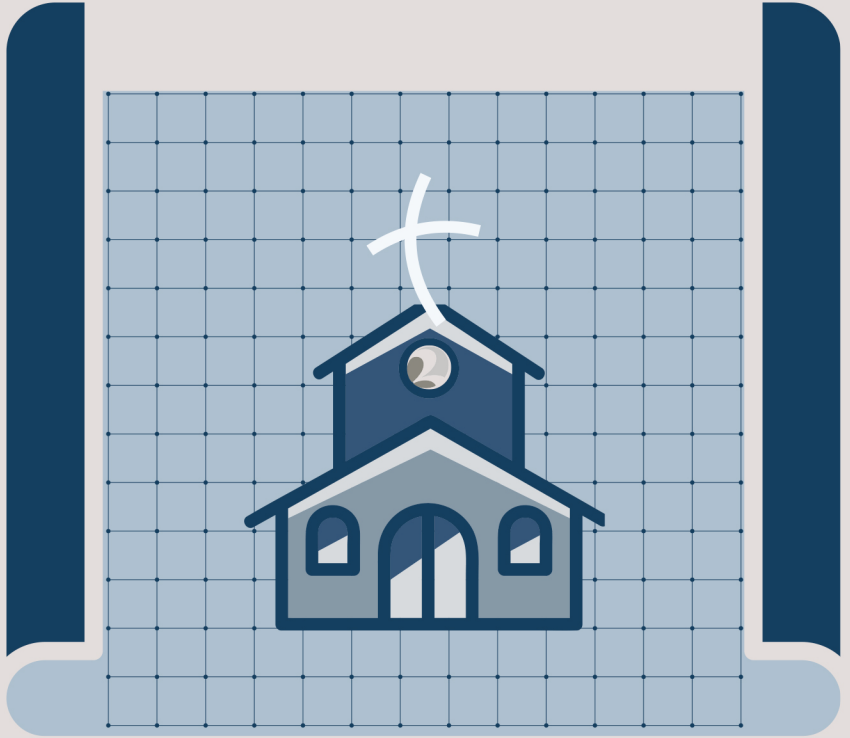




BLUEPRINT



WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

Fall Spiritual Journey 2025

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FROM THE PASTORS

Welcome to Blueprint: What is Church?, a study rooted in the first four chapters of the New Testament Book of Acts. These powerful passages offer a vivid glimpse into the birth of the Church—marked by unity, prayer, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, bold proclamation of the gospel, and radical community. As we explore Acts 1–4 together, we invite you to discover God’s original design for His people—not just as an institution, but as a Spirit-empowered movement of faith, mission, and transformation. This study will challenge and inspire us to reimagine what it means to truly be the Church today.

We invite you to get the most out of the Fall Spiritual Journey by attending worship each week. Join a small group for this journey and cultivate a daily habit of meeting with God in His Word and prayer by using this study guide’s daily devotions.

Our prayer is that this study would challenge you and inspire you toward greater faithfulness in our church family and to the mission, making an impact in eternity.

Your Pastoral Team

HELPS FOR HOSTS

Top Ten Ideas for New Hosts

CONGRATULATIONS! As the host of your small group, you have responded to the call to help shepherd Jesus' flock. Few other tasks in the family of God surpass the contribution you will be making. As you prepare to facilitate your group, whether it is one session or the entire series, here are a few thoughts to keep in mind.

Remember, you are not alone. God knows everything about you, and He knew you would be asked to facilitate your group. Even though you may not feel ready, this is common for all good hosts. God promises, "I will never leave you; I will never abandon you" (Hebrews 13:5). Whether you are facilitating for one evening, several weeks, or a lifetime, you will be blessed as you serve.

1. Don't try to do it alone. Pray right now for God to help you build a healthy team. If you can enlist a co-host to help you shepherd the group, you will find your experience much richer. This is your chance to involve as many people as you can in building a healthy group. All you have to do is ask people to help. You'll be surprised at the response.

2. Be friendly and be yourself. God wants to use your unique gifts and temperament. Be sure to greet people at the door with a big smile.... this can set the mood for the whole gathering. Remember, they are taking as big a step to show up at your house as you are taking to host a small group! Don't try to do things exactly like another host; do them in a way that fits you. Admit when you don't have an answer and apologize when you make a mistake. Your group will love you for it and you'll sleep better at night.

3. Prepare for your meeting ahead of time. Preview the session and write down your responses to each question.

4. Before your group arrives, take a few moments to pray for each member by name. Ask God to use your time together to touch the heart of each person in your group. Expect God to lead you to whomever he wants you to encourage or challenge in a special way. If you listen, God will surely lead.

5. When you ask a question, be patient; someone will eventually respond. Sometimes people need a moment or two of silence to think about the question. If silence doesn't bother you, it won't bother anyone else. After someone responds, affirm the response with a simple "thanks" or "great answer". Then ask, "How about somebody else?" or "Would someone who hasn't shared like to share anything?" Be sensitive to new people or reluctant members who aren't ready to say, pray, or do anything. If you give them a safe setting, they will blossom over time. If someone in your group is a wallflower who sits silently through every session, consider talking to them privately and encouraging them to participate. Let them know how important they are to you, that they are loved and appreciated, and that the group would value their input. Remember, still water often runs deep.

6. Provide transitions between questions. Ask if anyone would like to read the paragraph or Bible passage. Don't call on anyone, but ask a volunteer, and then be patient until someone begins. Be sure to thank the person who reads aloud.

7. Break into smaller groups occasionally. With a greater opportunity to talk in a small circle, people will connect more with the study, apply more quickly what they're learning, and ultimately get more out of their small group experience. A small circle also encourages a quiet person to participate and tends to minimize the effects of a more vocal or dominant member.

8. Small circles are also helpful during prayer time. People who are unaccustomed to praying aloud may feel more comfortable trying it with just two or three others. Also, prayer requests won't take as much time, so circles will have more time to actually pray. When you gather back with the whole group, you can have one person from each circle briefly update everyone on the prayer requests from their subgroups. The other great aspect of subgrouping is that it fosters leadership development. As you ask people in the group to facilitate discussion or to lead a prayer circle, it gives them a small leadership step that can build their confidence.

9. Rotate facilitators occasionally. You may be perfectly capable of hosting each time, but you will help others grow in their faith and gifts if you give them opportunities to facilitate the group.

10. Go through the Small Group Guidelines. This is a very important part of starting a new group. This will help outline and clarify all expectations for your members.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How Long Will This Group Meet?

This study is six sessions long. We encourage your group to add a seventh meeting for a serve project. In your sixth session, each group member may decide if he or she desires to continue on for another study. At that time, you may also want to do some informal evaluation, discuss your Small Group Guidelines, and decide which study you want to do next. We recommend you contact Rob Gaschler at rgaschler@secondbaytown.org for more information on future studies.

Where Do We Find New Group Members?

Recruiting new members can be a challenge for groups, especially new groups with just a few people, or existing groups that lose a few people along the way. We encourage you to use the Circles of Life diagram on page 8 in this study guide to brainstorm a list of people from your workplace, church, school, neighborhood, family, and so on. Then, pray for the people on each member's list. Allow each member to invite several people from their list. Some groups fear that newcomers will interrupt the intimacy that group members have built over time. However, groups that welcome newcomers generally gain strength with the infusion of new blood. Remember, the next person you add just might become a friend for eternity. Logistically, groups find different ways to add members. Some groups remain permanently open, while others choose to open periodically, such as the beginning or end of a study. If your group becomes too large for easy, face-to-face conversations, you can subgroup, forming a second discussion group in another room.

How Do We Handle the Child Care Needs in Our Group?

Second Baytown provides children's activities on Sunday night, Wednesday night and Thursday night. You can contact the church office to find out the specific times and arrange your meetings accordingly. One common solution is to have the adults meet in the living room and share the cost of a baby sitter (or two) who can be with the kids in another part of the house. Another popular option is to have one home for the kids and a second home (close by) for the adults. If desired, the adults could rotate the responsibility of providing a lesson for the kids. The last option is great with school-aged kids and can be a huge blessing to families.

SMALL GROUP GUIDELINES

It's a good idea for every group to put words to their shared values, expectations, and commitments. Such guidelines will help you avoid unspoken agendas and unmet expectations. We recommend you discuss your guidelines during the introduction meeting in order to lay the foundation for a healthy group experience.

WE AGREE TO THE FOLLOWING VALUES:

CLEAR PURPOSE: To grow healthy spiritual lives by building a healthy small group community

GROUP ATTENDANCE: To give priority to the group meeting (call if I am absent or late)

BE CONFIDENTIAL: To keep anything that is shared strictly confidential and within the group

CONFLICT RESOLUTION: To avoid gossip and to immediately resolve any concerns by following the principles of Matthew 18:15-17

SPIRITUAL HEALTH: To give group members permission to speak into my life and help me live a healthy, balanced spiritual life that is pleasing to God

LIMIT OUR FREEDOM: To limit our freedom by not serving or consuming alcohol during small group meetings or events so as to avoid causing a weaker brother or sister to stumble (1 Corinthians 8:1-13; Romans 14:19-21)

WELCOME NEWCOMERS: To invite friends who might benefit from this study and warmly welcome newcomers

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS: To get to know the other members of the group and pray for them regularly

OTHER: _____

We have also discussed and agree on the following items:

CHILD CARE: _____

STARTING TIME: _____ **ENDING TIME:** _____

If you haven't already done so, take a few minutes to fill out the Small Group Calendar, which can be found on page 9.

CIRCLES OF LIFE

Small Group Connections. Discover Who Can Connect In Community.

Use this chart to help carry out one of the values in the Group Guidelines, to "Welcome Newcomers"

Family
(Immediate or Extended)

Fellowship
(Church Relationships)

Friends
(Neighbors, Kids, Sports, School, etc.)

Fun
(Gym, Hobbies, Hangouts)

Factory/Firm
(Work, Professional Arenas)

Follow this Simple, Three-Step Process

1. List one to two people in each circle.
2. Prayerfully select one person or couple from your list and tell your group about them.
3. Give them a call and invite them to your next meeting. Over fifty percent of those invited to a small group say, "Yes!"

