



## LEADER'S GUIDE

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# New Testament Basics

Course Lecturer: Dr. Sid Buzzell

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**It is important that, if you have not already done so, you first review our [Leader's Packet](#) for specifics on how to open, facilitate, and close your group sessions.**

This Leader's Guide walks you step by step through this lesson. Use as much of the suggested material as you find helpful. Some sections have more than one discussion question or idea so you can choose an option that fits your group. Feel free to add other ideas as well. You may also choose to extend this particular lesson to two or more sessions.

The Leader's Guide contains information not covered in the Listening Guide, so the group session adds value to those who have completed the Listening Guide.

## Step by Step through the Study

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As you prepare for the session, you will find information you need to lead the discussion questions in this Leader's Guide.

### Teaching Note:

- *Section 1* provides "Background Studies" reading and/or questions for each section of the lesson. To avoid a lecture format and to keep this portion of the session interactive, we have included brief discussion questions that help explore the content presented in the lecture.
- *Section 2* provides "Application Questions" for each New Testament book covered in the session. You can tailor this portion of your session to your group's interests and needs by selecting questions appropriate to your group.

The group session may appear lengthy because of the number of books you will study, but you can survey the "Background" portion of the lesson fairly quickly.

## Introduce the Lesson

**Introduce the lesson** by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 1. “Lesson 1 of the New Testament Basics course provides a bird’s eye view of the New Testament. It is designed to introduce us to what the New Testament is, how its books are organized, and who the central characters are. We also briefly discuss what its role is in our lives as Christ’s followers.”

*Ask if anyone has questions about the lesson or about preparation for the lesson.*

## Review the Lesson Objectives

**Review the Lesson Objectives** below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

*By the end of this study you should be able to*

1. Explain what the New Testament is.
2. Name the central focus of the New Testament.
3. Explain what Jesus intended us to understand about Himself.
4. Describe your own relationship to Jesus’ offer of eternal and abundant life.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled, or perhaps have changed.

*After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share their personal goal for the lesson in a sentence.*

## Introduction

*Ask what kinds of experience the group members have had with the New Testament. This exercise is designed to warm them up to talking about their relationship to the New Testament and to give you a sense of how familiar various group members are with the New Testament.*

- Have you: Read it? Studied it? Taken a course on the New Testament?
- What New Testament book(s) have you spent the most time in?
- Any favorite books or passages?

Ask for answers to the following question (taken from the Listening Guide):

- Briefly explain in your own words how the Old Testament and the New Testament work together.

## Background Studies

### Introduction: What Is the New Testament?

Summarize the “sad news” that sin has alienated us from God.

*(Listening Guide question 2)*

- Read Romans 3:23 to establish the fact of sin.
- Then read Isaiah 59:2 or Romans 6:23 for the consequences of sin.
- You may want to talk about Genesis 3 and Adam’s and Eve’s original sin.
- Open a brief discussion on how they see the consequences of sin in our world.

Read John 3:16 - 17 and discuss the gospel as presented by Jesus Himself.

#### Ideas for Discussion

- Ask members if they can give a brief explanation of the gospel message. If some say no, give a brief presentation of the gospel.
- Ask those who have been Christians for a longer time if they ever tend to take this good news for granted. Do any of them have a habit of reminding themselves of our role as Christians on a regular basis? How could they do that?
- Ask if anyone in the group has never asked Jesus to forgive their sins and if they would be interested in talking further about doing so after the session.

### The New Testament Books

Ask a few people to respond to the question, “How would you explain what the New Testament is in your own words?”

*(Listening Guide question 5)*

Review how we “group” the New Testament books: four Gospels, Acts, twenty-one epistles, Revelation = twenty-seven books.

*(Listening Guide question 7)*

Discuss answers for a few minutes.

## The Gospels

There is a whole lesson on the Gospels, so don't get bogged down with details here.

Ask what Jesus intends for us to understand about Him.

*(Listening Guide question 8)*

Ask if anyone has a favorite Gospel, a favorite story, miracle, parable, etc. Take a few minutes to focus on Jesus as a real person.

Ask what thoughts come to mind when they hear the word *gospel*.

## God Spoke

Read or ask a member to read Hebrews 1:1–2.

- *What crucial claim did Hebrews 1:1 make?*
- *Why was it important to make that claim?*
  - ◊ *The letter was addressed to Hebrew Christians who were struggling with the temptation to go back to Judaism. The writer first had to validate the Hebrew Scriptures and did so with the words, “God spoke to our ancestors” Unlike the members of Paul’s Gentile churches who came to Christianity from pagan religions, the Hebrew Christians had turned from a God-given religion, He had to explain why Christianity was as valid as what God had given in the Old Testament to their Jewish fathers.*

## God Spoke Again

Ask how God spoke the second time.

*(Listening Guide question 11)*

The point the author was making in Hebrews 1:2 is that although God spoke to the Jewish ancestors through the Law and the prophets, He spoke again in Jesus and He is God's ultimate revelation of Himself.

- *Ask someone to read Hebrews 1:3.*
- *Ask someone else to read John 14:8–10.*
- *Why is it important to make this claim that Jesus exactly reveals God to us?*
  - ◊ *Because the whole New Testament message is based on the fact that Jesus is God.*
- *Tell students you will return to Hebrews in a later lesson, but the point in this discussion is to focus on Jesus's claim to be God.*

## Jesus the Incarnation

Discuss the meaning of *incarnation*.  
(*Listening Guide question 12*)

- *The word comes from the Latin “in carne”—“in flesh”—and refers to the fact that God added humanity to His nature when Jesus was born. See 1 Timothy 3:6 and 1 John 4:2.*

Ask what Luke made clear in the book of Acts.  
(*Listening Guide question 13*)

- *Explain that Luke wanted his readers to understand that although Jesus had ascended into heaven (Acts 1:9), that He sent His Holy Spirit to continue His work through human beings. Stress the fact that God still works through human beings just as He did when He was on earth.*

## The Book of Acts

Tell the group you will have two lessons on Acts, and at this point you are just introducing the book to them.

- *Luke’s purpose in Acts was to explain that the early church experienced miraculous growth in the Roman Empire because it was God’s work, not just the result human action. Jesus is alive and doing His work through these apostles.*
- *What’s so wonderful about this message is that He is still at work through His people—you and me—today.*
- *Ask the group to share how God is using them, or share how God used another person in a significant way in their lives.*

## The Epistles

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17 and lead your group in a discussion of its meaning.

- *Emphasize the fact that Christians are called to live this new life that 2 Corinthians 5:17 describes, and that the Epistles provide detailed instructions about what that new Christian life looks like.*

Summarize this point from the material recorded in Lesson 1 and then:

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Ask the group members if they have ever thought of the Epistles as guides to the Christian life.*
- *Ask them if most people in their churches think of the Epistles this way.*
- *Ask them to share teachings or passages from the Epistles that are especially instructive and helpful to them.*
- *You may want to give them a few minutes as individuals to think about the questions and write down something (or some things) to share.*

## Revelation

Ask for their response to the question, “What do you think was Revelation’s purpose?”  
(*Listening Guide question 20*)

- *Talk about the responses. Does the truth that God is in sovereign control of His creation ever encourage them in tough times?*

Ask for responses to the question, “What message does Revelation proclaim?”  
(*Listening Guide question 21*)

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Ask the group how real this truth is to them.*
- *Do they live as if Jesus is coming back?*
- *What difference would it make if they did live this way?*

## The New Testament’s Focus

Highlight the fact that Jesus is the major focus of the New Testament.

- *You could read Colossians 1:15-20; John 1:1-3, or Hebrews 1:1-4 and ask students to comment on the statement in the passage that most impresses them about Jesus.*
- *OR you could divide your group into three smaller groups and assign one of the passages to each group. Give them 5–10 minutes to summarize what their passages say about Jesus and prepare a brief report on their passage to give to the other two groups.*

## Application

Give group members time to talk about their personal relationship with Jesus. This can be done best in groups of two or three.

- *Encourage them to especially focus on this question: “How does being a Christian affect your life?”*
- *You can also ask the question this way: “Can you name a few specific ways your life is different because you are a Christian than if you were not a Christian? Don’t compare yourself with non-Christians; rather, contrast how you believe your own life would be different if you didn’t know Jesus in a personal way.”*

## Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each lesson of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God's Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone "sees" the same emphases, and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

## Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

### Introduce the Lesson

**Introduce the lesson** by reading the overview of Lesson 2. “The areas where Islam differs from Christianity is in who Jesus is, what the Bible is, and how you can be saved.”

*Ask if anyone has questions about the lesson or about preparation for the lesson.*

### Review the Lesson Objectives

**Review the Lesson Objectives** below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

*By the end of this study you should be able to*

1. Define *gospel* in your own words.
2. Name the four Gospels.
3. Explain why the four Gospels are different from each other.
4. Name how Jesus was emphasized in each Gospel.
5. Consider your own view of and relationship to Jesus Christ.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled, or perhaps have changed.

*After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share their personal goal for the lesson in a sentence.*

### Background Studies

#### Matthew and John: We Wrote What We Experienced

Ask group members if they have a favorite Gospel and why it is their favorite.

Ask, “What does the word *gospel* mean?”

*(Listening Guide question 1)*

- *The word gospel means “good news.”*

What did John and Matthew have in common that equipped them to write their Gospels?

*(Listening Guide question 2)*

- *John and Matthew were eyewitnesses to Jesus’ ministry. Read—or have a group member read—1 John 1:1–3*
  - ◇ *Open a discussion on what it must have been like to be with Jesus personally. Stress each statement John made about that experience (“heard,” “seen,” “looked at,” “touched”)!*
  - ◇ *John stated his purpose for writing 1 John in 1:3: “that you may have fellowship with us and with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.” Discuss what it means that we can actually have fellowship with Jesus, like John had with Him.*

## Mark and Luke: We Wrote What We Discovered

Ask what the source of Mark’s information was.

*(Listening Guide question 3)*

- *Peter was the source of Mark’s information.*
- *Discuss differences between John and Peter’s personalities (John more mild-mannered and Peter more bombastic) and discuss how those differences may have influenced how they related to Jesus.*

Ask where Luke got the material for his Gospel.

*(Listening Guide question 4)*

- *Read Luke 1:1-4 and talk about Luke’s research process. How do you think doing research relates to the doctrine of inspiration of Scripture? How much of the biblical writers’ personalities, writing styles, and sources of information do we see in their writings?*
  - ◇ *A great deal. God didn’t eliminate the writers’ personalities; He guided them and protected them from error but used their own ways of expressing His truth as they wrote.*
- *You could point out that even though we are all led by and filled with the Holy Spirit, God still uses our personalities, our own studies of Scripture, and other knowledge and gifts, and training when we serve Him.*

## The Synoptic Gospels

Ask if anyone knows what the word *synoptic* means.

*(Listening Guide question 5)*

- *It is made up of two Greek words: sun, which means “to combine” or “to pull together,” and opsis, from which the English word optical is derived and means “to see or to look.” The word means, “To see together.”*

Ask why we should read all three Synoptic Gospels.

*(Listening Guide question 7)*

- *The Synoptic Gospels work best when “seen together.” We discover a fuller and richer story of Jesus’ life and ministry when we compare all three synoptics.*

## John’s Gospel

Ask what the primary difference is between John’s Gospel and the Synoptic Gospels.

*(Listening Guide question 8)*

- *The synoptics provide three biographical essays on Jesus’ life. John, on the other hand, clearly stated in John 20:31 that his reason for writing his Gospel was to prove his theological thesis that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.*

Ask what John structured his Gospel around.

*(Listening Guide question 9)*

- *John presented seven of Jesus’ miracles as evidence of his claim for Jesus’ deity. The word he used for “miracle” is translated as sign or evidence. It was a word employed to describe evidence used to help decide a case in the court.*
- *John’s seven “signs” are:*
  - ◊ *Changing water to wine: 2:1–11.*
  - ◊ *Healing the official’s son: 4:46–54.*
  - ◊ *Healing the invalid: 5:1–18.*
  - ◊ *Feeding the five thousand: 6:5–14.*
  - ◊ *Walking on the Sea of Galilee: 6:16–21.*
  - ◊ *Healing a blind man: 9:1–7.*
  - ◊ *Raising Lazarus from the dead: 11:1–45.*

## Why Are the Gospels Different?

Ask the group if they can name some differences we see between the Gospel accounts.

