2) We are unfamiliar with the basic storyline.

So, here's a challenge:

- 1) Pick two people in your social circle who are not Christians and pray everyday that you would get an opportunity to share the Gospel with them. Invite the to church (offering to walk in with them), serve them in a meaningful way, talk to them about how you became a Christian. There is a sample personal Bible study on page 11.
- 2) Commit the basic storyline of Jesus' birth, life, ministry, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension to memory. 1 Cor. 15, Phil. 2, and Isaiah 53 are good places to start.

Read the text that converted the eunuch (Isaiah 53) together and conclude with a prayer of thanksgiving for Jesus.

- How do you think this text converted him?

Prayer Requests:

- Give thanks for Jesus.

God Can Use You

Acts 9:1-19

1/6/19

Read Acts 9:1-19

[1] But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest [2] and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. [3] Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. [4] And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" [5] And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. [6] But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." [7] The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. [8] Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. [9] And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

[10] Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." [11] And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, [12] and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." [13] But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. [14] And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." [15] But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. [16] For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." [17] So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." [18] And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; [19] and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. (ESV)

- Why does Jesus say, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting *me*?" (It shows Jesus's close association with his followers. To persecute a follower of Christ is to persecute Christ himself).
- What do you suppose was the purpose of Saul's blindness and fasting? (Maybe a result of his intense encounter with Christ to produce a time of reflection. Maybe punishment. Compare with Zechariah's deafness and muteness in Luke 1).
- Why was Ananias hesitant? How would you feel about the Lord's direction to him if it were given to you?
- Are there any people (or people groups) you are hesitant to reach out to? Why?



- What does Ananias' obedience teach us?
- What is the significance of the order of events in 9:18-19? (He was baptized even before he ate – baptism is important!).
- What does Saul's conversion suggest about who God uses for his purposes?

Prayer Requests:

- Pray that God would use us for his glory.



The Gospel is for All

Acts 10:34-38

1/20/19

Ice breaker – Have you ever had to do something that felt wrong even though you knew it wasn't? What was it? How did you overcome the guilt? Why did it feel wrong?

Background

In the beginning of chapter 10, we read about a man named Cornelius who was a Roman centurion (and therefore, a Gentile). He is a God fearer.⁵ His prayers and almsgiving please the Lord. Cornelius then has a vision of an angel of the Lord telling him to send for Peter. Peter is in another town and has a vision the day after Cornelius tells him that God has lifted the Jewish food laws. This means that Gentiles are now welcomed into the covenant people of God! Immediately after Peter's vision he meets the men sent by Cornelius. The next day, Peter follows the men back to Cornelius' house to preach the Gospel to them. The following is what he said.

Read Acts 10:34-38

[34] So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, [35] but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. [36] As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), [37] you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: [38] how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. (ESV)

Peter has been asked to do something that feels wrong to him. In his vision, God tells him he can now eat food that was previously unclean. Soon after, he enters the house of Cornelius which would have also made him unclean.

- How do you think Peter felt about going to the Gentiles?
- What about preaching to the Gentiles would have made Peter uncomfortable?
- How did Peter overcome this feeling?

Certainly, part of what made Peter uncomfortable was that the Jewish law had been relegated to tradition. Peter had lived his whole life following this law and it was just cancelled! Additionally,

⁵ "A gentile who worshipped Israel's God and was in some way attached to a synagogue but who had not submitted to Jewish conversion rites (esp. circumcision)." ESV Study Bible note.



Gentiles were considered second-class citizens in Judaism, even if they were God-fearers. Nevertheless, Peter is called to reach out to Cornelius.

- Are there any people groups today that the church is uncomfortable reaching out to?
- What makes us uncomfortable about this?
- What can we do to overcome our discomfort about reaching people unlike ourselves?

Prayer Requests:

- Pray that God will give us the strength to share the Gospel without partiality.



The Gospel Truth

Acts 14:1-7

2/3/18

Read Acts 14:1-7

[1] Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. [2] But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. [3] So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. [4] But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. [5] When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, [6] they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, [7] and there they continued to preach the gospel.