SMALL GROUP CALENDAR

Healthy groups share responsibilities and group ownership. It might take some time for this to develop. Shared ownership ensures that responsibility for the group doesn't fall to one person. Use the calendar to keep track of social events, mission projects, birthdays, or days off. Complete this calendar at your first or second meeting. Planning ahead will increase attendance and shared ownership.

DATE	LESSON	LOCATION	FACILITATOR	SNACK/MEAL
	SESSION 1			
	SESSION 2			
	SESSION 3			
	SESSION 4			
	SESSION 5			
	SESSION 6			
	SERVE			

HOW TO HAVE A QUIET TIME

Transformational Discipleship, a recently published book based on extensive spiritual growth research, found that the most significant catalyst for life transformation is daily time in God's Word. Having a daily quiet time or devotion will literally change your life. It is critical to living a Christ-centered life. So, for this study, we have provided daily devotionals for each week. Here are some tips to help you get started.

- 1. Begin with the right attitude.** As you begin, take a minute to pray. Ask God to show you anything in your life that is preventing you from hearing from Him. Ask Him to open your eyes and ears to see and hear what He wants to show you (Psalm 119:18).
- 2. Be ready to obey.** Sometimes God will show you things that are difficult to deal with. Maybe it's a weakness in your life. Maybe it's something He's asking you to do. Whatever it is, listen and respond!
- 3. Select a special time.** If you don't set a special time to meet with God, someone or something else will undoubtedly take His place. Start by setting aside 15 minutes. As you get more comfortable, add more time. Remember, the important thing is quality, not quantity.
- 4. Set a special place.** Jesus had a special place He would go to spend time with the Father. Why? He wanted to get away from the noise and busyness of life to devote all of Himself to His relationship with the Father.
- 5. Gather your resources.** We recommend a journal and an *ESV Study Bible*. If you're ready for more, see other resources recommended throughout the study.
- 6. Don't make it legalistic.** The enemy hates the fact that you are making this a priority. He will try everything to get you off track. Don't let him. Be careful, however, to avoid having a quiet time "just to check it off the list."
- 7. Don't give up or feel guilty if you miss a day.** That's exactly what the enemy wants. Just pick back up where you can.

WEEK 1:

JESUS AT THE CENTER: THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH

SERMON NOTES

[illegible]

WEEK 1: JESUS AT THE CENTER: THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH

Beginning the Journey: Today is your first meeting in our “Blueprint: What Is the Church?” series, and we are excited that you have chosen to join us. Each week we will take a few minutes to “look back” and discuss what you learned last week through the daily devotionals. Then, we will “look up” at what God wants to teach us in our study today. Finally, we will “look forward” to how we will live out the principles God has taught us today.

Looking Back: Take a minute to introduce yourselves to one another, and go over the group guidelines on page 7 as you begin your journey together.

Looking Up: Play the video and consider the discussion questions together.

Tell us about your favorite sequel story. What makes a good sequel?

Read Acts 1:1-5. Luke summarized part one of the story, the Gospel of Luke. What events and people did Luke highlight before starting part two?

Read Acts 1:6-11. The apostles watched Jesus ascend to heaven after seeing Him die and then encountering the resurrected Jesus. Put yourself in their shoes. What would you be thinking as you watched Jesus leave again?

Verse 8 is a summary verse for the book of Acts. What's the connection between the Holy Spirit and the witnesses of Jesus? What changes were coming?

Read 1 Corinthians 12:27. Even though Jesus is no longer walking the earth, what is the relationship between the church and Christ? What unifies individual believers?

Our video talked about how believers are united to Christ and grow together in Christlikeness. What practices of our church or your small group help you make Jesus the center of your life? What can your group put in place this semester to make Jesus the center of your time together?

Read Colossians 3:1-4. Think of a time this week when the world felt chaotic. How does knowing Jesus sits on a heavenly throne, with ultimate power and authority, give you hope?

While we wait for Christ's kingdom to come on earth, what can we do individually in anticipation of His return? Why do we need each other?

Looking Forward: How will you take what you learned today and apply it to your life this week? Take a few moments to pray together and ask God to help you live out these truths.

WEEK 1: JESUS AT THE CENTER: THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH

DAY 1—READ JOHN 14:19-20

"Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you."

Hidden 3D images were all the rage in the 1990s. At first glance, a poster might look like a cluster of painted stars, but if you adjusted your eyes in just the right way, a smoky 3D image would pop out at you. Posters, books, mugs, and puzzles were slathered with these images, but not everyone could see the hidden figure. For some, the image remained a cluster of stars.

Jesus predicted something similar in John's Gospel. As the apostles gathered around, He warned them of a coming time when the world would not see Him, but they would. The apostles would be able to see something—or someone—that the rest of the world wouldn't be able to comprehend.

Soon after speaking these words, Jesus was arrested and crucified. The apostles, along with the rest of the crowds, saw it with their own eyes. Then Jesus came back to life and walked around for forty days before ascending to heaven to sit next to the Father. Jesus knew this was coming when He spoke to the disciples in today's passage. He knew He would be invisible to the world, except to those who belong to Him. His disciples would be in Him, as He was in the Father, and He would be in them.

Those who put their faith in Christ would do more than see Him; they would be a part of Him. We trust in Him, and we are found in Him. Even though He sits next to the Father, He has not left us alone.

Have you put your faith in Jesus? If yes, how do you see Him in your life?

Read John 15:10-11. How did Jesus say you can abide in Him, even after His ascension? What will be the result you can see and feel?

Because Christ lives, we live in Him. How does knowing your union with Christ is permanent give you joy?

Pray that God would help you see Jesus today. Ask the Holy Spirit to teach you to abide in the love of the triune God.

DAY 2—READ ROMANS 6:5,11

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Rose bushes flourish when some branches die. The best way to get the most buds to bloom is to cut off the stems that aren't growing as they should. When branches crisscross, they need to be cut to avoid disease. If the stems grow too thin, turn grey, or get too dry, they need to be cut. This is called pruning, and it allows more flowers to grow.

The Christian life requires pruning too. We die to sin so that life in God might flourish. Paul told the church that our union with Christ means Jesus's death is our death to sin, and His resurrected life is our new life in God. This is our ultimate reality: Sin no longer has dominion over those in Christ. But we still await the day when our union with Christ is complete. We are still lured and enticed by sin. Rather than considering ourselves dead to sin, we bring our sin back to life. We return to our old way of living, when we treasure the things of the world more than the things of God.

Until the day Christ returns, the Christian life will be marked by a continual dying to sin so that we might live to God. We are united with Christ, but we must daily abide in His grace rather than rebelling against it. By grace through faith in Christ, we have died to sin and have been made alive to God. We either choose to participate in this reality, or we choose to rebel against it.

What in your life needs pruning? What sin needs to be cut away so your life in God might flourish?

Read 1 Peter 2:24-25. What was the price of our sin? By grace, what reward do you receive?

Christ's resurrected life makes us alive to God. What do we gain in our new life in God?

Ask God to convict you of and prune anything robbing you of a flourishing life in Him. Thank Jesus for the cross and the gift of new life.

DAY 3—READ EPHESIANS 4:4-6

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

If you drive through Colorado in the summer, you'll see mountain ranges covered in aspen trees. From a distance you'll see forests made of trees with thin white trunks topped with green leaves that seem to shimmer in the breeze. You might wonder how a tree so tall and thin could sway with the wind without tumbling over like a Jenga® set. The secret is the underground root system that connects each tree to another. This gathering of roots gives the trees strength.

The Christian life requires cutting away at our sin and being fortified by our union with Christ together. We are saved in Christ together. All of us enter our lives with Christ through individual stories, with our unique perspectives and God-given preferences, and together we grow into the righteousness of Christ. We are a diverse people made strong through the shared Spirit. We have one hope, one baptism, and one Lord and Father over, through, and in all. The church is made up of various members joined together in Christ. We are the body of Christ in the world.

Life in Christ includes our personal lives and our collective life together as the church. We were saved from sin and saved into a community that serves one another through the self-giving love of Christ. Sanctification is not an isolated activity; it requires fellowship with others. The love of God fortifies us, so we can stand against the chaos of the world.

When you think of life in Christ, does it include community? How are you sanctified through fellowship with others?

Read 1 John 5:3-4. How do the children of God overcome the world? What do they share?

Think of someone in our church who has encouraged you in your faith. Write out a prayer of thanksgiving to God for that person and consider thanking him or her directly.

Ask God to give you a desire to grow in community. Pray that the Spirit would make you into the Christian brother or sister you hope to find in others.

DAY 4—READ EPHESIANS 4:15-16

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

In English, we often use one word to describe two different things. We know the material we study for an exam, and we know the person who lives next-door. Spanish has two different words to highlight these two ways of knowing. Saber describes knowing a list of facts. Conocer describes knowing a person, place, or thing.¹ Our faith grows when we grow in knowledge of God—in knowledge about God and knowing God personally through a relationship with Him.

In Ephesians, Paul instructed a diverse church about how to live out their union with Christ. He said each individual was a part of a single body guided by their head: Jesus Christ. As the head, Jesus directs and sustains every joint that makes up His body. Christ guides and holds the church together. Yet Paul still urged the church to grow up—in every way—“into him who is the head” by “speaking the truth in love” (v. 15). To speak truth we must know about Christ, and to speak in love we must know Christ personally. We must be familiar with what is true of our salvation and with the love of Christ.

Individuals have different inclinations. For some, gaining information about God reveals the beauty of truth, so they delight in theology and Bible study. For others, deepening a relationship with God reveals the wonder of love, so they find joy in prayer and service. Both types of knowing are necessary for the body to grow up in every way into Christ. We need every member of the church teaching and practicing the love of God together.

Are you more inclined to seek knowledge of God through information or in relationship? How can you seek growth in both areas?

Read Romans 12:4-5. What does this teach about the benefit of different members in one body?

Consider how God has made Himself known to you. How can you use this to build up the church in Christ?

Thank God for giving you knowledge of Himself, and ask Him to show you where you might use this to serve the body of Christ.

1. "Saber vs. Conocer," SpanishDictionary.com, accessed April 9, 2025, <https://www.spanishdict.com/guide/saber-vs-conocer>.