*(Listening Guide question 10)*

- *Different parables; No parables in John; Different miracles; No birth narrative in Mark and John; Samaritan woman only in John 4, etc.*

Ask how having four different writers would explain differences in the Gospels.

*(Listening Guide question 11)*

- *Each of us notices what interests us. Illustrate with a policeman and a physician describing an automobile accident. The policeman would describe the cars’ speeds, the nature of the intersection (traffic lights, stop signs), weather conditions, etc. The physician would more likely describe injuries to the drivers and passengers in the cars. Each sees what she’s trained to see and is most interested in.*

Ask why having different audiences would account for differences between the Gospels.  
(*Listening Guide question 12*)

- *Refer to the illustration in the lecture where a college student is writing letters to her parents and to her friends about her college experience. Ask students to name some of the differences we might find between these two letters.*

Ask how having different purposes would explain differences in the Gospels  
(*Listening Guide question 13*)

- *Refer to the illustration in the lecture comparing the credentials we would present when applying for a job and when applying for membership in a bowling league. Ask students to discuss the differences they personally would present between applying for their dream job (or the job they have) and for a bowling league.*

## The Gospel Writers

You can discuss this material on the four Gospel writers in a number of ways .

**Exercise 1.** There is a brief description of each Gospel writer in the lecture. You can copy this material and bring it to the session with you. Divide your group into four smaller groups of two or three and have each group focus on one writer. Ask them to summarize the material, add some “sanctified imagination,” and write up an introduction of their writer to present to the rest of the group.

**Exercise 2.** Read the description of one writer and then ask the group members to draw a picture of the character, or to imagine what he would have looked like and describe him. Ask students to show or describe their pictures or read their descriptions.

**Exercise 3.** Divide your group into two smaller groups. Give each group two of the Gospel writers (for example, Matthew and Luke, Mark and John, etc.) and ask them to find as many comparisons and then as many contrasts between the two writers they were assigned as they can.

These exercises have two points to them:

- *To get the students to “see” each writer as different from the others.*
- *To humanize the writers so students read the Gospels with a bit more interest.*

After completing one or more of these exercises, ask group members if they identify more with a particular Gospel writer. Then ask if any of them are “more” or “less” like one writer than the others.

## The Gospel Writers’ Audiences

The following exercises provide various ideas for you to select from to help students interact with

this material from the lecture. A brief description of each audience is in the lecture. You can copy this material and bring it to the session with you.

**Exercise 1.** Divide your group into four smaller groups of two or three and have each group focus on one writer's audience. Ask them to summarize the material, add some "sanctified imagination," and write up an introduction of their writer's audience to present to the rest of the group.

**Exercise 2.** Read the description of one audience and then ask the group members to discuss what a writer might focus on or how he would cast his material when writing to this audience.

**Exercise 3.** Divide your group into two smaller groups. Give each group two audiences (Matthew and Luke's audience, Mark and John's audience etc.) and ask them to find as many comparisons and then as many contrasts between the two audiences they were assigned as they can.

These exercises have two points to them:

- *To get the group to understand how each audience is different from the others.*
- *To see how each audience would influence how a writer would address them.*

## The Gospel Writers' Purposes

A third reason the Gospels are different is that each writer had a purpose for writing:

- *Matthew presented Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. Ask someone to read Matthew 1:1 and name three facts that would impress Jewish readers.*
  - ◇ *Jesus Christ (Messiah).*
  - ◇ *Son of David (Messianic promise — 2 Samuel 7 and the Davidic Covenant).*
  - ◇ *Son of Abraham (Father of the Jews — Genesis 12:1–3).*
- *Mark presented Jesus as the faithful servant to Jesus' Father and to His Father's mission. The Romans were strongly committed to loyalty and service to the Roman Empire. Have someone read Mark 10:45, and then explain how this statement would make Jesus attractive to Romans. Remind them that Jesus ultimately served His Father.*
  - ◇ *"I came, not to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:45).*
- *Luke presented Jesus as the Savior of all humankind — Gentiles as well as Jews.*
  - ◇ *Jesus' genealogy goes all the way back to Adam — father of all mankind.*
  - ◇ *Ask someone to read Luke's key statement, Luke 19:10, and then open a brief discussion of how that would sound to a group that has never heard Jesus' story before.*
- *John presented Jesus as the Son of God.*
  - ◇ *Ask someone to read John 20:30–31, where John stated his purpose for writing. Discuss the passage.*
  - ◇ *John built his book around Jesus' seven signs.*

## Conclusion

In a paragraph or two, describe how YOU see Jesus. This is an important part of the lesson.

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Ask students to take some time (either 5-20 or 10 -15 minutes depending on how much time you allow for this discussion) to describe their own view of Jesus and how they would describe three things:*
  - ◇ *Their own view of Jesus as a person.*
  - ◇ *Their own relationship to Him.*
  - ◇ *Why they would recommend that someone they care about follow Him as their Lord — or not follow Him.*

## Application

Give students time to talk about their personal relationship with Jesus. This can be done best in groups of two or three.

- *Gospel means good news! Have you personally experienced the good news of God’s salvation?*
- *Is it really good news to you? Have you ever told this good news to anyone else? In Acts 1:8 Jesus gave His final commission to His followers and said, “You will be my witnesses.” Would you consider praying for one person by name with whom you could share this good news?*

## Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each lesson of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God’s Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone “sees” the same emphases, and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

## Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

## Introduce the Lesson

**Introduce the lesson** by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 3. “Jesus is the most important person who ever lived. But He is also the most complicated and controversial human who ever lived. In our lesson today we will look at some of the Bible passages that teach us about Jesus’ life and ministry. It will be easy to pause during our study time to worship this amazing God/man who came to earth to save us from our sin and to function as our High Priest.”

*Ask if anyone has questions about the lesson or about preparation for the lesson.*

## Review the Lesson Objectives

**Review the Lesson Objectives** below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

*By the end of this study you should be able to*

1. Name and explain the meaning of at least two Bible passages that present Jesus as God.
2. Name and explain the meaning of at least two Bible passages that present Jesus as human.
3. Present a general geography and chronology of Jesus’ earthly ministry.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled, or perhaps have changed.

*After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share their personal goal for the lesson in a sentence.*

## Introduction

*Ask group members, “What is the focus of Lesson 3?”*

- The focus is Jesus’ dual nature as fully God and fully human and why both natures are essential to His ministry as our Savior and High Priest.

# Background Studies

## Introduction

Ask group members, “What is the focus of Lesson 3?”  
(*Listening Guide question 1*)

- *The focus is Jesus’ dual nature as fully God and fully human and why both natures are essential to His ministry as our Savior and High Priest.*

## Jesus Is God

Ask group members, “How important is Jesus’ deity?”  
(*Listening Guide question 2*)

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Read John 14:1-3 and ask what’s at stake if Jesus isn’t God.*
- *Read John 14:6 and ask what’s at stake if Jesus isn’t God.*

Ask why Jesus didn’t initiate a lot of claims to His deity.  
(*Listening Guide question 3*)

- *Read Philippians 2:5-8 and lead a discussion on Jesus’ humility. He was secure in who He was and had no need to boast or drop hints. (I once heard a fighter pilot say, “How can you tell if someone is a fighter pilot? He will find a way to tell you.”)*
- *Read John 13:3-4. Note the relationship to Philippians 2: John 13:3 – Jesus knew who He was. Then the first word of John 13:4 is “So” He was able to take the lowest position and wash His disciples’ feet. John’s point? Jesus’s humility was based on His knowledge of who He really was.*

Discuss how Jesus’s response in Mark 2 communicated His deity.  
(*Listening Guide question 4*)

- *Mark 2:5 – Jesus stated that the man’s sins were forgiven.*
- *Mark 6–7 – Pharisees recognized that Jesus was doing what only God can do.*
- *Mark 8–9 – Jesus did something only God can do – He told the Pharisees what they were thinking, and then asked a question to set up His next move.*
- *Mark 10–12 – Jesus did a second thing that only God can do. Notice the words, in verse 10, “But that you may know”*

Ask why Jesus asserted His deity during His trial before the high priest.  
(*Listening Guide question 5*)

- *He was answering the high priest’s question honestly. Note that the high priest had put Jesus under*

*oath in verse 63, which heightened the validity of Jesus' answer.*

- *Also, to deny His deity would have delivered Jesus from the death sentence, but dying was His purpose for coming to earth in the first place.*

Ask how Matthew and Luke's opening chapters affirm Jesus's deity?

*(Listening Guide question 6)*

- *Jesus' virgin birth affirms His deity. Note in Matthew 1:22–23 that the angel announced to Joseph that Mary's pregnancy by the Holy Spirit took place to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah 7:14.*

Ask how Mark's opening chapter affirmed Jesus's deity.

*(Listening Guide question 7)*

- *Read Mark 1:1–3 and Isaiah 40:3–5 to show how John the Baptist fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy made eight centuries before John was born.*

Ask how John's opening chapter affirmed Jesus's deity.

*(Listening Guide question 8)*

- *Read John 1:1–3 and ask the group to identify three things John said about Jesus that are true only of God (eternal, created all, and source of life).*

Ask how all four of the Gospels' conclusions affirm Jesus's deity.

*(Listening Guide question 9)*

- *By focusing on Jesus' resurrection. Read 1 Corinthians 15:17–19 and discuss its message.*

Think for a few minutes about C. S. Lewis's claim and then state it in your own words.

*(Listening Guide question 10)*

- *If Jesus believed He was God and wasn't, He was a lunatic.*
- *If Jesus claimed to be God and knew He wasn't, He was a liar.*
- *So He was either God's Son, or a lunatic, or a liar.*

Ask group members to read Philippians 2:6, Colossians 1:15–20, and Hebrews 1:1–4.

- *Colossians 1:15–20 is the most thorough and you may find it the most productive for a discussion. Have someone read it and ask the question: "Of all the claims to Jesus' deity in Colossians 1, which is the most powerful to you?"*
- *Ask group members if they have comments they want to make from their reading of Philippians 2:6 and/or Hebrews 1:1–4.*

## Jesus Is Human

Ask why Jesus's humanity is so important.

*(Listening Guide question 14)*

- *Read 1 Peter 3:8–9 and talk about the doctrine of Jesus' substitutionary atonement, which means Jesus*

*suffered as a substitute for us. He died in our place — or He died to pay the penalty for our sins.*

Ask group members to summarize in their own words how Jesus' actions demonstrate His humanity.

*(Listening Guide question 15)*

Ask group members, "If you could cite only one Bible passage that teaches Jesus' humanity, which one would you choose?"

*(Listening Guide question 16)*

## Jesus Is Fully God and Fully Human

Ask, "What is important about the Colossians 1:9 statement?" Discuss their responses. For additional insights:

*(Listening Guide question 17)*

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Paul made three points about Jesus in this single verse.*
- *In Him (Jesus) all the fullness of deity dwells — Jesus is as fully God as it's possible to be.*
- *The fullness of deity dwells in Him in bodily form. Jesus "dwells" (exists) in a human body — He is not a spirit, not an angel.*
- *Ask someone to read Luke 24:39–43, where Jesus took great care to show His disciples that He did, in fact, have a "body" after His resurrection.*
- *This statement in Colossians was written almost thirty years after Jesus' resurrection and Paul wrote in the present tense — that in Him (at the time of writing) Jesus dwells (still) in bodily form. So His ascension into heaven didn't change the fact that He is still in human form.*

## Jesus's Life on Earth

Ask what we know about Jesus from His birth to the beginning of His ministry.