- What do you think it means in v. 2 when it says that the unbelieving Jews poisoned the minds of the Gentiles against the church?
- What are some lies unbelieving people believe about the church today? How do these lies start?
- How can the church dispel such lies?
- Verse 3 says that Paul and Barnabas' witness to the Gospel included signs and wonders. These abilities don't exist anymore. What do we have to convince people of the truth of the Gospel instead?
- After Paul and Barnabas preached and performed signs and wonders, the people were divided between the Jews and the apostles. Why?
- What about the Gospel divides people today?
- Why do you suppose some people chose not to believe?
- In verse 5 it says that the Jews and Gentiles teamed up to mistreat and stone Paul and Barnabas. What did Paul and Barnabas do in response?
- In what ways is the world hostile to the Gospel today?
- What can we learn from Paul and Barnabas's response to the hostility they experienced?

Prayer Requests:

- Pray that people around us would be receptive to the Gospel.

Church Conflict

Acts 15:1-35

2/17/18

Acts 15:1–35

[1] But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” [2] And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. [3] So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. [4] When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. [5] But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.”

[6] The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. [7] And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. [8] And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, [9] and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. [10] Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? [11] But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

[12] And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. [13] After they finished speaking, James replied, “Brothers, listen to me. [14] Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. [15] And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written,

*[16] ““After this I will return,
and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen;
I will rebuild its ruins,
and I will restore it,*

*[17] that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord,
and all the Gentiles who are called by my name,
says the Lord, who makes these things [18] known from of old.’*

[19] Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, [20] but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood. [21] For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues.”

[22] Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, [23] with the following letter: “The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. [24] Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, [25] it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, [26] men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. [27] We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. [28] For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: [29] that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.”

[30] So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. [31] And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. [32] And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words. [33] And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them. [35] But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also. (ESV)

Background: The early church soon found itself needing to deal with the large number of Gentiles coming to Christ. The question they are attempting to settle in this passage is, “Must Gentiles become Jews before becoming Christians?”

- What is the main problem in the passage? (Some Jews believe that Gentiles must be circumcised in to become Christians.)
- In verse 10, Peter asks the crowd why they are putting God to the test. What is the test?
- Do we place any unnecessary burdens or requirements on people today? What are they?
- What is James’ reason for allowing the Gentiles to become Christians in verses 13-18?
- The ultimate verdict of the Jerusalem Council is that a letter should be written to the Gentile churches asking them to abstain from anything sacrificed to idols, blood, things that have been strangled, and sexual immorality. Why do you suppose these things were chosen to be included in the letter? (All were associated with pagan religions).
- What kinds of things do we have similar “opinion or tradition wars” about today?



- What can we learn from the Jerusalem Council about how to handle such conflicts?

Prayer Requests:

- Pray for the unity of the church.



Where are You Called?

Acts 16:1-10

3/3/19

Acts 16:1-10

[1] Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. [2] He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. [3] Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. [4] As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. [5] So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.

[6] And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. [7] And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. [8] So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. [9] And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." [10] And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. (ESV)

- Why is Timothy circumcised? (Paul didn't want the Gospel message to be derailed over something nonessential).

Verse 4 refers to the decision of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15 - which we talked about at our last meeting). That decision was that Gentiles did not have to become Jews before becoming Christians.

- How do you reconcile the fact that Paul made Timothy (a Gentile Christian) undergo circumcision? (Timothy didn't think of it as a "salvation issue" but as a means to reach the Jews for Christ).
- What does this teach us about what we should be willing to do to reach others for Christ?
- Paul is forbidden by the Holy Spirit to go to Asia and is instead called to Macedonia. Do you think the Holy Spirit works in such ways today? Does he lead us anywhere?
- Who are you, as an individual and as a church, called to preach to?

Prayer Requests:

- Pray that we are willing to make the necessary steps to reach our neighbor.
- Pray that we become more sensitive to the Spirit's leading.

Outside the Walls is 4/7/19. Discuss your service project ideas. See page 10 for help.



Unlikely Church Plant

Acts 16:11-40

3/17/19

Acts 16:11-40

[11] So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, [12] and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. [13] And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. [14] One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. [15] And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

[16] As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. [17] She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." [18] And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.