DAY 5—READ COLOSSIANS 3:1-3

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

If you go into the movie theater after the commercials, you're unlikely to see popcorn hiding in the chair or the bubble gum under your seat. The dim lights are good for putting our attention on the movie screen and for pulling our attention away from the mess around us. Sin often acts like those dim lights, taking our attention away from our reality to a temporary, shiny thing in front of us. Life with others in Christ is like finally turning on the lights; it helps us see our mess clearly so we can enjoy something better.

In Christ, we aren't surprised by the mess. We know we are works in progress. We put our sin to death repeatedly by returning to the mercy of Christ repeatedly. We don't hide our sin because our lives are hidden with Christ. His righteousness is ours. And as those united to Christ, we help shine light on sin so we can see our hope more clearly. We help each other set our hearts on Christ, so the world becomes less desirable. We confess our sins to each other and point each other to the Savior who will one day complete His work in us.

Because Christ lives, we confess our sins to each other and rejoice together in the hope we have in Him. Through confession and rejoicing we reorient our attention to delight in the God who saves us.

What sins are you tempted to hide from others? How is this different from living a life that is hidden in Christ?

Read Colossians 3:5-10. Which of these sins are hardest to put to death? How does knowing Christ give you hope?

Think of a person who loves you and loves Christ. Choose a time and place to confess your sin to this person and tell him or her how to help point you back to Christ.

Praise the Father for hiding your life in Christ's righteousness. Ask the Spirit to help you desire the things above more than the things of the world.

SERMON NOTES

[illegible]

WEEK 2: ROOTED IN THE WORD: THE CHURCH'S GUIDING TRUTH

Looking Back: What did God teach you this past week as you read the daily devotions? What opportunities did you have to apply what you learned?

Looking Up: Play the video and consider the discussion questions together.

Have you ever accidentally assembled a piece of furniture or something else backward? Where did you go astray?

Read Acts 1:12-17. Right after the angels appeared, the apostles returned to Jerusalem and met with other disciples. What two things did they do when they joined together? Why do you think that was important to them?

Read Acts 1:18-26. The disciples remembered God's Word, acted on God's Word, and sought God's will. Does our community follow their example through what we do and how we pray?

Think about a time when someone has shared “their truth.” Why does the truth of God’s Word have the authority to either support or refute all other “truths”?

Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Give examples of a time when Scripture has been profitable to you and/or your community.

The Bible reveals truth, directs our lives, and forms community. How can God’s Word create a people who show the hope of God to a lonely world?

The Bible roots the church. What regular rhythms or daily habits will you put in place to anchor yourself in God’s Word? How can our group help with this?

Looking Forward: How will you take what you learned today and apply it to your life this week? Take a few minutes to plan your next meeting and spend some time in prayer together.

WEEK 2: THE WORD ROOTS THE CHURCH

DAY 1—READ ACTS 1:16

“Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.”

Every day, Americans spend a little over 5 hours on their phones. Phones can be used for work or school, but this survey reported only three hours of phone use fall during work hours. This leaves 2 hours and 16 minutes of free time on our phones. Phones have become a source of comfort at best and addiction at worst.

We devote our time to the things that matter to us, and where we spend time reinforces those values. After the apostles watched Jesus ascend to heaven, they went straight to Jerusalem to pray and submit to God’s Word. They didn’t fully understand what was coming next, but they didn’t give up nor did they seek their own way. They gathered, considered what God said, and sought to fulfill His will.

When the world feels disorienting or the future seems uncertain, we also have God’s Word to root us in the God who is good, right, and true. Our phones are a cheap fix. Only Scripture can brace us against whatever storms of life we endure. Our phones leave us needing more—we come back to them day after day—and they form us into anxious people who are disconnected from reality. God’s Word makes a home in us, forming us into faithful people who can see reality more clearly. We devote our time to the things that matter to us, and those things reinforce what we value. Our habits form our desires, and those who love God are to devote themselves to God’s Word.

1. “Are You Addicted to Your Phone? American Phone Usage & Screen Time Statistics,” Industry News, Harmony Healthcare IT, January 8, 2025, <https://www.harmonyhit.com/phone-screen-time-statistics/?clreqid=a5b99b78-5919-4ddd-a2d7-5cb3c4e66e6d&kbid=58587>.

What are some of your daily habits? How do they reveal your values and reinforce your desires?

Read Psalm 119:25-32. What did the psalmist ask God to do? What did the psalmist commit to do?

How would you like your desires to change? What new habits are needed to form those new desires?

Pray a section of Psalm 119 back to God. Ask God for a love of His Word and commit to making new habits that honor Him.

DAY 2—READ JOHN 1:1-3

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

When and where you grew up influences the way you pronounce various words. A group of people might be simply you guys or a twangy y'all. We say the same things but use different terms depending on when and where we grew up.

In John's Gospel, he referenced God creating the heavens and the earth but added a new term: the Word. He was showing an old story through a different lens to a different audience. John prompted his readers to remember humanity's origin story, highlighting that the Son existed before anyone saw the face of Jesus. The "Word" is the eternal Son of God revealed as the man Jesus.

All of Scripture from Genesis through Revelation reveals Jesus Christ, the Word of God. The Old Testament anticipates Christ's coming, the Gospels give an account of Jesus's life, and the whole of the New Testament teaches the church to anticipate Christ's return. To know Jesus is to know God's Word. To study Scripture is to peer into the activity of the Triune God, who draws near His people. To participate in a relationship with Christ is to obey the Word of God.

What do the first verses in John's Gospel teach us about the man Jesus?

Why is that good news for those who have put their faith in Christ?

In what way can you engage in relationship with Christ by expanding your knowledge of God's Word?

**Thank God for revealing the Son through the Word.
Ask God to help you know Jesus through His Word.**

DAY 3—READ HEBREWS 4:12-13

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him whom we must give account.

If you google “guilty kid with a marker,” you’ll find an array of videos showing children covered in ink. You might even have your own funny story of a kid, who was obviously guilty, trying to deny his or her complicity or explain away his or her behavior. To the adults in the room, this attempt to hide is ridiculous and sometimes humorous.

The Bible is more than a collection of leather, ink, and paper; it is the living and active Word of God. God’s Word discerns the thoughts and intentions of every heart, and trying to hide from its truth is like a kid covered in marker trying to explain away or give excuses for the writing on the wall. God sees our minds and hearts. We cannot hide from God. His Word reveals what is right and wrong, holy and wicked, and who is in God or apart from God.

We cannot know what is true apart from the God who is truth. To deny God is to deny what is ultimately true. God’s Word exposes our guilt and invites us into true redemption by faith in Christ. Everyone will one day give account to God, but only those in Christ can claim His righteousness.

As we grow in God’s Word, God uses us to share what is true with the world. We abide in God’s Word so we can tell the world of salvation offered in Christ alone.

When has Scripture revealed the thoughts and intentions of your heart? How did you draw near to God, or shrink back, as a result?

Read 1 Peter 1:22-25. How is the living and abiding Word of God shown through those who obey the truth?

How can you abide in God's Word so that He might spread truth to the world through you? Who misses out if you do not?

Ask God to give you an urgency in knowing His Word out of love for Him and for those who live apart from Him.

DAY 4—READ 2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Trust-building exercises help foster connection. A person might stand upright with arms crossed and eyes closed before falling back into a team of people who will catch him or her before he or she hits the ground. Or as a means of working together to solve problems, a team might use a collection of crafts to build a parachute for an egg, so it won't crack when dropped from above. Though sometimes silly, these activities build trust.

The church is guided by the Bible because we trust the God who gave it. The Bible is authoritative because its words are breathed out by the one true God. And the Bible is sufficient—meaning it is all we need for life and righteousness—because it reveals a holy God who draws near to His people. Even when obedience conflicts with our wants, Scripture will always guide the people of God toward His righteousness, perfection, and goodness.

The story of God invites our participation in the divine work of our Creator. We may not see the world clearly or fully understand what God is orchestrating in our lives, but by submitting ourselves to the authority of His Word, we strengthen our faith in our trustworthy Redeemer. The commands of Scripture are not a cold, hard set of rules but trusted paths to discovering the infinite delights of God who loves His creation. God's Word is sufficient for revealing God's will to God's people.

What attributes of God are revealed through the story of redemption and the commands of Scripture?

Read Romans 15:4. When has God's Word given you instruction, endurance, encouragement, or hope?

Choose one verse from this week to commit to memory. How does Scripture memory build our trust in God's Word?

Praise God for not hiding His will from you but revealing it through Scripture. Ask God to strengthen your faith by helping you trust Him at His word.

DAY 5—READ EPHESIANS 4:31-32

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

When cell phones first came out, text messages cost extra and were a hassle to type out. “Talk to you later” was abbreviated to “TTYL” and “Be right back” became “BRB.” Each typed character was precious, so they were spent wisely. The circumstances were often similar for the writers of Scripture. Papyrus, the paper they wrote on, was expensive and often hard to find, so they used every word with precision. Repetition, in a way, was an attempt to add exclamation marks for something an author really wanted his hearers to understand.

Throughout the New Testament, we find over fifty commands for how the church ought to live with one another. We are told to love one another (John 13:34-35), honor one another (Romans 12:10), greet one another (1 Corinthians 16:20), agree with one another (2 Corinthians 13:11), live in harmony with one another (Romans 12:16), be kind to one another (Ephesians 4:32), forgive one another (Colossians 3:13), bear one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2), confess to one another (James 5:16), and encourage one another (Hebrews 10:25). And that’s only ten examples!

The Word of God reveals God, guides our lives toward Him, and creates a community that enjoys His goodness. The Bible tells us how to live with others in such a way that the attributes of God are visible among us. Bible study is not just an individual activity, it is a means of forming the church into the image of the Savior. The Word of God sanctifies a community of people who belong to God and to one another. When we live out these “one anothers,” we display Christ’s image to the world and discover new joys in Him.

Which “one another” do you find easiest to follow? Which is most difficult?

Read 1 John 4:20-21. What does Scripture call us when we love God but hate someone in the family of faith? Why?

What could you gain by living out the “one anothers” of the New Testament? How would it bless those around you?

Pray that God would grow your knowledge of Him through the Bible, so His attributes are visible through you and your community.

WEEK 3:

EMPOWERED BY THE SPIRIT: FUEL FOR KINGDOM IMPACT

SERMON NOTES

WEEK 3: EMPOWERED BY THE SPIRIT: FUEL FOR KINGDOM IMPACT

Looking Back: What did God teach you this past week as you read the daily devotions? What opportunities did you have to apply what you learned?