*(Listening Guide question 18)*

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Read Luke 2:37.*
- *Summarize the story Luke told in Luke 2:40-45.*
- *Read, or ask someone to read Luke 2:46-49.*
  - ◊ *How old was Jesus? (v. 42)*
  - ◊ *What was He doing? (v. 46)*
  - ◊ *What was the crowd's response? (vv. 47, 48)*
  - ◊ *How do you think Mary asked the question in verse 48? In frustration? In anger? In fear? Ask someone to role-play Mary and state the question as they think she may have sounded.*
  - ◊ *What does Mary's question suggest about her relationship to Jesus?*

- ◇ *What was Jesus' answer? (v. 49)*
- *What does Luke 2:51 tell you about Jesus' childhood and His humanity?*
- *Note that Luke 2:52 closes this story with the same point it opened with in verse 40. What was Luke emphasizing here?*
  - ◇ *That Jesus was a precocious, but normal kid.*

Ask how old Jesus was when He began His ministry.  
(Listening Guide question 19)

- *Thirty years old. See Luke 3:23.*

Ask how long Jesus's second ministry phase was in Galilee.  
(Listening Guide question 22)

- *Note that these dates are not as precise as we would like. They are "best guesses" but not historically recorded in the Gospels.*
- *Jesus' Great Galilean ministry lasted about eighteen months; it probably began during the second year of His ministry and He preached the Sermon on the Mount and selected the twelve apostles during this phase of His ministry.*

Ask what Decapolis and Phoenicia have in common.  
(Listening Guide question 23)

- *They were Gentile territories. Jesus spent around six months ministering among the Gentiles.*

Ask what event opened and what event closed Passion Week.  
(Listening Guide question 24)

- *The week opened and closed on high notes. Jesus was greeted as Israel's king on day one and was resurrected on day eight.*

Ask how the Gospel writers demonstrate their attitude toward Passion Week.  
(Listening Guide question 25)

- *Writers gave far more attention to it than any other phase of Jesus' ministry. They recorded details of each day except Wednesday of that week.*
- *Why? Because it focuses on the purpose of His "emptying Himself and taking on the form of a bondservant" (Philippians 2).*

Ask what Jesus did during Passion Week that makes it so important.  
(Listening Guide question 26)

- *Take some time to discuss Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection as the climax of His earthly life.*

## Conclusion

Ask how long Jesus was on earth after His resurrection.

*(Listening Guide question 27)*

- *Read Acts 1:3 and talk about how Jesus “gave many convincing proofs that he was alive” (NIV), and did so for forty days after His resurrection.*
- *Then read Matthew 28:16–17 and point out that “many doubted.” Even after His resurrection, His appearances and giving evidence after His resurrection (John 20), His appearance at the Sea of Galilee, and forgiving Peter (John 21), some — even of His disciples who knew Him best — still doubted.*
- *Talk about the reality of our own doubts and faith. When we struggle with the reality of all this, it’s natural and normal.*

## Application

Continue the discussion about your group members’ personal relationships and attitudes toward Jesus. Encourage them to be honest about where they are with doubts and loving Jesus with all their hearts, souls, minds, and strength. Stress the fact that, like any relationship, their relationship with Jesus will be stronger at times than at other times. Be honest about your own relationship.

## Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each lesson of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God’s Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone “sees” the same emphases, and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

## Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

## Introduce the Lesson

**Introduce the lesson** by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 4. “Jesus changed lives. People followed Him or rejected Him, but we find few instances of people ignoring Him. What made His ministry so effective? While that is an impossible question to answer, we can gain some clues by studying what He did.”

*Ask if anyone has questions about the lesson or about preparation for the lesson.*

## Review the Lesson Objectives

**Review the Lesson Objectives** below and briefly comment on any you feel need elaboration.

*By the end of this study you should be able to*

1. Define *miracle* and explain how miracles contributed to Jesus' ministry.
2. Define *parable* and explain how parables contributed to Jesus' ministry.
3. Understand how to read Jesus' parables more effectively.
4. Describe how Jesus' conversations and friendships contributed to His ministry.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled, or perhaps have changed.

*After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share their personal goal for the lesson in a sentence.*

## Introduction

*Begin by asking questions for discussion.*

- Ask group members what, in their opinion, is most characteristic of Jesus' life and ministry on earth.
- Ask if anyone has a favorite story or event about Jesus.

*The three aspects of Jesus' ministry we study in this lesson are:*

- Jesus' Miracles = Demonstrate His power.
- Jesus' Parables = Demonstrate His Genius. He made up many of these parables on the spot when He was being challenged or attacked.
- Jesus' Conversations and Relationships = Demonstrate His Caring and Concern.

## Background Studies

### Introduction

Introduce the three aspects of Jesus' ministry you will study in Lesson 4.

#### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Ask group members what, in their opinion, is most characteristic of Jesus' life and ministry on earth.*
- *Ask if anyone has a favorite story or event about Jesus.*

The three aspects of Jesus' ministry we study in this lesson are:

- *Jesus' Miracles = Demonstrate His power.*
- *Jesus' Parables = Demonstrate His Genius. He made up many of these parables on the spot when He was being challenged or attacked.*
- *Jesus' Conversations and Relationships = Demonstrate His Caring and Concern.*

### Jesus's Miracles

Ask if anyone wants to offer a definition of a miracle.

- *Suggest the definition given in the lesson: "A miracle is a work of God that transcends the ordinary power of nature and that reveals a truth."*

Ask why it is important to emphasize that only God can work miracles.

*(Listening Guide question 1)*

- *Because Jesus accepted the credit and claimed the power to do miracles.*
- *Read Acts 3:12-13 and Acts 4:5-10 and discuss the difference between the apostles' miracles and Jesus' miracles. Note how carefully and forcefully Peter and John stated that it was not their power, but God's that healed.*

Restate the point that miracles transcend the ordinary powers of nature. Ask how you would say this to a fourth-grade child.

*(Listening Guide question 2)*

Ask what laws of nature Jesus transcended with His miracles.

*(Listening Guide question 3)*

- *Changed water to wine (John 2:1–11) — Chemistry and Time*
- *Healing the official's son (John 4:46–54) — Distance – the boy was not present*
- *Healing the invalid at Bethesda (John 5:1–18) — God's Sabbath Law*
- *Feeding the 5,000 (John 6:5–14) — Quantity*
- *Walking on the Sea of Galilee (John 6:16–21) — Gravity*
- *Healing a man born blind (John 9:1–7) — Creation and Spiritual Darkness*
- *Raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1–45) — Sin and Death*

Ask, “Is there a miracle particularly fascinating or troubling to you?”

*(Listening Guide question 4)*

In addition to His power, what else did Jesus reveal through His miracles?

*(Listening Guide question 5)*

- *He was God's Son.*
- *He had great compassion for people.*
- *He had the power and the will to “cure” the deeper disease of the human soul. He was willing and able to do what He came to do.*

Ask how John specifically used Jesus's miracles.

*(Listening Guide question 6)*

- *To give evidence to support the claim he made when he stated the purpose of his Gospel in John 20:31*

Notice that many of Jesus' seven “I Am” claims are supported by His miracles. Don't attempt to link each “I Am” to a specific miracle, but note that a number of the statements deal with similar themes as some of Jesus' miracles.

*I Am...*

- *The Bread of Life (John 6:35) (Feeding the crowds).*
- *The Light of the world (8:12) (Healing the blind man).*
- *The Door of the sheep (10:7–9).*
- *The Good Shepherd (10:11, 14).*
- *The Resurrection and the life (11:25) (Raising Lazarus).*
- *The Way, the truth and the life (14:6).*
- *The True vine (15:1–17) (Water to wine).*

Read John 10:24–26. Ask how Jesus used His miracles in these verses.

*(Listening Guide question 8)*

Read John 10:36–38. Discuss how Jesus used His miracles in these verses.

- Verse 36: *The Jews accused Jesus of blasphemy because He claimed to be God's Son.*
- Verse 37: *Jesus told them not to believe His claim. Anyone can say he is God.*
- Verse 37 and 38: *But, Jesus said, you must believe the miracles.*

## Jesus's Parables

Ask if anyone has a favorite parable and discuss the parables for a short time.

Explain the difference between a parable and a fable.

*(Listening Guide question 10)*

- *A parable is an untrue story that could have actually happened.*
- *Jesus made up believable stories so people could see themselves in the story. He didn't use actual characters so that WE can become the Good Samaritan or the needy prodigal.*
- *A fable is an untrue story that could NOT have happened.*
  - ◊ *Compare "Three Billy Goats Gruff" with "The Good Samaritan" or "The Cyclops and His Treasure" from Aesop's Fables with "The Prodigal Son."*
  - ◊ *Stress the fact that people had to identify with the characters in Jesus' parables for them to be effective.*
- *Read the Good Samaritan parable (Luke 10:30-35) and use names of people in your group as substitutes for the six characters in the parable: the man on the journey, the two robbers, the priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan. For example, "Bill was on a journey when Fred and Jack robbed him. Alice and Pete went by and..."*

What's the difference between a parable and a true story?

*(Listening Guide question 11)*

- *In a parable the teller can craft the story to accomplish whatever purpose he has for using the parable. Jesus was not limited to actual characters and events.*
- *Because the characters aren't actual people, we can substitute ourselves for the characters. We can be the forgiving father or the needy prodigal son or the resentful brother in Luke 15:11-32. See the material in the Lesson section, "The Power of Parables."*

Explain the three points about understanding the parables presented in the lesson.

- *We separate the story and its message.*
- *We must put the parable into its context.*
- *We define the scope and magnitude of the parable's point.*

## Jesus's Conversations and Relationships

Ask about the difference between an apostle and a disciple.

*(Listening Guide question 20)*

- *The point is that Jesus had various relationships: enemies, people who were disinterested, people who were curious, disciples (interested learners), friends, and apostles. The apostles were twelve officially appointed witnesses and leaders — Luke 6:12–16. Jesus called His disciples and appointed twelve as apostles. He had many disciples, but only twelve apostles. Among the twelve He had a circle of friends with Peter, James, and John.*

Ask group members how they would have fit into Jesus' circles based on their current way of relating to Him.

Jesus made friends with a variety of people. Two were tax collectors, Matthew became an apostle, and Zacchaeus became a devoted follower. He violated social custom by befriending and teaching women; Mary and Martha and Mary Magdalene became close friends. He ministered to a Samaritan woman and healed a Gentile woman's daughter, etc.

- *Discuss with the group how open — or closed — we are to the kinds of people Jesus went out of His way to befriend and minister to.*
- *Ask the group, "What opportunities are available in your community to follow Jesus' model?"*
- *Read Matthew 25:34–40 and discuss how serious Jesus was about these kinds of relationships.*

## Application

The lesson has focused on Jesus' ministry as:

- *A powerful miracle worker*
- *A wise teacher*
- *A compassionate and loving friend.*

Open a conversation with your group about how they relate to Jesus.

### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Is one of these images easier for some members to resonate with than others?*
- *Do they relate to Him in different ways at different times?*
- *Can they balance all three of these images of Jesus?*
- *How do they actually function or participate in their relationship with Him?*

## Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each lesson of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God's Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone "sees" the same emphases, and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

## Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

## Introduce the Lesson

**Introduce the lesson** by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 5. “The book of Acts is a long one and contains lots of details about the early church. In this lesson we attempt to outline the book’s main idea and structure so we can more easily understand its details.”

*Ask if anyone has questions about the lesson or about preparation for the lesson.*

## Review the Lesson Objectives

**Review the Lesson Objectives** below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

*By the end of this study you should be able to*

1. Explain Acts’ big idea and its outline.
2. Name and explain the contribution of seven key passages in Acts.
3. Explain the difference between and the contribution of Acts’ “growth” passages and “snapshot” passages.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled, or perhaps have changed.

*After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share their personal goal for the lesson in a sentence.*

## Introduction

*Ask the group if they know what the relationship is between Luke’s Gospel and his book of Acts.*

- Have someone read Luke 24:50-53 and someone else read Acts 1:1-3.
- Ask the group to list as many comparisons between the two passages as they can.
  - ◊ Use a chalkboard or a large piece of paper to record them.

*What similar emphases did Luke make in both passages?*

# Background Studies

## Introduction

Ask the group if they know what the relationship is between Luke's Gospel and his book of Acts.  
(*Listening Guide question 1*)

Have someone read Luke 24:50-53 and someone else read Acts 1:1-3.

Ask the group to list as many comparisons between the two passages as they can.

- *Use a chalkboard or a large piece of paper to record them.*

What similar emphases did Luke make in both passages?

## Luke's Message in Acts

Ask what two evidences Luke presented to show that what was going on in the early church was Jesus's work.

(*Listening Guide question 2*)

You can either complete this exercise as a whole group or create two smaller groups.

- *Have group members read the following passages and ask them how these events proved that Jesus was still at work.*
  - ◇ *Acts 2:1-3*
  - ◇ *Acts 3:1-8*
- *Ask a group member to read the following passages, and then explain how they show that Jesus was still at work.*
  - ◇ *Luke 22:54-62*
  - ◇ *Acts 5:27-29; 40-41*

Open a discussion with the question, "What evidence does God give us today that He is still at work in the world and in His church?"