[19] But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. [20] And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. [21] They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice." [22] The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. [23] And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. [24] Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

[25] About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, [26] and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. [27] When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. [28] But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." [29] And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. [30] Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" [31] And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." [32] And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. [33]

And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. [34] Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

[35] But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, "Let those men go." [36] And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace." [37] But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out." [38] The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. [39] So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. [40] So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed. (ESV)

- This is the story of the planting of the church at Philippi. It apparently takes off and does well, as we hear about in Paul's letter to the Philippians. What strikes you as unusual about his church plant?
- The first three converts at Philippi are Lydia, a fortune telling slave girl, and a jailer. What does this tell us about who we are called to reach?
- When Paul casts the spirit out of the slave girl, her owners drag Paul and Silas into the marketplace for punishment. Why?
- They obviously believed in Paul's ability to drive out the spirit, why do you suppose they chose not to believe?
- In what ways does our own greed get in the way of our faith?
- When Paul and Silas are put in prison, the text says they were praying and singing hymns to God. Why were they doing this?
- What can we learn from Paul and Silas' situation here?
- Why is it difficult to focus on God when we are facing hardships?
- Why does the Philippian jailer decide to be baptized?
- What can we learn from Paul and Silas about influence from this passage?

Prayer Requests:

Outside the Walls is 4/7/19. See page 10 for ideas.



Be a Berean
Acts 17:10-15
5/5/19

Acts 17:10–15

[10] The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. [11] Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. [12] Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men. [13] But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds. [14] Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there. [15] Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed. (ESV)

This lesson is shorter than usual, but important. In this passage Luke commends the Bereans for two reasons: 1) they were willing and eager to learn and 2) they searched the Scriptures to see if what Paul was telling them was true. Today, I want us to strengthen each other by sharing things that help us in Bible study.

- What motivates you to study the Bible?
- What are some Bible study tools you use? My own favorite is called The Bible Project ([youtube.com/thebibleproject](https://www.youtube.com/thebibleproject)). Go to their Youtube channel and search “Read Scripture: Acts Ch. 13-28” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-17KxpjL0Q>) . That’s the video relevant to today’s lesson.

Prayer Requests:

- Ask God to give us a greater zeal for His Word.



The Right Sermon to the Right People

Acts 17:16-34

5/19/19

Acts 17:16–34

[16] Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. [17] So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. [18] Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, “What does this babbler wish to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. [19] And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? [20] For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.” [21] Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

[22] So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. [23] For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. [24] The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, [25] nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. [26] And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, [27] that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, [28] for

“‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, “‘For we are indeed his offspring.’”

[29] Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. [30] The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, [31] because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

[32] Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, “We will hear you again about this.” [33] So Paul went out from their midst. [34] But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them. (ESV)

- What provoked Paul to speak in Athens?



- In what way is our “city full of idols”?
- Why do you think the Athenians were curious about what Paul had to say?
- Verse 21 says that the Athenians were content to spend all their time “telling or hearing something new.” In what way(s) is our culture similar?
- Why does Paul seem very religious?

Paul does a good job in this passage of re-appropriating their own culture in order to communicate the Gospel message. In verse 23 he mentions the altar to the unknown god then tells them it’s the God of Jesus. Next, he shares lines from one of their own poets.

- How can we appropriate our own culture to spread the Gospel?
- What are some ways you have seen this done well or poorly in the past?

Prayer Requests:

Date	Lesson	Page #	Host
9/16/18	Be Devoted (Acts 2:42-47)	12	
10/7/18	We Need Each Other (Acts 4:23-31)	14	
10/21/18	Outside the Walls	10	--
11/4/18	Be One (Acts 4:32-5:11)	17	
11/18/18	Chosen to Serve (Acts 6:1-7)	19	
12/2/18	Be Faithful (Acts 7:54-60)	21	
12/16/18	Share Your Faith (Acts 8:26-40)	24	
1/6/19	God Can Use You (Acts 9:1-19)	26	
1/20/19	The Gospel is for All (Acts 10:34-38)	28	
2/3/19	The Gospel Truth (Acts 14:1-28)	30	
2/17/19	Church Conflict (Acts 15: 1-35)	31	
3/3/19	Where Are You Called? (Acts 16:6-10)	34	
3/17/19	Unlikely Church Plant (Acts 16:11-40)	35	
4/7/19	Outside the Walls	10	--
4/21/19	No Meeting Easter	--	--
5/5/19	Be a Berean (Acts 17:10-15)	37	
5/19/19	Right Sermon (Acts 17:16-34)	38	