Looking Up: Play the video and consider the discussion questions together.

What's a gift you remember receiving that you were really excited about? How did you react?

Read Acts 2:1-4. Describe the scene of Pentecost. What senses were involved?

Read Acts 2:5-13. The disciples no longer seemed bewildered or confused. What were they able to do after they received the Spirit? What was new? Do you think it surprised them?

The same Spirit that fell in Acts 2 is now alive in those who believe in Jesus. According to the video, what new things has the Spirit enabled you to do?

Read Romans 8:9-11. What is the difference between Spirit-reliance and self-reliance? What cues you in to whether you're seeking your own glory or participating in God's?

The Spirit falling in Acts 2 was a fulfillment of God's Old Testament promises. What promises of God do you trust in? What is something you want from God that isn't one of His promises?

Read Ephesians 1:3-10. Name three things that stand out that God has gifted you. How do you value these things as good gifts from God?

The Holy Spirit keeps us in God until we see Him in glory. How can knowing this is true give you confidence today? How can trusting this is true help grow your love, joy, peace, or patience? (See Galatians 5:22-23 for more Fruit of the Spirit.)

Looking Forward: How will you take what you learned today and apply it to your life this week? Take a few minutes to plan your next meeting and spend some time in prayer together.

WEEK 3: EMPOWERED BY THE SPIRIT: FUEL FOR KINGDOM IMPACT

DAY 1—READ JOEL 2:30,32

"And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. . . . And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Each week we fill our calendars with activities. Some of our schedule is up to us, but other parts are not. We have work meetings and kids' practices, a dinner with friends, and Wednesday night home group. These are things we schedule, plan, and make happen. Other things aren't up to us. Birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays aren't as flexible; they come and go without our input. Or the unexpected happens—a car wreck, a new job, a sick kid—and all your plans are scattered. Some things are in our control, but a lot is not.

In the Old Testament, God promised a day when He would send His Holy Spirit to those who called on Him. It would never be in humanity's control to work their way toward God. Left on their own, people would continue to abound in sin. The prophet Joel warned God's people of future day when God would judge them for unrighteousness, but he also foretold of a day when God would save them by His grace.

When God sent the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, the people were gathered in prayer to seek God's will. They were simply depending on God. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers is evidence of God's faithfulness, not our own. No amount of doing the right things in the right way at the right time will earn us peace with God, yet still the Spirit takes residence in us. We don't need to fight for more control and autonomy, we can trust that God will continue to be faithful.

What promises of God do you depend on? How do you trust God to be faithful?

Read Philippians 1:6. What good work has God begun in you? What will it look like when that work is complete?

Think about something in your life you're struggling with right now. How can it remind you to return to God and trust in His faithfulness?

Thank God for the gift of the Holy Spirit, whose presence is a testimony of God's faithfulness. Ask God to help this truth fuel your trust in Him through every circumstance.

DAY 2—READ ACTS 1:8

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Witnesses in a court of law must have some experience with what has taken place. They have seen, heard, or touched something relevant for the case being litigated. Witnesses testify to what they have experienced.

In Acts 1, Jesus promised the Spirit would come to His disciples and make them witnesses of Christ. Jesus’s followers were a bit of a mess and often misunderstood, not unlike us. Though Jesus told how His kingdom turned things upside down—with the lowly being exalted and the first becoming last—John and James still wanted to know who would get the best seat in heaven. Jesus forewarned Peter that he would deny Christ three times before sunrise, and Peter adamantly rejected this idea, but this warning was almost immediately fulfilled. The disciples were often a mess. Yet, when the Spirit fell on them, they went out preaching about the “mighty works of God” in languages they didn’t know before (Acts 2:11).

The Spirit gifts us with power outside of ourselves. He makes us witnesses to the saving works of Christ. In the Spirit, we experience the work of Christ on our behalf. We are brought from death to life, from sin to grace, and from a life of self-destruction to a life of enjoyment of God. Through the Spirit, we know, see, and feel the salvation that is ours in Christ. We become participants in the story of God’s redemption. Through us, the Spirit continues the work that began at Pentecost, taking it to the ends of the earth.

**How are you a witness to the saving work of Christ?
What evidence would you give?**

Read Colossians 1:27-29. What mystery of God has been made known to you? For whose benefit did the Spirit make it known?

If God's work in you is evidence of Christ's salvation, who do you need to share it with? Plan to share what Christ has done to encourage another believer or to talk about Him with someone who does not yet know Him.

Ask the Spirit to continue to reveal Christ to you and grow your confidence in Him. Praise God for the work He has done in you already.

DAY 3—READ JOHN 3:5-6

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

The Old Testament law could only make us aware of sin. The law elevated the holiness of God, and its requirements show how far humanity is from God's righteousness and the cost of our sin. Even after a priest completed an offering, a new offering would be needed because God's people continued in sin. The prophets tell how God's people not only made offerings in sin, but they also walked away sinning until they simply refused to return to God at all. Our sinful flesh is weak and could never gain us access to God.

But now we have the Spirit. The Spirit gives us access to God Himself. Through the Spirit, we are brought into the activity of God, and the Spirit gives us new life in God. When Jesus spoke of these things to Nicodemus in John 3, Nicodemus was confused. He wanted access to God's kingdom, but he wondered how a person could be born again. The falling of the Spirit in Acts 2 brought about this new birth.

Because we have the Spirit, we have access to God's kingdom. Through the Spirit, we die to our sinful flesh so we can live a new life in God; His grace is at work in us. Rather than returning to the law and trying to achieve God's holiness on our own, we abide in Him by trusting His commandments are for our good. We are covered by Christ's righteousness, and the Spirit helps us live like Him daily.

The law shows how we abound in sin, but now—by the Spirit—we are under grace. What does the Spirit make us abound in instead?

Read Galatians 5:22-23. The Spirit grows in us the fruit of God's character. Which of the areas do you feel most in need of the Spirit for?

How do you find joy and delight in your salvation?

Thank God for access to His love. Ask God to restore you to the joy of your salvation so that knowing Him would be your greatest delight.

DAY 4—READ JOHN 16:13-14

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

Joaquin Phoenix is notorious for method acting, meaning he stays in character even when the camera isn’t rolling. When he played Johnny Cash in *Walk the Line*, he attended a rock-n-roll bootcamp, played guitar on set, and had everyone on set call him “JR” (Cash’s given name). Phoenix thinks it’s important to inhabit a character so that he can portray him accurately.¹

While we aren’t characters acting in a scene, we are participants in the story of God’s redemption; the Spirit makes us so. Our investment in this reality should make any other “method actor” pale in comparison. After Jesus ascended, God sent the Spirit to enable believers to continue Christ’s work of reconciling all things to the Father. The Spirit enables our participation in the work of God by helping us spread the glory of the Son. The Spirit guides us to Christ and glorifies Christ through us. Through the Spirit, we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28).

Faith is more than a cognitive exercise. We display faith when we continue the work of Christ. Through His commands, God shows us how to enjoy more of Him. Wherever God is, His attributes—like His patience, kindness, goodness, and peace—are enjoyed. Since the Spirit is in us, we are enabled to speak what is true and live life as God intends in the world.

1. Michael Gordon, “Three Times Joaquin Phoenix Took Movie-Making to the Limit,” *Far Out Magazine*, October 11, 2024, <https://faroutmagazine.co.uk/three-times-joaquin-phoenix-movie-making-to-limit/>.

How do you participate in God's story of redemption when you speak about or act like the Son?

Read John 15:14-15. What does the Spirit enable us to do? Because the Spirit is in us, what new title does Jesus give us?

What does obedience to God require of you today? How will you lean on the Spirit's help to enable you?

Thank God for giving you the Spirit to enable your faithfulness to Him. Ask the Spirit to show you how to rely on God today.

DAY 5—READ EPHESIANS 1:13-14

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

In the Middle Ages people used wax seals on contracts and other legal documents. Seals acted like a signature, conveying the authority of signee. Royals, lords, monarchs, and bishops each possessed a unique seal that relayed their class and power.²

Scripture describes the Holy Spirit as a seal or guarantor of our future glory. In the Old Testament, before Christ came, sin reigned over humanity and separated sinful humanity from a holy God. Now, because of Christ, grace reigns over those who have faith in Christ. God marks us as His people by sealing us with His Holy Spirit, and the Spirit keeps us in Christ until the day we see God face-to-face. We are sealed by the creator God who has all power and authority.

Our future is secure; it is not dependent on our faithfulness but God's. God will keep us in Christ as He has promised. We can do nothing on our own, but in the Spirit, we're empowered to enjoy God forever. When we find ourselves turning again to the sins of the flesh, the Holy Spirit is always there to prompt repentance and bring us back to the love of Christ.

2. "The Beginners Guide to the History of Sealing Wax," Blogs, Zetta Florence, July 28, 2024, <https://zettaflorence.com.au/blogs/musings/the-beginners-guide-to-the-history-of-sealing-wax>.

How does the Spirit's ongoing presence free us from shame and give us hope?

Read 1 Peter 2:9-10. According to this passage, what is the identity of those who have God's Spirit?

Write a few things you anticipate about future glory with God. How does the Spirit help you to prepare you for those realities today?

Thank God for His grace that keeps you. Ask the Spirit to reorder your affections so Christ is most glorified in your life.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

WEEK 4: PRAYER AND OBEDIENCE: THE CHURCH'S PATH TO POWER

Looking Back: What did God teach you this past week as you read the daily devotions? What opportunities did you have to apply what you learned?

Looking Up: Play the video and consider the discussion questions together.

If you could have any superpower, what would it be? Why?

Read Acts 2:36-41. The crowds had come to Jerusalem to offer thanks to God during Pentecost. How did they respond to Peter's message? Why might they consider it good news?

Read Acts 2:42-3:1. How many times is prayer mentioned in this passage? Why do you think it was an important practice of the early church?

The Holy Spirit helps common people do uncommon things. How does the Spirit enable obedience? How is obedience the church's path to power?

Read 2 Corinthians 7:9-10. How does godly grief over sin produce repentance?