Read Acts 1:8 and tell the group that this verse serves as a three-point outline of Acts.

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Ask what the three points are (four places are named, so clarify that Judea and Samaria were like states or provinces and suggest one movement).*
- *Discuss how Jesus's commission to be His witnesses relates to us. We aren't commanded to go to these specific places, so how would we apply His commission today?*
  - ◇ *Jerusalem = The city they were in at the time—their "home base" (normal contacts).*

- ◇ *Judea and Samaria = provinces or territories—like states.*
  - » *Judea was the province where Jerusalem was located, like Denver is to Colorado (people they wouldn't see regularly or in their normal routine).*
  - » *Samaria was the province just north of Judea where the despised Samaritans lived—a place Jews would have to deal with prejudice to go (people they would avoid seeing).*
- ◇ *The world (people they would have to make a conscious, organized effort to see).*

We are not “commissioned” to go to these specific locations but to be witnesses every day in our own cities, in our states, wherever we travel, to our “Samaria” (people who are outside of our “comfort zone”), and to the whole world either directly or through supporting our missions’ ministries.

## Jesus’s Strategy to Change the World

The first place of witness Luke described was Jerusalem. (Point I. in Acts’ outline.)

- *Luke described it in chapters 1–7.*
- *The events described occurred over a period of about three years.*

Acts 6 describes an important event you will discuss later in the session, but introduce it here by reading and commenting on Acts 6:1.

- *Point out that the church was growing, that problems began to arise, and that the apostles appointed more ministers to help with the work.*

Point II in Acts’ outline was Judea and Samaria.

- *Chapters 8–12*
- *About twelve years*

In addition to describing the geographical expansion of the church, Luke describes another major emphasis: the ministry of non-apostles.

- *Stephen (one of the six ministers from Acts 6) in chapter 7*
- *Philip (another of the six ministers) in chapter 8*
- *Paul’s conversion in chapter 9*
- *Barnabas in chapter 11:19–30*

Point III in Acts tells how the gospel went all the way to Rome.

- *Chapters 13–28*
- *About thirteen years*
- *Paul’s ministry is the focus of these chapters*

## Seven Key Passages

### Acts 1:8

You covered this verse earlier so just mention here that it is Acts' outline and that Jesus's commission to His apostles (and to us) is the book's big idea.

We are to be Jesus's witnesses and take His message of salvation to the whole world, beginning with where we happen to be at any time, home or away.

### Acts 2

This chapter describes the birth of the church...

- *Read Acts 2:1–4.*
- *The Day of Pentecost was fifty days after Passover. Jesus was crucified the day before Passover, was raised three days after Passover, and ministered to the disciples for forty days after His resurrection. So the event of Acts 2 occurred about ten days after the events of Acts 1:8.*
- *Explain that “tongues” can also be translated as “languages” and fits with the miracle described in Acts 2:5 by equipping the disciples. Beware of getting into a discussion about the gift of tongues because that distracts from Luke’s point here. God gave this reassuring miracle to the disciples at this critical juncture in the church’s life.*
- *A second miracle is recorded in 2:40–41 when three thousand souls responded to Peter’s sermon.*

Briefly discuss with the group how they think Jesus's followers would feel about their lives and their role as Jesus's witnesses on the evening of that Day of Pentecost when all these events occurred.

Discuss how they feel about their own lives and role as Jesus's witnesses.

### Acts 6-8

Read Acts 6:1–4 and note four points:

- *The church was growing and the apostles were unable to keep up with the ministry details (v. 1).*
- *There was potential for a major split in the church between Grecian (Greek-speaking) and Hebraic Jews who had become Christians (v. 1).*
- *The apostles used great wisdom in handling the potential firestorm:*
  - ◊ *They validated the problem by gathering “all” the disciples.*
  - ◊ *They let the Grecian Jews select their own ministers to meet their needs (notice all Greek names in v. 5).*
  - ◊ *They set strict qualifications for the ministers (v. 3).*
  - ◊ *The apostles recognized and commissioned the ministers (v. 6).*
  - ◊ *“Troubled” people (v. 1) became “pleased” people (v. 5).*

- *The potential split was handled in such a way that the church's ministry was still effective in the community (v. 7, "So the word of God spread" NIV).*

You could open a discussion about what we can learn from the apostles' approach for managing conflict in our homes, churches, workplace, etc.

## Acts 9

Acts 9 records Paul's conversion to Christianity.

Ask someone to read Acts 9:1–3 and describe what happened to Saul/Paul.

Ask someone to read Philippians 3:4–6 (if time allows, also read Philippians 3:7–11) and describe Paul.

Christ obviously made a huge difference in Paul's life. Discuss what brings about such change and how your group members are progressing in their spiritual journeys.

## Acts 10 and 11

Acts 10 and 11 describe Peter's experience with planting the first Gentile church. The elaborate miracle of the three-time command to eat unclean food demonstrates how set Peter was in his opposition to including Gentiles in the church.

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Ask a group member to read Acts 10:27–29 and discuss what it says about the gospel crossing cultural barriers from Jews to Gentiles.*
- *Also note the Jewish Christians' response in 11:1–2.*

## Acts 15

After Paul and Barnabas had gone to Galatia and planted churches in Gentile cities (Acts 13–14), the Jewish believers in Antioch condemned them for not requiring the Gentile believers to be circumcised or keep other Mosaic laws (15:1–2).

Paul and Barnabas and some of their critics went to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and elders there to resolve the question of whether people needed to obey Jewish laws to become Christians. They resolved it, and the doctrine of salvation by grace and not by works, later stated in Ephesians 2:8–9, was birthed and confirmed.

## Acts 13–28

Chapter 13 to 21:26 records Paul's missionary journeys to where he planted the churches he later wrote to. If we read the Acts accounts of planting the churches and the letters Paul wrote to them as companion texts, they inform each other.

- *Acts 13–14 — Galatians*
- *Acts 16 — Philippians*
- *Acts 17: 1–9 — 1 and 2 Thessalonians*
- *Acts 18:1–17 — 1 and 2 Corinthians*
- *Acts 18:18–22 and 19:1–41 — Ephesians*
- *Acts 16:1–3 — 1 and 2 Timothy*

## Two Kinds of Passages

Ask what the “growth” passages tell us.  
(*Listening Guide question 27*)

- *The “growth” passages tell us that the gospel was reaching large numbers of people. God’s work was succeeding. Jesus was still at work.*

Discuss why the growth passages matter.  
(*Listening Guide question 28*)

- *God is concerned about numbers because they represent souls saved.*
- *Luke included the numbers to demonstrate the church’s impact on culture.*

If you want to read or reference the “growth” passages they are:

- *1:15; 2:41; 2:47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7; 9:31; 9:35; 9:42; 11:21.*

Ask what a “snapshot” passage is.  
(*Listening Guide question 29*)

- *A passage that stops the narrative to describe what was actually going on in these churches.*

Ask what the “good news” snapshot passages tell us.  
(*Listening Guide question 30*)

- *They help explain the “growth” passages. “Quantity” occurred because of the “quality” of what God was doing in people’s lives.*

The “good news” passages are:

- *2:42–47; 4:32–37; 5:12–16.*

Ask what two things the “hard news” passages teach us.  
(*Listening Guide question 31*)

- *These Christians were real people with real issues.*
- *Because of what God was doing in their lives they were able to resolve their issues in love and wisdom. The church continued to attract people even though they had issues.*

Ask what made Christianity so powerful.

*(Listening Guide question 32)*

- *It was more than a human movement. Jesus was at work among them.*

The “hard news” passages are:

- *5:1–11; 5:17–42; 6:1–7.*
- *But God used the “hard news” to strengthen and build the church.*

## Application

As you think back over this lesson, imagine yourself as an individual Christian living in this amazing period of time.

### Ideas for Discussion

- *How do you think you would have responded?*
- *What fears would you have had?*
- *What would have fascinated you the most?*
- *What would you have contributed to the events?*

## Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each lesson of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God’s Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone “sees” the same emphases, and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

## Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

## Introduce the Lesson

**Introduce the lesson** by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 6. “Paul the apostle was a man especially prepared for the mission he received from God. In this lesson we study him as a person and as a missionary.”

*Ask if anyone has questions about the lesson or about preparation for the lesson.*

## Review the Lesson Objectives

**Review the Lesson Objectives** below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

*By the end of this study you should be able to*

1. Describe Paul in a way that highlights his unique combination of strengths.
2. Describe each of Paul's three missionary journeys.
3. Describe Paul's imprisonment.
4. Explain specific lessons we learn from Paul's life and ministry.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled, or perhaps have changed.

*After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share their personal goal for the lesson in a sentence.*

## Application Questions

### Paul, the Person

Introduce a discussion on what the group thinks Paul was like: friendly, “cuddly,” cold, preoccupied, etc.

List the four passages we refer to as “key” passages on Paul.

*(Listening Guide question 3)*

- *Acts 9 — Paul’s conversion.*
- *Acts 22:3–5 — Paul’s pre-conversion credentials; and 6–21 — his conversion story.*
- *Philippians 3:4–6 — Background; and 3:17–21 — His commitment to Christ.*
- *Galatians 1:10–2:21 — Explaining his apostolic ministry (also 2 Corinthians 1–7).*
- *See also: Ephesians 3, where Paul explains his calling as apostle to the Gentiles.*

Ask if anyone knows what “Hellenistic” means.

*(Listening Guide question 4)*

- *See Acts 22:3 and Philippians 3:4–5.*
- *Hellenistic means to be “Greek” in language and customs. Many Jews who were religiously faithful to Moses’s Law also adopted Greek language and some elements of Greek culture. Paul’s family, living in Tarsus, a Gentile city, had become “Hellenized.” But Paul boasted that he was Jewish to the core.*

Paul lived in Tarsus until he was twelve years old and then went to Jerusalem to study Jewish law at the temple.

Paul studied with Gamaliel, the respected Jewish scholar (Acts 22:3; see also Acts 5:33–34). To say Paul had studied under Gamaliel would be equivalent to saying he had a PhD from Harvard or Oxford University.

Ask students to read Philippians 3:4–6 and list the facts it contains about Paul.

Summarize the advantages Paul enjoyed because he was a Roman citizen.

- *The incidents in Acts 16:35–40 and in Acts 22:37–39 illustrate how Roman citizens had additional rights and privileges a non-citizen didn’t have.*

Paul’s appeal to Caesar — Summarize from the lesson how Paul used his Roman citizenship to guarantee his trip to Rome (Acts 26:32).

Read Acts 27:1 and ask if anyone noticed an important point Luke made there. Then read Acts 16:10, where Luke subtly made the same point.

- *Note that Luke used the pronoun “we” in 27:1 and “we” and “us” in 16:10. Luke was, at times, part of Paul’s team.*

Briefly discuss how Paul’s Jewish heritage and his Roman citizenship contributed to his ministry effectiveness to Jews and to Gentiles.

Discuss the two criteria for being an apostle and the fact that it appeared that Paul didn’t meet either one. He was not one of the Twelve, who were personally taught by Jesus, and he was not personally appointed by Jesus while Jesus was on earth.

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Ask a group member to read Galatians 1:11–12 and discuss the first criterion for apostleship.*
- *Ask a group member to read Acts 9:15–17 and discuss the second criterion for apostleship.*

Read Acts 13:2–4 and explain how Luke used this passage to affirm Paul’s legitimacy as an apostle.

List the four things that affirmed Paul’s ministry.  
(*Listening Guide question 18*)

- *Born into a devout Jewish family but raised with Greek culture.*
- *Born a Roman citizen.*
- *Received the finest education in Jewish Scriptures available.*
- *Called and taught by God’s Son and commissioned by God’s Holy Spirit.*

Ask students to reflect on their lives — their parents, ethnicity, education, experiences, etc. — and list ways God, in His sovereign guidance, has prepared them for His service. Read Romans 8:28 and remind them that God uses everything to shape and strengthen us if we allow Him to.

- *Give them about ten minutes to reflect and write down significant events in childhood, primary and secondary education phases, after high school, etc. Divide life into logical segments.*
- *Let them discuss their discoveries in groups of two or three.*
- *You may want to share your own story first to give them an idea of what you’re asking them to do.*

## Paul’s Ministry

It’s important to be familiar with Paul’s journeys and ministry because chapters 13–21 record his ministry of planting the churches he wrote to. Studying Acts and Paul’s epistles together enriches both studies.