Think of a time when you felt convicted about your sin. Was your initial reaction shame, hiding, or fear? How would returning to God in faith look different?

Read Galatians 5:16-18. According to this passage, what does the Spirit enable us to do?

Faith and repentance are ongoing activities in the life of the believer. Are they part of your everyday life? How can our group practice dependence on God together?

Looking Forward: How will you take what you learned today and apply it to your life this week? Take a few minutes to plan your next meeting and spend some time in prayer together.

WEEK 4: PRAYER AND OBEDIENCE: THE CHURCH'S PATH TO POWER

DAY 1—READ ACTS 2:36-37

"Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.' Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'"

Who hasn't dreamed of flying through the sky like Superman or having telekinetic powers like Yoda? Have you ever imagined being able to teleport, like a Star Trek character, to a sandy beach on the other side of the world? Or have you thought about using Harry Potter's invisibility cloak for just one afternoon? Superpowers are fun to imagine because they let us consider doing something we couldn't otherwise.

When the Spirit fell at Pentecost, the church was gifted a power they didn't have before: direct access to the God who created them. When those who received the Spirit went out in the power of the Spirit, they spoke of the mighty works of God, and the Holy Spirit spread across Jerusalem. People heard their words and were convicted of their sin. Those listening realized their guilt and were cut to the heart. They didn't run from their sin, blame-shift, or give excuses. They acknowledged their sin and returned to God. This repentance was evidence of the Spirit's power.

Power in the kingdom of God belongs to God alone. Left on our own, we merely seek more of our own: We use whatever power we can grasp to get what we want, when we want it. But God uses His power to draw people to Himself. The Spirit brings us into the love of God. The Spirit gives us access to God and, through obedience and prayer, the Spirit empowers us to draw near to God.

Do you seek the power of the Spirit as much as you seek your own ability? Why is prayer and repentance more valuable than personal success or popularity?

Read Ephesians 3:14-19. Describe why Paul was eager for the church to abound in faith.

The Spirit produces faith and repentance in us. Why are these things essential to delighting in the love God has for you?

Thank God for the Spirit's power that produces faith and repentance in you. Ask God for an eagerness to walk in the Spirit's power instead of your own.

DAY 2—READ 2 CORINTHIANS 7:9-10A

As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret.

In the movie *Inside Out* (Disney Pixar, 2015), the character Joy tries to snub out the character Sadness so Riley can experience the best life. Joy casts Sadness into the hidden recesses of Riley's mind, but Sadness eventually finds her way back. By the end of the movie, we come to appreciate that without any Sadness at all, Joy is less complete.

When we face our sin, we ought to let it break our hearts. To shove our guilt aside like it doesn't matter is to cheapen the cross of Christ. Our sin is not something we should belittle or dismiss. When sin grieves us, we are led to repentance. We return to God with expectation that He can and will mend our broken hearts.

Godly grief produces repentance when sin breaks our hearts, and we turn away from sin and back to the God who saves us from sin's power. Conviction is an indication that we're not living in accordance with the good design of God. When we remember that forgiveness is ours in Christ, we delight in the love of God and abound in the hope that one day He will complete His work in us. We don't hide from our sin, through the Spirit, we bring it to the cross of Christ. When we do, by God's grace alone, we are forgiven and filled with the Spirit who forms us into the image of the Son, and we share in the joy of the Father.

How are you most likely to respond to sin in your life? Do you hide, shift blame, shame yourself, make excuses, or confess it to God and others?

Read 1 John 1:8-9. What two things has God promised when we are honest about our sins and confess them to Him?

Do you believe Christ's sacrifice on the cross was enough to cover your sins? Do you believe you need His forgiveness? How do you need to be honest with God about these things today?

Thank God that the forgiveness He gives you in Christ is full and complete. Ask the Spirit to help you pray in belief of this truth, and ask Him to give you a godly grief that leads you to the mercy of Christ.

DAY 3—READ MATTHEW 28:19-20

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Many families have a relative who just can't seem to find the right present for any occasion. You leave Christmas with a cat-shaped mug, even though you've never liked cats, or an ugly sweater that you'd never wear no matter how cold it gets. Sometimes we get a gift and think, "What am I supposed to do with this?"

In Acts the church received the best gift, and Peter knew exactly what to do with it. When the people were convicted by their sin, they asked the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). Peter responded, "Repent and be baptized" (Acts 2:38). Baptism is an act of obedience and a public declaration of faith in Christ. Baptism doesn't save a person but shows God has already saved them. In Matthew 28, Jesus told His disciples to continue teaching the things He taught and to baptize people in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When Peter told the crowds to be baptized, he was obeying the commands of Christ.

The Spirit enables our obedience, and through obedience we enjoy more of God. Obedience is the church's path to power because obedience leads us to our Savior. We are saved by grace through faith and are called to seek faithfulness to Christ throughout our lives. We either do what we want, or we do what God wants. The first will lead us away from God, but by the second we enjoy the God who is already near to us.

When you think of the word obedience, is your initial reaction positive or negative? Why?

Read Romans 6:15-18. Paul made it clear: We are either slaves to sin or slaves to righteousness. Where does each option lead? Do you consider these destinations in your daily choices?

Obedience is a path to power because it leads us to the all-powerful God. What does obedience to God look like for you today? How is God drawing you near to Him?

Praise God for making Himself known to you. Ask the Spirit to lead you in the righteousness of Christ for His glory and your good.

DAY 4—READ ROMANS 8:26-27

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

When we think of power, we might imagine a conquering king or a muscular warrior. Or maybe it's a modern CEO with many people under his or her authority. People with power have notable titles and demand respect. To have power at all means you have control or influence over those with less power. Much of the time people with power lord it over others, but that's not what God does.

The creator God who has authority over all He has made gives us access to His power. We who have no power, except to continue in sin, are empowered by the Spirit of God to enjoy Him. The Spirit reconciles us to God and then prays to God for us. The Spirit who sees every one of your thoughts and knows every desire in your heart, intercedes for you so you will be strengthened in God. When our prayers lack hope, the Spirit seeks God on our behalf. When we don't know what to pray, the Spirit groans for us, deeper than words. When we lack knowledge or awareness of how to depend on God, the Spirit of God Himself prays for us.

Our power comes not in accumulating our own influence and might, but by depending on God who gives us His. His power is not shown in conquering others and obliterating opposition, but by building up a people according to His likeness. We find real power when we lay our attempts at the feet of God.

**Where do you find yourself wanting more power?
What do you want power over?**

Read Psalm 113:5-8. What are some examples of how God uses His power in these verses? How did God show His power at the cross of Jesus?

Where might you need the Spirit's prayers now?

Give thanks to God for the Spirit who knows you completely and prays for you according to God's will. Ask the Spirit to give you words to pray that reflect God's good desires for you.

DAY 5—READ PHILIPPIANS 4:5B-7

The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Since 2010, anxiety among teenagers and young adults has risen significantly. “Among US college students, diagnoses of depression and anxiety more than doubled between 2010 and 2018.”¹ People are growing in worry and fear.

In stark contrast to this anxiety stands the peace found only in Christ. In an anxious time, the peace that comes through knowing Christ displays the power of God. Our Lord is at hand, so we don’t need to be anxious. The God with all authority uses His power to draw people to Himself, so they might delight in Him. God makes His communicable attributes available to us—His love, peace, joy, and rest. He loves us with such joy that He was willing to send His Son to die on a cross so humanity could be reconciled to Him. God can be trusted with every worry, because He has already proven to be steadfast and kind toward us to the greatest degree.

The church has a pathway to power because our Savior is already at work in and through us. Because of Christ, we are brought into the Father’s family, and with His Spirit we are empowered to live like Him in the world. Why wouldn’t we follow His lead? The power of God’s kingdom is not domineering or demanding but humble and gracious. Power comes through prayer and obedience as we rely on our good and gracious Savior. We need not be anxious because the God who overcame the world is with us by His Spirit.

**What is something you are anxious or worried about?
How much of your day is spent protecting or distracting
yourself from these worries?**

**Read Philippians 4:8-9. Rather than your worries and
anxieties, where else might you focus your imagination?**

**Take time to list at least three things that are lovely and
commendable about God who draws you to Himself.**

**Ask God to help you reorient your attention to the
beauty of Christ. Pray that the Spirit would lead you to
abound in joy and peace because of your salvation.**

1. Sophie McBain, "The Anxious Generation by Jonathan Haidt – A Pocket Full of Poison, Review, The Guardian, March 21, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2024/mar/21/the-anxious-generation-by-jonathan-haidt-a-pocket-full-of-poison>.

WEEK 5:

LIFE TOGETHER: BUILDING A THRIVING CHURCH COMMUNITY

SERMON NOTES

[illegible]

WEEK 5: LIFE TOGETHER: BUILDING A THRIVING CHURCH COMMUNITY

Looking Back: What did God teach you this past week as you read the daily devotions? What opportunities did you have to apply what you learned?

Looking Up: Play the video and consider the discussion questions together.

Would you go to a two-man football game? What other event would be pointless if only one or two people showed up?

Read Acts 2:41-45. As the church was birthed and began to grow, what did they prioritize?

Read Acts 2:46-47. Describe the church's relationships and habits. In what ways are these things similar and different from our church community?

Are you more inclined to hide from people or seek people's attention? How did the community in Acts avoid either of these tendencies?

Read Exodus 22:20. God warned Israel of a devotion to destruction. What new devotion did the Spirit give to the church (Acts 2:42)? How do our devotions reveal the character of God's people?

What are you devoted to? Would your calendar confirm your claim? Would your prayers?

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10. What was Paul's appeal to the Corinthian church? What do we gain by enjoying God together? What do we miss if we don't?

If an unbeliever came into our community, would they find the character of God among us? Are we marked by gladness, generosity, and praise?

Looking Forward: How will you take what you learned today and apply it to your life this week? Take a few minutes to plan your next meeting and spend some time in prayer together.

WEEK 5: LIFE TOGETHER: BUILDING A THRIVING CHURCH COMMUNITY

DAY 1—READ 2 JOHN 1:9

Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.

A good friend is hard to find. Keeping a good friend also requires commitment. We get caught up in our own mess and forget to care for others the way we hope they care for us. Or we hide ourselves away, so our inner turmoil doesn't scare them away. But God not only sees all of us, He also calls us His. Friendship with others requires our participation; friendship with God is an invitation to enjoy Him.

The church in Acts 2 devoted themselves to teaching and prayer. Through these activities, the church enjoyed belonging to God together. According to our passage, to abide in the teaching of Christ is to abide in the Father and the Son. The church wanted more of God, so they practiced submission to Him together.

Too often when considering the teachings of Christ, we view them as a list of rules we must follow so God will be pleased with us. We turn our relationship with God into a to-do list. But God's love is not conditional, based on our performance; it's based on His grace. We show gratitude for what He has done and who He is by devoting ourselves to His teaching and to prayer. We don't just show obedience when it's easy and convenient; we give our whole lives over to trusting His Word and seeking His will.

What teachers and ideas do you follow? Do they lead you to abide in God or to seek independence from God?

Read 1 Timothy 6:3-5. How do these traits stand in opposition to God?

How might enjoying God help you submit to Christ's teachings?

Ask God to make you abound in love for His word. Pray that the Spirit will grow your devotion to Christ's teachings so devotion to the world becomes less enticing.

DAY 2—READ LUKE 22:19

And He took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Most people appreciate a "get-it-done" attitude. We consider independence a strength and reliance a weakness. But in God's kingdom, the needy find strength in Christ (Matthew 5:5).

When Jesus gave the Last Supper to the disciples, He created a new community, one defined by their belonging to Him. Each time we take communion, the church remembers the body of Christ that was broken so we could be reconciled to God. When we take communion together, we practice our participation in the body of Christ as the body of Christ.

We belong to Christ together. God saves individual believers and brings us into a new community that the Spirit is sanctifying into the likeness of Christ. Sanctification is a communal activity. Each time we take communion, we practice this belonging, but our belonging isn't relegated to Sundays; it's an ongoing fellowship. We are a new community in all of life. Our brothers and sisters in Christ are evidence of the love of God, and we multiply the love of God when we act in love toward one another. Sometimes the church does not feel this delight. Even when—or maybe especially when—fellowship with others feels cumbersome and difficult, we press forward in God's love. We extend His grace, mercy, patience, and kindness to each other, and we grow in Christlikeness.

Do you tend toward independence from or reliance on others? How is the body of Christ meant to encourage each individual believer?

Read 1 Corinthians 1:4-6. What benefits does Paul list for a community of faith being sanctified in Christ together?

How has the body of Christ, on the cross, saved you? How does the body of Christ, the church, aid in your sanctification?

Praise God for the cross of Christ, which saved you and brought you into a new community. Ask God to encourage you through the church and to make you an encouragement to others in the church.

DAY 3—READ ACTS 2:46-47A

“And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people.”

“Slapping lipstick on a pig” is an idiom that means trying to hide something ugly by covering it with something more attractive. A cheap renovation on a flipped house falls into this category when the finishes are beautiful but the foundation is falling apart. Or this may look like a fake smile when you’re coming apart at the seams. Contrary to these experiences, the early church’s outward appearance mirrored their inner reality.

The early church was marked by glad and generous hearts. But it didn’t take long for the church to face opposition. The gospel of Jesus Christ was met with hostility. Continuing in Acts, there were angry officials, murderous mobs, and even shipwrecks. The Spirit had come, but life wasn’t always easy or convenient. Endurance was required, and yet the church continued in glad generosity.

The same is true for us: Life isn’t always easy. But it’s also true that the Spirit gives hope and peace that transcends any circumstance. Godly gladness is more than a happy face; it is a resolute trust that no matter what lies ahead, God is enough and He’s on your side. The church is marked by gladness and generosity when it continues together, abiding in the goodness of God.

Would others describe you as a glad or generous person? Why or why not?

Read Hebrews 12:1-4. How does Scripture describe Jesus, even in enduring the cross? What motivated Him?

Is there an area where you doubt the generosity of God? How can you remind yourself of His joyful love for you today?

Thank God for His generosity and His glad welcome of you. Ask the Spirit for the glad generosity of God to mark your life and community.

DAY 4—READ PSALM 35:27

Let those who delight in my righteousness shout for joy and be glad and say evermore, "Great is the Lord, who delights in the welfare of His servant!"

At Texas A&M University, a "two-percenter" is a person who is a part of the school but not involved with every school custom and tradition. A two-percenter might go to class and have friends at the school, but you won't find them whooping and hollering at a football game. They benefit from being a part of the school but abstain from the full experience. The devotion of the early church looked more like "110-percenters" and, as a result, they abounded in praise and delight.

The early church was devoted to the things of God. They purposed that everything they had—their time, money, energy, attention, and love—would be used to enjoy God together. Jesus became the center of their whole lives. Ongoing obedience to Him led them to abound in joy. They had been reconciled to God and felt His tangible presence among them.

Two terms to help us consider how we center our lives in Christ are mortification and vivification. Mortification means we put sin to death; we stop pursuing sinful behaviors, desires, and imaginings. We take sin seriously, and we let it break our hearts so we can know the mercy of Christ. But we also take righteousness seriously; we let it cultivate new life within us. To devote ourselves to God, we not only put old things to death, but we also bring new things to life. This is called vivification. New delights and praise spring out of us when we purpose that all we have will be used for God. When a community is obedient to God, they magnify and multiply their delight in Christ.

Does your commitment to the things of God look more like devotion or convenience? What makes you answer that way?

Read Psalm 112. List at least three ways those who delight in God's commandments are different from those who delight in lesser things.

What attributes of God brings you joy and peace? How do you seek to remember and reflect on these truths regularly?

Ask God to make your delight in Him abound. Then spend a few minutes in silence before God, delighting in His love for you.

DAY 5—READ PHILIPPIANS 1:9-11

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

If you run regularly, you're a runner. If you paint daily, you're a painter. If you have a job, you're employed. You can't be a runner if you've never run, a painter who's never painted, nor employed without a job. There's a similar order of things when we consider the glory of God. If you find your satisfaction in God, His glory will be displayed in your life. On the other hand, if you don't know God or spend time with Him, you can't expect to display His glory to others.

In Acts, as the church devoted themselves to God and found delight in Him, God displayed His glory through them. Paul explained this order of events to the Philippian church when he prayed for their love to abound in knowing God, so that they may be filled with the fruit of righteousness, to the glory and praise of God.

We often turn this order upside-down. We try to glorify God by cleaning ourselves up. We make righteousness a list of dos and don'ts. But God is glorified when we find our satisfaction in Him. Knowing God reorients our lives to make Christ supreme. This love fills us with the fruit of righteousness and glad obedience grows new delights in us. When they do, we get a glimpse at the glory of God. So, stop trying to honor God in your own strength. Behold the beauty of your Savior and abide in Him. As you do, you will find yourself becoming more like Him.

What causes you to delight in God? What causes you to doubt Him?

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4. What is the evidence of a growing faith? What was Paul's response to a church growing in faith?

Love, informed by knowing God in Christ, makes us righteous and results in God's glory displayed. Consider your love for God or others, knowledge about the things of God, and regular praise of God. Which of these do you consider a strength? Where do you need to grow?

Ask God to glorify Himself through you by increasing your love, deepening your knowledge of Him, and making praise a regular rhythm of your day.

WEEK 6:
ON MISSION WITH GOD:
ADVANCING THE GOSPEL BOLDLY

SERMON NOTES

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on its right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.

WEEK 6: ON MISSION WITH GOD: ADVANCING THE GOSPEL BOLDLY

Looking Back: What did God teach you this past week as you read the daily devotions? What opportunities did you have to apply what you learned?

Looking Up: Play the video and consider the discussion questions together.

Have you ever used someone's name to gain access into an event or for some other benefit? Who was it and what'd you get by using their name?

Read Acts 3:1-10. Describe the scene of the lame beggar before the beautiful gate. Where did Peter and John set their gaze? Why was this significant?

How did Peter and John's actions embody what they learned from Jesus? (For example, see Luke 5:23-26.)

Read Acts 3:11-26. What is surprising to you about Peter's proclamation? Why had the people gathered to the apostles in the first place?

How did Peter point to Jesus as the Savior of God's people?
How did Peter invite his hearers to respond?

Considering the scenes of Acts 3, do you relate more to the lame man, the apostles, or the crowds that came to the apostles? In what way?

Read 2 Timothy 4:1-2. How is the church called to advance the gospel in word and action?

Think about the places you go and the work God has equipped you to walk in. Where and to whom are you uniquely called to advance the gospel (a mission field, the workplace, or your home, neighborhood, or community)? How can you share the gospel by speaking boldly?

Looking Forward: How will you take what you learned today and apply it to your life this week? Take a few minutes to plan your next meeting and spend some time in prayer together.

WEEK 6: ON MISSION WITH GOD: ADVANCING THE GOSPEL BOLDLY

DAY 1—READ ACTS 1:8

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

You can follow every weight-lifting social media account, or all meal-prep influencers, but you won’t gain any real experience until you try it yourself. Experience belongs to others until we put it into practice.

In Acts, the Holy Spirit fell and knowledge about the wondrous works of God became more than something Jesus’s followers learned; it was something they participated in. The Holy Spirit empowered them to become the witnesses of Christ to a watching world. Peter and John went out from where they were and lived the truths of the gospel. The church continues going to the ends of the earth, starting with where God has placed us. The early church is our example, but experiential knowledge of Christ and the Spirit becomes ours when we join God in His work. Like the early disciples, we are called to advance the gospel wherever we go: in our homes, our workplaces, or our neighborhoods and communities.

Where we are located and the people around us are not an accidental coincidence; God has placed us there intentionally to live out the gospel. The gospel goes forth when we embody and proclaim Christ with the unique gifts God has given us, in the specific places He has settled us. If we are parents, we parent as participants in the gospel. If we are businesspeople, we conduct business to the glory of God. We are commissioned to be brothers, daughters, next-door neighbors, PTA volunteers, professors, cashiers, accountants, plumbers, and musicians that embody and proclaim the good news of Christ Jesus wherever we may go.

Make a list of the unique talents and skills God has given you. Then make another list of places where God has positioned you for His purposes.

Read Titus 3:8. How might you devote yourself to excellent work for the good of others?

What new words or new actions are needed for you to live out the gospel in the places God has called you?