The first trip was to the Galatian region and it is recorded in Acts 13 and 14. The trip lasted two years (AD 46–48).

The Jerusalem Council is recorded in Acts 15 and occurred in AD 50. See details in the Lesson 6 transcript.

The Jerusalem Council is important because God concluded that salvation is by grace through faith and not a result of works (see Ephesians 2:8-9).

Paul’s second journey was to Greece (Macedonia and Achaia) and to Asia Minor, and it is recorded in Acts 15:36 to 18:22. It occurred from AD 50–52.

Paul planted the churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth, and Ephesus. He later wrote letters to all but the Berean church.

Paul's third journey is recorded in Acts 18:23 to 21:26, and it occurred in the years AD 53–57.

The third journey was different from the first two. Paul planted no new churches. He moved to the city of Ephesus, where he lived for three years. During that time he visited the churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth and continued his ministry to them.

At the end of his third journey Paul was arrested in Jerusalem (Acts 21–22).

## Paul's Imprisonment

This detailed material may be too much to lecture on for your group, but if questions come up, you can use this information to interact with them. You can summarize it and present the fact that Paul was arrested in Jerusalem and spent two years in Caesarea, where he appealed to Caesar. That resulted in him being sent to Rome, where he was under house arrest for two more years.

- *Imprisonment in Jerusalem in AD 57. (Acts 21:27–22:23).*
- *Paul's life was threatened in Jerusalem and he was moved to Caesarea where he was imprisoned from AD 57–59. (Acts 22:23–26:32).*
- *He appealed to Caesar (Acts 25:22 ; 26:32).*
- *He was sent to Rome and was involved in a shipwreck on the way (Acts 27:1 – 28:16).*
- *He was in Rome under house arrest for two years (AD 59–61) waiting for his audience with Caesar (Acts 28:16–31).*
- *Paul wasn't in a prison, but in a house (Acts 28:30-31). While there, he ministered to visitors, shared the gospel with the guards, and wrote letters to churches and individuals.*

## Paul's Fourth Missionary Journey

When Luke's account in Acts ended, Paul was still imprisoned in Rome.

Paul was released from prison in AD 62. He visited the churches he had planted, went to Crete with Titus and planted a church there (Titus 1), and may have gone to Spain.

He was arrested again in AD 67–68 . (2 Timothy 4:6–8) and was executed at that time.

## Conclusion

Paul's approach to life may best be summarized by what he wrote in Philippians 1:20–21.

**Ideas for Discussion**

- *Ask someone in the group to read the passage and discuss it as a whole group or divide the group into smaller groups of two and three and have the smaller groups read and discuss.*
- *Close with a whole-group discussion of what made Paul “tick.”*

## Application

If you were to take one fact or principle from Paul’s life to prepare a devotional talk to present to a group of young Christians:

**Ideas for Discussion**

- *What would you select?*
- *What would you say about it?*

## Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each lesson of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God’s Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone “sees” the same emphases, and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

## Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

## Introduce the Lesson

**Introduce the lesson** by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 7. “This lesson introduces the New Testament epistle and surveys six of Paul’s letters: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians. The lesson’s purpose is to provide historical background on each book that will enrich your understanding of the books’ content whenever you read them.”

*Ask if anyone has questions about the lesson or about preparation for the lesson.*

## Review the Lesson Objectives

**Review the Lesson Objectives** below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

*By the end of this study you should be able to*

1. Name the first six of Paul’s epistles as listed in the New Testament.
2. Understand key themes in these epistles.
3. Apply important spiritual truths from each of these epistles.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled, or perhaps have changed.

*After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share their personal goal for the lesson in a sentence.*

## Introduction

*Ask group members why the Epistles were written and what role they play in the New Testament.*

- Originally they were written to address specific situations that existed in the various churches.
  - ◊ We refer to Paul’s letters as “occasional” epistles because they were written to specific churches or individuals and address “current” situations.
  - ◊ We refer to the other epistles as “General” and “Johannine” epistles because they were

written to the church at large and address issues more generally existent in most of the first-century churches.

- Today they instruct Christian individuals and churches about how to live the “All things become new” life Paul referenced in 2 Corinthians 5:17.

*How many New Testament epistles are there?*

- There are 21 epistles.
- How do we organize them?
  - ◊ Thirteen are written by Paul and are referred to as the “Pauline Epistles.”
  - ◊ Four are written by other authors (James, Peter, and the unknown author of Hebrews) and are referred to as “General Epistles.”
  - ◊ Three epistles and Revelation are written by John and are referred to, along with his Gospel, as “Johannine Literature.”

*Ask group members if they have a favorite epistle, and if so, why?*

## Background Studies

### Romans

#### Background

Written by Paul to the church at Rome from Corinth in AD 57. during his third missionary journey.

The book of Romans was one of the two letters (Colossians also) Paul wrote to churches he didn't plant.

Ask a group member to read Romans 1:7–15 and discuss what it says about Paul's attitude and wishes for the church at Rome.

Paul wrote the letter to prepare the church for his visit. He had not personally presented the gospel to them and wanted to make sure they understood what he meant by the word.

#### Key Passage

Ask a group member to read Romans 1:16 - it's key verse and discuss why Paul was not ashamed (or perhaps more accurately was “proud”) of the gospel.

- *The gospel was the good-news message that God would use to change lives and cultures.*
  - ◊ *Ask the group to name some ways the gospel message about Jesus Christ has changed culture:*

- » *Slavery, role of women, family life, love for your neighbor, etc.*
- ◇ *Ask the group to name some ways their own lives are changing because of Jesus.*

## Main Idea

God's gospel is an essential message.

## Outline

- *Chapters 1–11: God has saved us from sin and given us a whole new approach to life.*
- *Chapters 12–16: God teaches us how to live this whole new approach to life.*
  - ◇ *Emphasize the fact that the gospel is more than a ticket to heaven when we die. It is a lifestyle to be lived every moment of our lives.*

Romans' contribution to the New Testament is that it provides the most complete theological explanation of the Christian faith in the whole Bible.

We use it today to explain the doctrine of salvation and as a basis for how to live as a Christian.

# 1 Corinthians

## Background

From Paul to the church in Corinth. Written from Ephesus around AD 55. Paul planted the church at the end of his second missionary journey, in AD 52.

Ask a group member to read Acts 18:9–11 as a reference to Paul's ministry in Corinth on his second journey.

Corinth was in Achaia, southern Greece, but had a large Roman population. It was a major seaport and was known for its sexual immorality. There were twelve pagan temples in the city, including one to Aphrodite with over one thousand prostitutes who participated in the religious rituals. A cosmopolitan city, its inhabitants represented numerous religions and cultures. Most of the believers had come to Christ from a deep moral and philosophical distance.

Paul spent eighteen months there on his second missionary journey, but many new believers had joined since Paul left and didn't know him, and some actually opposed him.

Ask a group member to read 1 Corinthians 3:4 and 9:1–3, and then discuss the relationship between Paul and the Corinthians.

Three major issues troubled the church:

- *Divisions and bickering among the members: 1:10–13.*

- *Casual about immorality: 5:1–2.*
- *Confused about church order — worship, spiritual gifts, communion, etc.: 7–14.*

### Key Passage

1 Corinthians 3:1–3 is a key passage because it summarizes the issues in Corinth.

### Main Idea

“The gospel is too big to ignore in daily life.” Being a Christian has to make a difference.

### Outline

- *Chapters 1-6: Paul responded to problems that had been reported to him (1:11).*
- *Chapters 7-16: Paul responded to specific questions they had asked him in a letter (7:1).*

1 Corinthians contributes to the New Testament by teaching us about early church struggles and how Paul addressed them.

We use 1 Corinthians today as a guide to personal and church life. The church today isn't that much different from the church in Corinth—the struggle of sinful people trying to live God's will.

## 2 Corinthians

### Background

From Paul to the church in Corinth, written about six months after 1 Corinthians in AD 55 from Macedonia (where Philippi and Thessalonica were located).

Ask a group member to read 2 Corinthians 10:1–6, and then discuss what this paragraph tells you about the relationship between Paul and the Corinthians (see also 1:23; 2:4).

Some in Corinth opposed Paul and undermined his legitimacy as an apostle, even accusing him of dishonesty (see 1:15–17). Paul wrote 2 Corinthians to defend his legitimacy and to prepare the church for his intended visit.

### Key Passage

A key verse and theme for the book: 2 Corinthians 5:17.

### Main Idea

Paul's conduct, character, and calling made his ministry legitimate.

Paul explained and defended himself by referring to his:

- *Conduct (7:2–4).*
- *Calling (5:18–20).*
- *Character (4:1–2).*

## Outline

- *Chapters 1–7: Paul explained his conduct and his ministry as an apostle.*
- *Chapters 8–9: Paul provided instructions for contributing to the relief fund for the Jerusalem church.*
- *Chapters 10–13: Paul further explained and defended his ministry as an apostle.*

Second Corinthians contributes to the New Testament by providing detailed insight into Paul's personal life.

We use it today as a model for how to confront others honestly and lovingly.

# Galatians

## Background

From Paul to a group of churches he and Barnabas planted on their first journey (Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe; Acts 13-14) in the Galatian region in AD 48–49. Wrote the letter shortly after he and Barnabas completed the trip and before the Jerusalem council (Acts 15).

Ask a group member to read Galatians 1:6–8, and then discuss what Paul's words indicate about his attitude toward the Galatian churches. (Paul was frustrated by their unbelief.)

Read Acts 13:44; 14:1–3; 14:19 to give background on the strong Judaizing influence in Galatia.

Ask someone to read Galatians 3:1–3, and then discuss the Galatians' problem.

- *They were abandoning the gospel message because it wasn't "working" for them. Their lives weren't improving.*

## Key Passage and Main Idea

Galatians 5:16 and 25 (This presents Paul's solution to their problem; you may ask someone to read it aloud.)

## Main Idea

“Walk by the Spirit and you will not fulfill the desires of your sinful nature.”

## Outline

- *Chapters 1–2: Paul defended his apostleship.*
- *Chapters 3–4: He explained how the gospel delivers us from slavery to a salvation by faith.*
- *Chapters 5–6: He gave an explanation of how the Holy Spirit can change our lives.*

Galatians contributes to the New Testament by giving a clear explanation of how God changes our lives as we respond to the Holy Spirit's power and leading.

We use Galatians today to explain God's grace; to present the fruit of the Spirit (5:22–23); and instruct believers how to "walk by the Spirit" (5:16–25).

## Ephesians

### Background

Paul planted the church on his second journey in AD 52 (Acts 18:19–22). He lived there for three years on his third journey (Acts 19:1–41) and sent Timothy there to be their pastor. He wrote Ephesians while in prison in Rome in AD 60–61.

Ephesians was written to encourage and instruct. No problems are mentioned.

### Key Passage

Read Ephesians 4:1–3, the book's key passage and theme, and discuss:

- *The importance of building strong unity in the church.*
- *How this passage could contribute to teaching about that importance.*

### Main Idea

We walk worthy of our calling when we walk in unity.

### Outline

- *Chapters 1–3: God has made unity possible.*
- *Chapters 4–6: Paul instructs us in how to build strong unity.*

Ephesians contributes to the New Testament by teaching how essential unity is and how to achieve and maintain it.

We use Ephesians today to teach how church life can prosper as we follow God's design for unity and mutual ministry.

# Philippians

## Background

Paul planted the Philippian church on his second journey (Acts 16:6–40). He visited the church twice on his third journey (Acts 20:1–12). He wrote Philippians from his Roman prison in 60–61.

Read Philippians 1:3–8 and discuss the relationship between Paul and the Philippians.

No doctrinal or moral issues are discussed in the letter. It was a “thank you” letter.

Read Philippians 4:14–16 and discuss what it says about Paul’s feelings toward the Philippian believers.

## Key Passage

Philippians 1:20–21

These verses have great content for a discussion on a theme for any Christian’s life.

## Main Idea

“For me, to live is Christ.” NIV

## Outline

- *Chapters 1–2: Learn to live by following good examples.*
- *Chapters 3–4: Learn to live by following good instruction.*

Philippians contributes to the New Testament by providing personal insight into Paul’s devotion to Christ and His mission.

We use Philippians today as encouragement and instruction for living the Christian life.