Ask the Spirit to empower you to advance the gospel in your home, place of work, and community. Pray that God will turn your good intentions into realities.

DAY 2—READ LUKE 6:20-21

And He lifted up His eyes on His disciples, and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh."

iPhones have a photography setting where a grid of thirds will pop-up each time you open your camera. In photography, the rule of thirds says our eyes are naturally drawn to the image that lines up with this grid. But this is just a guideline. Sometimes a new perspective helps us find beauty from a different angle.

In Acts, Peter and James looked directly where others did not. They gazed on the lame man begging outside the temple gates, even as he hid his face from them. The apostles learned this from Jesus. In Luke, Jesus looked directly at the disciples when He taught them that blessedness is not in wealth, power, or influence; instead, God's blessing belongs to the poor, hungry, and weeping. Christ's teaching became a visible reality when Peter and John lifted the lame man from his humble position. The apostles extended the power of Jesus to the lame man, and he leaped with joy, praising God.

Where we put our gaze matters. When we look for blessings in money, achievement, and popularity, we won't find the joy that comes only through Christ. The world is shallow and fickle. But the blessings of God are distributed with eternal, holy power that can forgive sin and make a lame man walk. God's blessing is real and lasting.

Where do you fix your gaze throughout your day? Do you recognize your need for the gospel and God's love for the people around you?

Read Matthew 9:35-36. What was Jesus's attitude toward those He preached His message to? Why?

Think of a person you come across frequently that you might typically ignore. How does God see him or her? How can you extend Christ's compassion toward that person?

Confess to God where you have not loved the people around you the way He loves them. Ask God to remind you of your need for Him and to give you joy in His grace.

DAY 3—READ ACTS 3:8

And leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.

We tend to view life as black and white. Either things are going well or they're not. Everything is wonderful or nothing is good. But a wise person sees more color. He or she can hold both at the same time; he or she can mourn the hard and still celebrate the good. It's not always either-or; it's often both-and.

The healed lame man displayed the same gladness that marked the rest of the early church. In his disability, he could not enter the temple, but once he was healed, he leaped into the presence of God, praising Him. The man became evidence of the saving work of Jesus Christ, and crowds were drawn to him because of his joyous proclamation. They wanted what he had, so Peter pointed them to Jesus.

The church should be, at its core, joyful. We find joy knowing God has forgiven us through Christ and has given us His Spirit to be with us forever. We should take such joy seriously. Like the lame man, God healed us when we had nothing to offer. When we take joy seriously, others will be drawn to that joy. The gospel invites others to see Christ.

What joys lead you to praise God? How will you seek to enjoy Him daily?

Read Psalm 51:10-12. What are some prerequisites to discovering joy?

What helps, or hinders, your enjoyment of God?

Thank God for offering Christ when you had nothing but need to give. Ask the Spirit to restore you to the joy of your salvation and for others to come to know God through you.

DAY 4—READ ISAIAH 53:5

But He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed.

We can only speak boldly about things we know with confidence. If you grew up in London, you couldn't explain to a Texan the appeal of tacos for any meal of the day. If you don't watch the NBA or movies, you'd probably shy away from telling someone the difference between Michael Jordan and Michael B. Jordan. We speak about what we know.

In Acts 3, Peter proclaimed the gospel of Jesus by speaking about the Jewish Messiah the prophets foretold. Those attending the temple knew the Old Testament Scripture that pointed to a Savior who would suffer to bring peace to God's people. Peter said Jesus is that Man. Empowered by the Spirit, Peter recalled the Word of God to point the crowds to Jesus.

A church advances the gospel when we speak truth boldly. But, to speak with any confidence, we must know the truth of the Bible. The Bible reveals God and how we fit into His story of salvation by grace, through faith. We cannot share Jesus with others unless we know how Jesus leads us to the one true God. Our ideas, opinions, and experience might hint at something true, but only the Bible will lead us directly to the truth of God. Apart from Scripture, we're susceptible to the lies of the world. When what we speak of Jesus is more informed by the world than the Bible, we might be using His name, but we're not offering His truth. To speak the truth about Jesus boldly, we must know how the Bible reveals Him.

How does the Bible help you speak confidently about the good news of Jesus?

Read Luke 4:18-21. The same Spirit who empowered Jesus is now in you. How does this knowledge grow your confidence in proclaiming Jesus?

What keeps you from speaking boldly what you know to be true about Jesus? How might you seek to overcome this hindrance by relying on the Spirit and studying God's Word?

Praise God for making Himself known through Jesus. Ask the Spirit to make you bold to speak what you know to be true of Christ.

DAY 5—READ 2 CORINTHIANS 5:20

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

No one can teach everything, but everyone can show us something. In Acts 3, after Peter proclaimed the gospel through the lens of the Old Testament, he urged the crowds to turn from their wickedness and turn to God. The apostle was continuing the ministry of Jesus. God was making His appeal to Jerusalem through the faithfulness of His disciples. The church continues this same ministry as ambassadors for Christ today. As we embody the teachings of Christ and boldly speak what we know to be true, God makes His appeal through us. He implores others to be reconciled to Him through the Son. The church is on mission with God.

To advance the gospel in the places God has called us, we don't need every answer to every question, we only need a relationship with Jesus. We don't have to be experts in ancient history or able to match quotes with the church fathers who spoke them. We don't need to feign complete knowledge that explains away every mystery of God and the world. We simply need to know Jesus and submit to what God's Word says is true about Him. We only need to speak boldly about what God has made known to us: Christ came to reconcile sinners. We need only to embody what we know to be true: the kind, patient, and generous love God made known to us. You may not know everything, but if you know Jesus, you know enough to tell others about Him.

What work has God done in you to make you an ambassador for Christ? How is that work unique to you?

Read 2 Corinthians 6:1-2. Do you have Paul's same urgency for advancing the gospel of Christ? Why or why not?

What might you gain by living as Christ's ambassador? What will you miss out on if you don't?

Praise God for making you an ambassador for Christ. Ask the Spirit to make you bold and give you an urgency to spread the gospel.

COMMENTARY

WEEK 1

John 14:19-20

14:19–20 On that day probably refers to Jesus coming on his disciples in the Spirit at Pentecost.

Romans 6:5,11

6:5 Though believers have not yet experienced resurrection, we are assured this future reality by the fact that Christ, in whose death we share, has been raised from the dead.

6:11 This is the first command in the book of Romans.

Ephesians 4:4-6

4:3–6 Believers have the responsibility to keep unity in the body of Christ. The seven “ones” enumerated in these verses constitute the foundation on which the Trinitarian God creates a oneness in the church. Paul’s plan can be seen from the vantage point of the work of the one Spirit creating one body; the one Lord Jesus Christ creating one hope, faith, and baptism; and the one God the Father bringing about one people of God.

4:6 One God and Father of all reminds believers that God’s oneness defines the church’s oneness.

Ephesians 4:15-16

4:15 Speaking the truth in love: When a church is faithful to speak truth in love, it will have transparent relationships where people edify and benefit one another.

4:16 Ultimately the church will grow up into Christ in all aspects, with each part fitting together and supporting the other. Each member of the body must function properly if the body is to grow. We get our English word harmony from the Greek term translated fitted and knit together.

Colossians 3:1-3

3:1–2 So if resumes the implications of believers' identification with Christ begun in 2:20. It signals a shift in the epistle from doctrinal instruction (chaps. 1–2) to practical application (3:1–4:6). The objects of believers' efforts and thoughts are Christ and things above rather than earthly things. These commands contrast true spiritual living with the false spirituality promoted by earthly "philosophy."

3:3 The basis for the commands (vv. 1–2) lies in believers' union with Christ. Hidden connotes that God fully completed the action in the past with permanent results.

WEEK 2

Acts 1:16

1:15–17 Peter began to assume his role as leader and spokesman for the apostles. The Scripture Peter referred to was Ps 69:25, quoted in v. 20.

John 1:1-3

1:1 In the beginning was the Word echoes Gn 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” John located Jesus’s existence in eternity past with God. The Word was God: Not only did Jesus exist before creation, he is also the same God who created the heavens and the earth. “The Word” (Gk Logos) conveys the notion of divine self-expression or speech (Ps 19:1–4). God’s Word is effective. He speaks, and things come into being (Gn 1:3, 9; Is 55:11–12).

1:2–3 Everything that exists owes its existence to Jesus.

Hebrews 4:12-13

4:1–16 The author now drew the readers into examining their own personal faith as the Word of God shines its penetrating light upon the heart. Faithfulness begins with a proper internal disposition. The living and effective Word of God probes into the deepest part of a person like a surgeon’s knife to discern his innermost thoughts and intentions. God’s Word reveals to him both his ingrained wickedness and the saving way of faith. At that critical point, when the divine judge reveals himself through his Word, the hearer must make every effort to enter the divine rest by believing.

If the result of unbelief and disobedience to God is exclusion from divine rest, then the result of true faith and faithfulness to God is entrance into everlasting divine rest. Such a rest was not available through the ministry of Joshua in the OT since it was reserved for the ministry of the NT “Joshua.” The name Jesus is a Greek derivative of the Hebrew name Joshua, which means “the Lord is salvation.” The ministry of Joshua did not bring people Sabbath rest. Only through the superior ministry of Jesus the Son of God may a person enter divine rest. Only through the great high priest, who has come from heaven and identified with human beings in their weakness, may we approach the throne of grace with boldness.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

3:16–17 Inspired means “breathed out by God.” Because Scripture comes from God himself, it is profitable in many ways, ultimately leading us to righteousness, maturity, and service. All Scripture refers to the OT, but by implication to the writings of the NT as well (1Tm 5:18; 2Pt 3:15–16).

Ephesians 4:31-32

4:25–32 Paul offered five examples of what living the new life means in the context of relationship with others. All of the examples include a negative command, a positive command, and a spiritual principle on which the commands are based. At the base of all of Paul’s commands is a God-centered spiritual foundation.

4:32 Paul used a play on words to illustrate his point. Believers are urged to be kind (Gk *chrestos*) because of Christ (Gk *Christos*).

WEEK 3

Joel 2:30,32

2:30–31 The cosmic signs that are part of the day of the Lord inspire awe for believers and terror for unbelievers. This day is one of salvation as well as judgment (Rv 6:12–17).