# Application

## Romans

Ask a group member to read Romans 12:1–2, and then discuss Paul’s three “urgings”:

- *Present yourself as a living sacrifice — 100 percent commitment. Sacrifices were killed.*

- *Do not be conformed — Enter a life-long, constant process of shedding old habits.*
- *Be transformed — Enter a lifelong, constant process of growing into new habits.*

## First Corinthians & Second Corinthians

Ask a group member to read 1 Corinthians 3:4–9, and then discuss the following questions:

- *What issue did Paul address? (v. 4)*
- *What’s the point of Paul’s response? (v. 5–9) — That God uses different people in different ways to accomplish His will.*

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7–9 and discuss the following questions:

- *Why was Paul given a “thorn in the flesh”? (v. 7) [No idea what it was].*
- *What was Paul’s first response to this thorn? (v. 8).*
- *What was God’s response to Paul? (v. 9).*
- *What was Paul’s response to God’s response? (9–10).*

Ask group members if they have realities in their lives they wish were different. (Better intellect, better athlete, better musician, better looking, etc.)

What about things they have prayed would be different and aren’t? Can they trust that God created them as they are for a reason? That He will use them in spite of, or because of, real or perceived “weaknesses”? Can they, like Paul, thank God for them?

## Galatians

Read Galatians 2:20 and discuss its message about being crucified with Christ.

- *Crucified with Christ — refer to Galatians 5:24.*
- *It is no longer “I” who live — Christ has given me power to overcome my sinful ego.*
- *Christ lives in me and gave Himself up for me — see Galatians 1:4.*

What does Galatians 1:4 say God’s will is for the Christian?

## Ephesians

Read Ephesians 4:29–32 and see how many principles you can find for building healthy relationships.

## Philippians

Read Philippians 3:12–14 and notice Paul’s language: “I press on” (v. 12); “one thing I do” (v. 13); “straining” (v. 13); and “I press on” (v. 14).

- *What do these words say about Paul?*
- *What “one thing” was he “pressing” and “straining” for?*

Ask what that would look like in their daily lives in terms of actual function and lifestyle?

As you reflect on your past week, what does it appear is the “one thing” you are “pressing on” toward?

- *Does that “one thing” reflect your deepest values?*
- *If not, what could you do to adjust your schedule to refocus on what matters most?*

## Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each lesson of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God’s Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone “sees” the same emphases, and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

## Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

### Introduce the Lesson

**Introduce the lesson** by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 8. “Lesson 8 continues the survey of Paul’s letters by looking at Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. These brief overviews provide spiritual insights that guide us as God’s people in every generation.”

*Ask if anyone has questions about the lesson or about preparation for the lesson.*

### Review the Lesson Objectives

**Review the Lesson Objectives** below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

*By the end of this study you should be able to*

1. Name the last seven of Paul’s epistles as listed in the New Testament.
2. Understand key themes in these epistles.
3. Apply important spiritual truths from each of these epistles.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled, or perhaps have changed.

*After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share their personal goal for the lesson in a sentence.*

### Background Studies

## Colossians

### Background

The church in Colossae was one of the two churches (along with the church in Rome) Paul wrote to but didn't plant. Epaphras, one of his trusted colleagues, had planted the Colossian church while Paul was in Ephesus on the third missionary journey (1:7–8). The letter was written in AD 60–61 from Rome while Paul was under house arrest.

Read Colossians 1:3–4 and discuss Paul's relationship to the Colossians. He was a stranger who cared for them.

The purpose of the letter was to assure the Colossians that Jesus's offer of eternal and abundant life was valid and to address a heresy that was being taught in Colossae about Jesus's nature. From the book's content we can conclude that the false teaching involved:

- *Ceremonial rules for worship (2:16–17).*
- *Asceticism or separatism (2:21 and 23).*
- *Angel worship (2:18).*
- *Low view of Christ (1:15–20; 2:2–3, 9).*
- *Reliance on human wisdom (2:4, 8.)*

### Key Passage

A key passage is Colossians 3:1–2. Ask someone to read it, and then discuss its content.

### Main Idea

The book's main idea is that when we trust Jesus's sovereignty it makes sense to submit to His authority.

### Outline

Like most of Paul's letters, Colossians can be divided into two sections:

- *Chapters 1–2: We can trust Jesus's sovereignty (cf. 2:9–10).*
- *Chapters 3–4: We must submit to Jesus's authority (cf. 3:1–2).*

Colossians contributes to the New Testament by providing key statements about Jesus's deity (1:13–22; 2:9).

We use Colossians today to develop our trust in Christ and urge obedience to Him (3:1–4).

## 1 Thessalonians

### Background

Thessalonica was a busy seaport city, the largest city in Macedonia. It didn't have the same

mixture of cultures or level of immorality as Corinth. Ask someone to read Acts 17:1–5, and then list the facts about planting this church.

- *Planted on the second journey, after he was in Philippi, in AD 50–51.*
- *Wrote the letter from Corinth a few months after the church was planted.*

Paul had an intimate ministry with the Thessalonians and cared deeply for them (2:7–8).

### Key Passage

First Thessalonians 3:12–13. *Read and discuss its use as a prayer we can all pray for each other.*

### Main Idea

The only antidote to falling backwards is to aggressively move forward.

### Outline

The book's outline contains two movements:

- *Chapters 1–3: Reflection on and explanation of Paul's ministry in Thessalonica.*
- *Chapters 4–5: Instruction and exhortation for godly living.*

Though there isn't a separate section addressing it, the book — as does 2 Thessalonians — has references throughout to Jesus's second coming and the end of the age. Each chapter of 1 Thessalonians ends with a reference to Jesus's return.

First Thessalonians contributes to the New Testament by showing the nurturing side of Paul's ministry (2:7–8); and by providing essential information about Jesus's second coming.

We use it today to show how godly leaders can relate to followers and to inform us about our doctrine of eschatology (last things).

## 2 Thessalonians

### Background

Written in AD 50–51, about six months after 1 Thessalonians, from Corinth.

Second Thessalonians continues the themes introduced in 1 Thessalonians about continuing to grow in Christ and about Jesus's second coming.

The Thessalonian epistles are sometimes referred to as Paul's eschatology (doctrine of last things).

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:3–4 and discuss Paul’s attitude toward the Thessalonian believers.

### Key Passage

2 Thessalonians 2:16–17

- *Paul was comforting a persecuted church.*
- *Read and discuss this passage for insight into the situation in Thessalonica.*

### Main Idea

God’s faithfulness in the past encourages us to trust His faithfulness in the future.

### Outline

The book has three movements:

- *Chapter 1: Appreciation for their progress and encouragement to continue growing.*
- *Chapter 2: Explanation about Jesus’s return and encouragement to stand firm in the faith.*
- *Chapter 3: Exhortation to pray and encouragement to follow God’s teaching.*

Second Thessalonians contributes to the New Testament by providing essential teaching on the end of the age.

We use the book today to encourage aggressive pursuit of spiritual growth.

## I Timothy

### Background

Written by Paul to Timothy between AD 63 and 65 after Paul’s release from house arrest. Written from Philippi. Timothy was pastoring the church in Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3).

Ask a group member to read Acts 16:1–3 then, as a group, identify facts about Timothy.

In addition to the Acts passage, add that:

- *Timothy was one of Paul’s most faithful coworkers.*
- *He’s named as co-sender of six epistles (2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon).*
- *Paul gave Timothy high praise in Philippians 2:19–22.*

Read 1 Timothy 3:14–15 and discuss Paul’s purpose as stated there.

## Key Passage

1 Timothy 1:18–19

## Main Idea

Godly leaders must live godly lives.

## Outline

First Timothy is difficult to outline because Paul mixes personal and vocational matters and repeats and builds on his ideas throughout the book. But a rough outline is:

- *Chapter 1: Warnings about false teachers.*
- *Chapters 2–3: Instructions about life and ministry as a pastor/leader.*
- *Chapter 4: Additional instructions about false teachers.*
- *Chapters 5–6: Instructions about various personal and church matters.*

First Timothy contributes to the New Testament by giving insight into early church structure and leadership and into Paul’s mentoring ministry.

We use it today to teach about biblical qualities for leaders and instructions for ministry.

## 2 Timothy

### Background

Written from Paul to Timothy in AD 67. Paul had been arrested again and was back in prison, but this time he was in a dungeon waiting for his execution.

Read 2 Timothy 1:2–7 and discuss Paul and Timothy’s relationship.

Timothy seemed to struggle with insecurity that Paul referred to numerous times. For example:

- *Read 2 Timothy 1:7; 1:8; 2:15; 1 Timothy 4–12, and discuss what Paul’s statements indicate about Timothy.*
- *Then discuss the fact that Timothy was Paul’s highly effective and valued coworker, but seemed to lack self-confidence.*
- *Remind the group about Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” from 2 Corinthians 12 and discuss human frailty and God’s power to use us even with our limitations and struggles.*

Paul’s purposes in writing 2 Timothy were:

- *Paul missed Timothy and wanted to see him before his execution — see 2 Timothy 4:9, 21; see also 1:4.*
- *Paul wanted to encourage Timothy in ministry — see 2 Timothy 1:14; 3:14; 4:2.*

## Key Passage

Second Timothy 3:16–17 and 4:2 (the keys to Timothy’s ministry effectiveness)

## Main Idea

Be strong and faithful in the ministry God has given you.

## Outline

- *Chapter 1: Paul’s personal concern for Timothy.*
- *Chapter 2: Instructions about Timothy’s personal life as a leader.*
- *Chapter 3: Warnings and instructions about the last days.*
- *Chapter 4:1–8: Instructions about preaching God’s Word.*
- *Chapter 4:9–22: Personal matters and concluding remarks.*

Second Timothy contributes to the New Testament by providing insight into Paul’s final days and making a clear statement about the inspiration of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

We use 2 Timothy today to teach the authority of Scripture and stress its foundational role in ministry effectiveness.

# Titus

## Background

Written between AD 63 and 65 from Macedonia between Paul’s release from house arrest and his second imprisonment.

Titus was a Greek (Gentile). Paul’s address to him as his “true child in the faith” (1:4 NCV) indicates that Paul led him to Christ. Titus went with Paul and Barnabas to the Jerusalem Council as a demonstration that uncircumcised Gentiles were true believers (Galatians 2:1–3).

Titus is mentioned thirteen times in Paul’s letters and was a faithful and effective coworker.

He was trusted with the “tough” jobs:

- *He delivered Paul’s confrontational 2 Corinthians letter and dealt with some of the hard issues there before Paul arrived from Macedonia.*
- *He and Paul planted churches in Crete after Paul was released from his first imprisonment and Paul left Titus there to “set things in order” (Titus 1:5).*

Paul’s purpose in writing to Titus was to instruct and encourage Titus in his difficult ministry in Crete.

Ask someone to read Titus 2:12–13, and then discuss the churches in Crete.

### Key Passage

Titus 2:11–15. *Ask a group member to read the passage, and then discuss it.*

### Main Idea

Be faithful to God and His Word in conducting a godly ministry.

### Outline

- *Chapter 1: Instructions about elders and about false teachers.*
- *Chapter 2: How to minister to various groups in the church.*
- *Chapter 3: Encouragement and instruction about godly living.*

The book of Titus contributes to the New Testament by providing essential information about church leaders and leadership.

We use Titus today as a reminder that the hardships of ministry demand the highest of godly qualifications for church leaders.

## Philemon

### Background

Written from Paul to his friend Philemon in AD 60–61 while Paul was under house arrest in Rome. Philemon lived in Colossae and was a slave owner. Paul wrote Colossians and Philemon at about the same time and sent the letters to Colossae with Onesimus and Tychicus (Colossians 4:7–9).

Read Lesson 8 on the book of Philemon for background on Philemon, the man.

Read verses 1–2 and 7–9 and describe Paul and Philemon’s relationship.

### Key Passage

Verses 16–17. Ask a group member to read these verses, and then discuss Paul’s purpose for writing to Philemon.

### Main Idea

In Christ we are all equal.

## Outline

- *Verses 1–7: Greetings, thanksgiving, and prayer.*
- *Verses 8–21: Paul’s request for Onesimus and its explanation.*
- *Verses 22–25: Personal request and greetings.*

Philemon contributes to the New Testament by showing us what a powerful impact Christianity was making on first-century culture. (Only Christianity could suggest that a slave and his owner could relate as brothers!)

We use Philemon today to teach that as Christians we have no place for prejudice.

## Application

## Colossians

Read Paul’s prayer for the Colossians in 1:9–10 and discuss:

### Ideas for Discussion

- *What Paul asked God for (v. 9).*
- *Why Paul asked for that (v. 10).*
- *The prayer continues through verse 14 and you can discuss the full prayer, but if time is limited, the essence of his request is found in verse 9 and 10.*

## 1 Thessalonians

Illustrate how we can use good Bible study methods to reveal biblical history. These passages help us trace Paul and Timothy’s ministry to the Thessalonian church:

- *Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17–20 to show how deeply Paul cared for the Thessalonian church.*
- *Read 1 Thessalonians 3:1–5. After leaving Thessalonica and going to Athens, Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to see how they were doing after Paul’s hasty departure.*
- *Read 1 Thessalonians 3:6–10. Paul then moved on to Corinth and Timothy arrived with a report from the church. That report is what prompted Paul to write 1 Thessalonians.*

This exercise gives additional understanding of Paul’s care for the churches, but is also an excellent illustration of what we can learn by reading our Bibles carefully. Encourage group members to take the Our Daily Bread Christian University course Bible Study Basics.

## 2 Thessalonians

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:1–3 and discuss the reasons Paul was grateful for and proud of the Thessalonian church.

## 1 Timothy

Read Philippians 2:19–22 and discuss qualities that made Timothy an effective minister and leader.

- *Genuinely interested in others' welfare.*
- *Unlike others who were more concerned about themselves than about Christ.*
- *“No one else like him”—not a lot of these kinds of leaders around!*

## 2 Timothy

Read 2 Timothy 3:16 together as a group and discuss its meaning.

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Remind the group that Paul was encouraging Timothy to be bold in his ministry.*
- *Timothy's authority as a minister/leader was not in his own wisdom or strength.*
- *Scripture is God's inspired Word and therefore contains His authority.*
- *Scripture is profitable for four things:*
  - ◊ *Teaching — It tells us how God wants us to live.*
  - ◊ *Rebuking — It reveals where we are not living by God's teaching.*
  - ◊ *Correcting — It teaches how to respond to our errors and make them right.*
  - ◊ *Instructing in righteousness — It teaches how to move beyond “fixing errors” and aggressively grow as Christians.*
- *“So that...” God's people are equipped for good work.*

## Titus

In Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3 Paul wrote that church leaders need to be “above reproach” (Titus 1:6; 1 Timothy 3:2). Discuss:

- *What being “above reproach” means:*
  - ◊ *Literally, “without handles.” People are unable to make accusations against this kind of person “stick.” They have an unassailable reputation.*
- *Why is this so important for a church leader?*
- *How does someone achieve that qualification?*

## Philemon

Give group members a moment to consider any group or any individual they have a problem relating to for any reason. Ask the question:

- “What would Paul write if he wrote his ‘Philemon’ letter to address you and your ‘Onesimus?’”

## Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each lesson of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God’s Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group lesson could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone “sees” the same emphases, and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

## Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

### Introduce the Lesson

**Introduce the lesson** by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 9. “Lesson 9 provides an overview of Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, and Jude. These epistles instructed and encouraged the early church as it made its impact on the world of its day and instructs and encourages contemporary Christians as we influence our world today.”

*Ask if anyone has questions about the lesson or about preparation for the lesson.*

### Review the Lesson Objectives

**Review the Lesson Objectives** below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

*By the end of this study you should be able to*

1. Name each of the General Epistles.
2. Understand key themes in the General Epistles.
3. Apply important spiritual truths from each of the General Epistles.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled, or perhaps have changed.

*After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share their personal goal for the lesson in a sentence.*

# Background Studies

## Hebrews

### Background

We do not know who wrote Hebrews. The letter was written before AD 70 when the Romans destroyed the Jerusalem temple. The statement in 13:4, “those from Italy greet you,” indicates the writer’s location.

Ask a group member to read Hebrews 13:18–19, and then discuss what it says about the writer/reader relationship.

The recipients were a specific congregation of Christians (5:11–14; 6:10; 10:23–24). That they were Jewish is seen from its title “To the Hebrews,” and in references to “the fathers,” and to Hebrew characters and history (Abraham, Moses, Tabernacle, Aaron, the priesthood, the sacrificial system, Joshua—all the heroes of faith in chapter 11 were Israelites). These Christians were being persecuted—not only by the Romans, but by their fellow Jews (10:32–39; 12:4).

Hebrews’ purpose is similar to Galatians’ purpose. Like the Galatian Christians, these Hebrew Christians were struggling with returning to their previous way of life and the letter was written to persuade them that no belief or religion—even Judaism—was comparable to Christianity.

To discourage their abandonment of Christianity, the writer included five warnings.

You could divide your group into smaller groups and assign each a passage to read and report on what the warning is. Some are too long for a brief study, so the best ones to use for this exercise are:

- 2:1–4
- 3:12–15
- 5:11–14
- *The other two warning passages are 4:1–12 and 10:26–31.*
- *There is a sixth passage, 6:1–12, that has been a battleground for theologians over the years. You may mention it and explain that it is a controversial passage beyond the scope of a basic Bible course and could eat a lot of time and result in little benefit.*

### Key Passage

Hebrews 3:1. Read and discuss this command (“consider” is in the imperative mood). The Greek word translated *consider* means “to give very careful consideration to a matter”; “to think about

very carefully, to consider closely.”

## Main Idea

Christians should aggressively pursue Christ because He is superior to any other option for life.

- *The Greek words for “better” and “superior” occur fifteen times in Hebrews.*

## Outline

- *Verses 1:1–4:13: Jesus is superior in His Person.*
- *Verses 4:14–10:18: Jesus is superior in His work.*
- *Verses 10:19–13:25: Jesus is superior in the quality of life He offers.*

Hebrews contributes to the New Testament by providing essential information about Jesus’s nature and ministry.

We use it today to teach the importance of aggressively pursuing a personal relationship with Jesus.

# James

## Background

Written by James, one of Jesus’s brothers (Matthew 13:55), but James didn’t believe Jesus’s claim to be God (John 7:5) until after His resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:7). See Lesson 9 for more background on James. The epistle was probably written early—before the Jerusalem Council in AD 50. James most likely wrote from Jerusalem, where he was a respected elder in the church.

The opening address, “To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations” is a reference to Jewish people. But the letter was obviously written to Christians (2:1 and 5:7–8). When James wrote, the church was still almost exclusively Jewish. The reference to “scattering” may be related to Acts 8:1 and 11:19 when the church was scattered after Stephen’s martyrdom in Acts 7.

James wrote to encourage these “scattered” and displaced Christians to exercise their faith in God in their everyday activities.

## Key Passage

James 1:22. Ask someone to read James 1:22 and James 2:18, and then discuss how the two summarize James’s theme:

- *How we live out our “faith” is described in God’s Word (1:22). Scripture is our instructions and our guide to life and must be acted on.*
- *Anyone can say he has faith in God and believes in His Word, but James wanted more than verbal*

evidence.”

- ◇ *Read and discuss James 2:18 and discuss James’s challenge there.*
- ◇ *James says the verbal claim is only validated when we do what God tells us to do.*

## Main Idea

Faith that does not function in life is not real faith.

## Outline

James reads more like a lecture than an epistle. The book contains fifty-four imperatives as James encourages his readers to live what they claim to believe. Outlining the book is difficult, but he does give the reader five opportunities to test their faith’s validity:

- *Faith tested by Pressure — Do we apply faith when we struggle with difficulties?*
- *Faith tested by Discrimination — Do we apply faith when we evaluate people?*
- *Faith tested by Deficiencies — Do we apply faith to our dealing with inadequacies?*
- *Faith tested by Conflicts — Do we apply faith when relating to “difficult” people?*
- *Faith tested by discouragement — Do we apply faith when dealing with injustice?*

James contributes to the New Testament by showing us the “other” side of faith. Paul said that all we need is faith (Ephesians 2:8–9); James said faith without works is dead (2:14–26).

- *Discuss this seeming contradiction and then explain that:*
  - » *James’s “faith without works is dead” claim does not contradict Paul’s view (Ephesians 2:8-9) but expands it. Paul was writing about the role of faith in becoming a Christian and James was writing about the role of faith in being a Christian. We don’t merely exercise faith once in our life—when we accept Jesus as Savior. We exercise faith every day in living with Christ as our Lord.*

We use James today as a guide to applying what we believe to how we live.

# 1 Peter

## Background

Written by Peter, the apostle, from “Babylon” (probably a euphemism for Rome) in the early AD 60s to the church at large (see 1:1). (See Lesson 9 for details on the recipients.)

Peter was respected as an apostle, but he had more credentials than that:

- *He had preached a number of effective sermons, especially Acts 2:14–42.*
- *God had performed miracles through Peter (Acts 3; 5:12-16; 9:32–43).*
- *He had remained faithful when imprisoned (Acts 4; 12) and beaten (Acts 5).*

- *God used Peter to plant the first Gentile church (Acts 10–11).*

As a group, discuss what images you have in your minds about Peter: personality, looks, etc.

Peter's purpose is to instruct and encourage suffering Christians (5:12).

### Key Passage

1 Peter 1:1–2. *Ask someone to read 1:1–2 and 5:12 and 5:14, and then discuss the words repeated at the opening and closing of 1 Peter.*

- *Peter was telling these suffering Christians they could have “grace” and “peace” even though they were suffering because of their faith in Christ, and this letter explains how.*

### Main Idea

You can have God's grace and peace in full measure in the midst of your trials.

### Outline

- *Verses 1:1–2:12: How salvation changes our view of what matters most in life.*
- *Verses 2:13–3:12: The role of submission in our suffering.*
- *Verses 3:13–4:19: How Christians live with suffering.*
- *Verses 5:1–14: How shepherds minister to suffering saints.*

First Peter contributes to the New Testament by showing us how completely Christ shifts the focus of our worldview from current realities to eternal realities.

We use 1 Peter today to help Christians know how to cultivate grace and peace in our lives even in times of pain and suffering.

## 2 Peter

### Background

From the Peter, the apostle, to the church at large.

Ask a group member to read 1:1–2, and then discuss what mood Peter was setting for his readers in these verses.

Peter's purpose is to help his readers deal with the false teachers harassing the church. The false teachers and their heresies were moving into some church congregations, and Peter was warning them to beware of their influence.

- *Read 2 Peter 2:1–3 and 3:3–4 and discuss these teachers' strategy and its consequences.*

- Read 2 Peter 1:10-11; 3:1-2; 3:18 and discuss Peter's strategy for combating the false teaching.

## Key Passages

Verses 3:1–2 and 1:20–21. God has given us “Truth” we can depend on.

## Main Idea

The antidote to being deceived by error is aggressively pursuing God's truth.

## Outline

- *Chapter 1: We must vigorously pursue the trustworthy truth God has given us.*
- *Chapter 2: There are false teachers who will corrupt God's truth and teach dangerous error.*
- *Chapter 3: When Christ returns He will judge the false teachers and reward His faithful followers.*

Second Peter contributes to the New Testament by warning readers about false teachers and by providing teaching about Jesus's return.

We use 2 Peter today to help Christians grow in their faith, to guard against false teachings, and to prepare for Jesus's return.

## Jude

### Background

Jude, like James, was one of Jesus's siblings (Matthew 13:55). They both initially rejected Jesus's claim to be God's Son (John 7:5). We know little else about Jude.

Recipients were the church at large, both Jewish and Gentile Christians. Read verses 1–2 and discuss the greeting in light of the book's theme of warning about being misled by false teachers.

We have no data that helps give a specific date to the epistle's writing, but the similarity of its content with 2 Peter suggests that the two letters were written around the same time, around AD 65.

Jude clearly stated his purpose for writing in verse 3. Read the verse and discuss Jude's theme and its similarity to 2 Peter's.

### Key Passage and Main Idea

Verses 20–21. Read and discuss the role between the dangers of false teachers and Jude's advice in these verses.

The antidote to being deceived by false teachers is to actively live by the truth God has given us.

## Outline

- *Verses 1–3: Jude’s purpose for writing.*
- *Verses 4–16: Warnings about false teachers.*
- *Verses 17–25: Urgent exhortation to live by God’s truth.*

Jude contributes to the New Testament by warning against being casual about proper doctrine.

We use Jude today to encourage Christians to know and practice what Scripture teaches.

## Application

## Hebrews

Reference the Lesson transcript for an explanation of the particular problem the author had to deal with and how he addressed it in Hebrews 1:1–2.