2:32 This verse shows the human obligation (calls on the name of the Lord) and the divine role in salvation (among the survivors the Lord calls). Both “calls” are necessary for salvation. God does not save those who do not call on him, and none call whom he has not called.

Acts 1:8

1:8 The major focus of the book of Acts is stated in this verse. Jesus said believers would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them, empowering them to be his witnesses in Jerusalem first and then spreading to the end of the earth. Note three things about how this unfolds. First, the empowering presence is to be the Holy Spirit, not Jesus himself. Jesus prepared his disciples for the transition when the Holy Spirit would come to be a constant presence in his bodily absence (see Jn 14:16–17). Second, the growth of the church would come about through the witness of the disciples. From the beginning, the church is depicted as a community that actively witnesses to their faith in Jesus Christ. Third, the result of this witness will be measurable, geographical growth. This growth will begin in Jerusalem and then spread through ever-widening concentric circles to other Jewish areas (e.g., Judea), to areas on the edges of Judaism (e.g., Samaria), and eventually to “the end of the earth,” which may refer to the known world of that time, likely coextensive with the reach of the Roman Empire. As new lands and peoples were discovered in coming centuries, the church understood that it must keep expanding its witness to reach the newfound “end of the earth.”

John 3:5-6

3:3–8 The discussion of the need for spiritual rebirth develops the reference to the “children of God” who are “born ... of God” in the prologue (1:12–13). On “children of God,” see 8:39–58 and 11:51–52. The phrase born of water and the Spirit probably refers to spiritual birth that cleanses from sin and brings spiritual transformation (Ezk 36:25–27). The kingdom of God, a major topic in the other Gospels, is mentioned by John only in vv. 3, 5 (see the reference to Jesus’s kingdom in 18:36).

John 16:13-14

16:12–13 On the Spirit of truth, see note at 14:16–17. The Spirit’s ministry of guiding Jesus’s followers into all the truth will fulfill the psalmists’ longing for divine guidance (Ps 25:4–5; 43:3; 86:11; 143:10). Isaiah recounted how God led his people in the wilderness by the Holy Spirit (Is 63:14) and predicted God’s renewed guidance in the future (Is 43:19). The word declare (Gk *anangello*) occurs more than forty times in the book of Isaiah, where declaring things to come is said to be the exclusive domain of God (Is 48:14) and where God challenges pretenders to declare the things to come (Is 42:9; 44:7; 46:10; cp. Is 41:21–29, esp. vv. 22–23; 45:19).

16:14–15 The Spirit would glorify Jesus by declaring all his words and actions.

Ephesians 1:13-14

1:13–14 Sealed in him with the promised Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit was promised by the prophets and by Jesus (Jl 2:28–29; Jn 14:15–26; 16:5–16). The Spirit is described as both a seal showing ownership and a pledge pointing to future redemption. Though believers have not yet experienced redemption in full, God will bring about final redemption (life in his immediate presence) for all who have received the Spirit (Eph 1:14). On the sealing of the Holy Spirit, see 4:30; 2Co 1:21–22.

WEEK 4

Acts 2:36-37

2:36 Peter addressed his words specifically to Jews (the house of Israel) and affirmed that Jesus whom they crucified was both Lord and Messiah. By calling Jesus “Lord and Messiah,” Peter was staking the biggest possible claims. “Lord” is reserved in the Greek translation of the OT (the Septuagint or LXX) for God (Yahweh). Thus Peter says Jesus is God. Peter further noted that Jesus was the Messiah (anointed one), Israel’s hope for salvation.

2:37 Peter’s audience was pierced to the heart because they realized their guilt in the execution of Jesus, plus they were convinced by Peter’s passionate eyewitness testimony and his description of how the events surrounding Jesus’s death and resurrection fulfilled OT prophecies about the promised Messiah. This prompted them to ask the question that anyone hearing the gospel should ask, Brothers, what should we do?

2 Corinthians 7:9-10a

7:9–10 From us means “because of us,” that is, because of Paul’s letter. The loss he refers to is probably the same loss as in 1Co 3:14–15. Paul’s letter kept them from experiencing such a loss.

Matthew 28:19-20

28:19 The command to extend their mission worldwide brings to a climax Matthew’s repeated theme of Gentile participation in God’s salvation. The inclusion of four Gentile women in Jesus’s genealogy and the summons of the magi to worship the infant Christ foreshadowed the disciples’ mission of making disciples of all nations. Baptism marked a person’s entrance into the faith community. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is a reference to the Trinity. Matthew’s language shows that a clear understanding of Jesus’s nature and identity as God was required before baptism.

28:20 The Great Commission (vv. 19–20) is preceded by a reference to Jesus’s authority and followed by the promise of Jesus’s spiritual presence among us. Both are necessary if we are to fulfill our God-given mission.

Romans 8:26–27

8:26–27 In our weakness we have the help of the Spirit. Jesus is our intercessor in heaven (Heb 7:25), and the Spirit is our intercessor on earth within our hearts. We are limited and ignorant, but the Spirit uses unspoken groanings to communicate our needs. This is not “speaking in tongues or languages” (Gk glossolalia). It is instead wordless. Our heavenly Father knows what is happening in our lives and within the deep recesses of our personalities (1Sm 16:7; Pr 15:11; Jr 17:10). The Spirit’s requests are always according to the will of God and are always answered.

Philippians 4:5b–7

4:5 Graciousness implies selflessness and respect for others (cp. 2:1–4). Seldom mentioned in Paul’s writings, graciousness is expected of believers and Christian leaders (cp. 1Tm 3:3; Ti 3:2). Be known indicates it is part of the church’s reputation. The Lord is near reminded the Philippian believers of Christ’s unseen presence. It also reminded them of his return.

4:6–7 Worry is anxiety (Mt 6:25–34). Prayer is the antidote for worry. Three words express different aspects of prayer: prayer, a worshipful attitude; petition, a need; and requests, the specific concern. Thanksgiving shapes prayers with gratitude. In response, the peace of God brings power to endure. The peace surpasses knowledge, calming a troubling situation when explanations fail. Further, peace guards by keeping anxieties from hearts (choices) and minds (attitudes).

WEEK 5

2 John 1:9

9 There are always new ways to apply Christ's teaching, but the foundations were established by his coming and the instruction he gave to his followers. John called for dynamic love and creative faithfulness while warning against perverting the apostolic teachings about Jesus.

Luke 22:19

22:19 To institute a new memorial meal (the Lord's Supper), Jesus chose the unleavened bread of the Passover meal to represent his physical body, which would be broken on the cross much as bread was broken during the meal. His death would be offered (given for you) as a substitute for sinners, all of whom deserve to die for their sins.

Acts 2:46-47a

2:46 Early Christian gatherings took place in two places: the temple and the homes of individual believers.

2:47 The early church was an evangelizing church. Luke recounted that every day the Lord added to those who were being saved. He did not say how this took place, but it appears that evangelism took place primarily through the gathering of Christians in the temple and in individual houses. The crucifixion and resurrection of Christ were at the heart of early Christian preaching, which called for immediate response from anyone who listened.

Psalm 35:27

35:27–28 God’s righteousness is connected with the psalmist’s vindication. The term for “righteousness” (Hb tsedaqah) can also mean “justice,” so the call for vindication is actually a request for the execution of God’s justice in the psalmist’s situation.

Philippians 1:9–11

1:9–10 Paul prayed two petitions: a growing love (v. 9) and complete character (v. 10). Love (Gk agape-) is selfless action for another person. Knowledge and discernment together foster mature love. “Knowledge” is both intellectual and experiential. “Discernment” occurs only here in the NT and connotes moral sensitivity. Love enriched by knowledge and moral discernment leads believers to experience what really matters. The word pure emphasizes personal integrity; blameless means good character that survives all accusations.

1:11 The phrase filled with the fruit of righteousness expresses how a person attains purity and blamelessness. Righteousness is the character of those whom God declares righteous.

WEEK 6

Acts 1:8

1:8 The major focus of the book of Acts is stated in this verse. Jesus said believers would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them, empowering them to be his witnesses in Jerusalem first and then spreading to the end of the earth. Note three things about how this unfolds. First, the empowering presence is to be the Holy Spirit, not Jesus himself. Jesus prepared his disciples for the transition when the Holy Spirit would come to be a constant presence in his bodily absence (see Jn 14:16–17). Second, the growth of the church would come about through the witness of the disciples. From the beginning, the church is depicted as a community that actively witnesses to their faith in Jesus Christ. Third, the result of this witness will be measurable, geographical growth. This growth will begin in Jerusalem and then spread through ever-widening concentric circles to other Jewish areas (e.g., Judea), to areas on the edges of Judaism (e.g., Samaria), and eventually to “the end of the earth,” which may refer to the known world of that time, likely coextensive with the reach of the Roman Empire. As new lands and peoples were discovered in coming centuries, the church understood that it must keep expanding its witness to reach the newfound “end of the earth.”

Luke 6:20-21

6:20–26 Verses 24–26 in this section are the exact counterpart to vv. 20–23 (blessed vs. woe; poor vs. rich; hungry vs. full; when people hate you vs. when all people speak well of you). In Matthew, it is “the poor in spirit” and “those who hunger ... for righteousness” who are blessed. The same is true here, because the reward for the blessed ones is in heaven. Jesus noted that rejection was the way those in earlier generations used to treat the prophets, while speaking well was the way they treated the false prophets. The implication is that Jesus’s growing rejection by the religious leaders is proof that he was a true prophet.

Acts 3:8

3:8–11 The sight attracted a great deal of attention. The response was awe and astonishment.

Isaiah 53:5

53:4–6 For the first time the reader learns that the servant suffered on behalf of others. Even so, people did not recognize it, and he was rejected as one struck down by God for his own supposed sins. Verse 4 is quoted in Mt 8:17.

2 Corinthians 5:20

5:19–21 What Christ did, God did. Christ's death mainly affected the world, that is, human sinners (rather than evil supernatural beings, for whom no divine provision for reconciliation has been made). Christ's death upholds God's righteousness. Trespasses were placed on the one who did not know sin. In return, the righteousness of God is credited (imputed) to all who are in him. The message of reconciliation is known to others only when ambassadors for Christ spread it. The Great Commission is the responsibility of reconciled human beings, not angels (Mt 28:18–20).



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