### Ideas for Discussion

- *He validated the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) in verse 1, but introduced a further revelation from God in verse 2.*
- *Ask someone to read verses 2–5, and then discuss what the writer said about God’s second revelation.*
- *Discuss each of the attributes listed in verses 2–3.*
- *Discuss the two ministries presented in 3:*
  - ◊ *After He made purification for sins — crucifixion and resurrection (9:15),*
  - ◊ *He sat down at God’s right hand — His current priestly ministry (4:14–16).*

## James

Ask someone to read James 3:13–18, and then discuss the two kinds of wisdom.

- *Earthly wisdom is described in verses 13–16.*
- *Heavenly wisdom is described in verse 17.*
- *The “fruit” of heavenly wisdom is described in verse 18 and is the result of “peace” produced by the heavenly wisdom.*

## 1 Peter

Ask someone to read 1 Peter 2:1–2 (you can also discuss Hebrews 5:11–14). Then talk about what is happening to your group members as you are participating in this group study of New Testament Basics.

Also discuss why, given 1 Peter’s theme and context of cultivating grace and peace in the midst of suffering, this statement on spiritual growth is so important. When do we most need to be growing in our faith?

## 2 Peter

Discuss how 2 Peter 1:3–9 presents the God/human interaction required for spiritual health.

- *Verses 3–4 teach us that God has given us all we need for spiritual growth.*
- *Verses 5–7 teach us that we need to “make every effort” to pursue what God has given.*
- *Verses 8–9 teach us that we have the option to possess what God has provided—or not.*

## Jude

Read verses 24–25, which is a common benediction that we often hear quoted.

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Discuss its content in light of Jude’s (and 2 Peter’s) emphasis on the dangers of being deceived and led astray from God’s truth.*

## Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each lesson of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God’s Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone “sees” the same emphases, and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

## Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

*The Johannine Letters*

## Introduce the Lesson

**Introduce the lesson** by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 10. “Lesson 10 focuses on 1, 2, and 3 John and on the book of Revelation. These brief overviews provide instruction from Jesus’s “beloved disciple” on how to live today and how to be prepared for our Lord’s return.”

*Ask if anyone has questions about the lesson or about preparation for the lesson.*

## Review the Lesson Objectives

**Review the Lesson Objectives** below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

*By the end of this study you should be able to*

1. Explain the theme and content of each of John’s epistles.
2. Give an overview of the book of Revelation.
3. Apply spiritual truths from these inspired books.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled, or perhaps have changed.

*After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share their personal goal for the lesson in a sentence.*

## Introduction

*Open by introducing these books as letters from John, the “beloved disciple.”*

*Ask the group what they know about John that would give his original readers confidence when they read his letters. Some possible responses:*

- He was an apostle.
- Part of Jesus’s inner circle (along with Peter and James).
- The “beloved disciple” (13:23; 19:26; 20:2).
- Jesus asked John to take care of Mary, His mother (John 19:25–27).

- God performed miracles through him (Acts 3–4).
- He had remained faithful when he was arrested (Acts 4) and beaten (Acts 5).
- Was sent to confirm the legitimacy of the Samaritan church (Acts 8:14).
- As a disciple of John the Baptist, he was a deeply religious Jew when he came to Christ.

*Ask the group how they view John. What do they think he was like?*

- The goal here is to provide a brief description of John in Lesson 2, Point VI. D.

## Background Studies

### 1 John

#### Background

Written by the apostle John in the late AD 80s or early AD 90s from Ephesus. Written to believers (2:12–14; 3:1; 5:13) but not addressed to any specific place. Probably a circular letter to be copied and sent to a number of churches.

John stated three reasons for writing. Have someone read the following, and then discuss John's stated purpose found in each.

- *1:3 — John's desire to have fellowship with them and for them to have fellowship with God and with His Son, Jesus Christ.*
- *2:26 and 3:8-10 — To discuss the dangers of false teachers and their deception.*
- *5:13 — So that they may know they have eternal life and discuss why that matters.*
  - ◊ *That is the major theme of 1 John — false teachers were confusing the Christians and John was helping them confirm the validity of their relationship with Jesus.*

John was combating false teachers who were denying Jesus's claim that He was God and could offer eternal life to those who believed in Him.

- *Read and talk about 2:22 and 4:2–3 to see John's condemnation of the false teachers.*

#### Key Passage

*1 John 1:1–4. Read and discuss how this passage would contribute authority to John's message that Jesus is truly God's Son and we can be confident that His teaching is valid.*

#### Main Idea

Only Christians who live in fellowship with God can live with conviction.

## Outline

John is difficult to outline because he repeats and develops his two major themes. But generally, we can divide the book between his themes:

- *Chapters 1–2: Assurance that you may fellowship with us and with God (read 1:6–7 together).*
- *Chapters 3–5: Assurance that you have eternal life (read 4:9–10 together).*

First John contributes to the New Testament by showing us how thoroughly false teaching had permeated the church and how to combat it.

We use 1 John today to help believers understand the importance of actively pursuing the Christian lifestyle.

## 2 John

### Background

From “the elder.” Similarities of style with 1 John indicates that John, the apostle, wrote 2 John. The term *elder* could refer to a title as elder in the church at Ephesus, but more likely it is a reference to his age.

Written to, “the lady chosen by God and to her children, whom I love in the truth” (1:1 NIV), which is probably a church in Asia Minor. Dated around AD 85–95.

Ask a group member to read 1:1–3 and ask the group how they would define the relationship between the two words prominent in these verses.

- *Ask if someone would name what the two words are (love and truth).*
- *Give the group a few minutes to explore how they think the two words relate.*

In the early days of the church (first two centuries), traveling evangelists ministered from city to city preaching the gospel. Local church members would provide lodging and provisions for them. Some false teachers had begun spreading false teaching in the churches and 2 John was written to help the believers determine how to deal with these false teachers. *Ask the group what they would advise. Ask how balancing the two themes in 1:1–3 would influence their response.*

- *Read verses 9–11 and discuss what they say about the question.*
- *Read verses 5–6 and discuss how this teaching would balance the truth of verses 9–11.*
  - ◇ *We must address error and not ignore it. But we can do so in a spirit of love.*

## Key Passage

Verses 5–6.

## Main Idea

Truth and love are complementary (not complimentary) tenets of the Christian faith. We must use both to balance each other. Truth need not be “harsh”; love isn’t always “soft.”

## Outline

- *Verses 1–4: John commanded his readers to walk in truth.*
- *Verses 5–6: John commanded his readers to walk in love.*
- *Verses 7–11: John gave instructions about false teachers.*
- *Verses 12–13: Conclusion.*

Second John contributes to the New Testament by showing that truth and love can co-exist and balance each other.

We use it today to remind ourselves that we must be committed to both truth and love when dealing with false teaching and false teachers in the church.

# 3 John

## Background

From “the elder” — see information on 2 John. Written to Gaius, a faithful and beloved coworker who supported those who teach the truth.

## Key Passage

Verse 11.

## Main Idea

We must support faithful ministry and confront unfaithful ministry.

Third John contributes to the New Testament by providing a case study for the teaching about dealing with false teachers in 1 and 2 John.

We use 3 John today to teach that truth is worth fighting for but we can do so with a loving spirit.

## Outline

- *Verses 1–8: Commends Gaius for supporting those who teach the truth.*
- *Verses 9–11: Condemns Diotrefes for opposing evangelists who teach the truth.*
- *Verse 12: Recommends Demetrius, one of God’s faithful teachers.*
- *Verses 13–14: Tells Gaius that he plans to come and deal with the issues face-to-face.*

## Revelation

Teaching note – Explain that Revelation is a complicated book with various viewpoints on just about everything except how to spell its name. In a “Basics” course you will treat Revelation like the other New Testament books and only discuss a broad overview of its content. Ask the group to avoid trying to turn the session into a prophecy conference (or debate).

If some are interested in a more in-depth exploration of the book, they can take the Our Daily Bread Christian University course NT228 Revelation: The Book of Revelation — The End & The Beginning.

## Background

Present the following to the group:

- *Ask what exposure they have had to the book of Revelation.*
- *Ask if anyone has strong views on its interpretation. If so, suggest that they hold their views lightly because there are godly, Bible-believing New Testament scholars who take the Bible seriously as God’s inspired Scripture, but who disagree with each other on many issues in Revelation.*
- *Set a tone of exploration for the lesson and not one of confrontation. If a group member becomes adamant on a point, remind them that you just completed three of John’s letters where he focused on love — even when dealing with ideas we know are unorthodox. Most of the debate about Revelation is not over issues of orthodoxy. So let gentleness and kindness guide the discussion.*

Written by John the apostle (he named himself in 1:1, 4, 9 and 22:8) to seven churches in Asia Minor. It was probably a letter intended to be circulated to all the churches and not limited to these seven and was most likely written around AD 95.

Roman authorities were beginning to enforce emperor worship and Christians had to make a clear stand against the empire. As a result, persecution was increasing.

Read 2:10; 2:13; 3:10; 6:9 and discuss the various ways Christian were being persecuted. Ask your group how they think they would respond to such conditions.

The book’s purpose was to reveal God’s sovereignty as a basis of encouragement and strength for the persecuted church. Revelation teaches us that God has not lost control of His world and that in His time He will return and establish His reign.

## Key Passage and Main Idea

Revelation 4:11 and 5:11–14. Read these passages and emphasize that in spite of all the references to beasts and destruction in the middle section of the book (chapters 6–18) the book's theme is Jesus's victory over Satan and evil. Chapters 19–22 present details of Christ's return.

## Outline

The outline is presented in 1:19, where John was told to, "Write...

- *Chapter 1: The things you have seen (the vision of God).*
- *Chapters 2–3: What is now (the condition of the church in John's day).*
- *Chapters 4–22: What will take place later (the events described in chapters 4–22).*

Discuss the four views of the book's third movement. They are described in the lesson transcript and you may want to play that for the group, if possible, or read it. After each view open up to the group for discussion. Very briefly, the four views are:

- *Preterist — Limits the events to the first-century setting and claims that most of the events have already occurred.*
- *Historicist — Understands the events as descriptions of events from Patmos to the end of history.*
- *Futurist — Sees the events occurring in the end times.*
- *Idealist — Believes the chapters present symbolic pictures of the timeless truth that good will prevail over evil.*

Revelation's fundamental teachings are not dependent on any of these views, and can be appreciated by anyone who seeks its overall message and resists the temptation to figure out all of its details.

Because the imagery was primarily related to events and characters more obvious to the original readers, many of the book's details undoubtedly made more sense to them than to those of us who must depend on conjecture to interpret some of the imagery. Our concerns deal with the big picture of Jesus's return and His victory over Satan.

Revelation's contribution to the New Testament is that it helped the people of John's time gain a better understanding of how their difficult circumstances were under God's sovereign control and that they should not abandon their commitment to Christ.

We use Revelation today to teach Jesus's supreme rule over His creation and encourage believers to worship Him and eagerly look for His return.

# Application

## 1 John

John gave his readers seven ways to “check” the validity of their faith. Ask different group members to read the following passages and explain the “check” John gave us.

Introduce the exercise by asking if they ever wonder if their relationship with God is real or if they talk with other Christians who wonder. Ask what they use for evidence that their Christian faith is real when they doubt or attempt to help others who doubt.

To help us “know” our relationship with Jesus Christ is real, John gave us these seven “checks”:

- 1:6
- 1:8
- 1:10
- 2:4
- 2:6
- 2:9
- 4:20
- *Summary: 5:10–13*

## 2 John

John encourages us to carefully promote truth and guard against error.

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Discuss specific ways that following verse 6 would guide us in dealing with people who attempt to introduce false teaching in our church. How can we be “tough” and “tender” at the same time?*
- *Discuss how 2 John’s principles could help us deal with other important issues in our nation, communities, businesses, homes, schools, etc., where we deal with unethical behavior.*
- *Ask how Ephesians 4:29–32 helps us here.*

## 3 John

Discuss ways your group members can show appreciation for pastors, missionaries, and other Christian workers who are faithful to their ministry. Make a list of specific actions you can do this week.

## Revelation

The last two paragraphs of the transcript in Lesson 10 focus on the blessings for reading Revelation stated in 1:3 and 22:6–7. Read those passages and close the group session on a high note of praise and worship for the fact that God is on His throne and is going to triumph over evil. Revelation closes in 22:20–21 with Jesus’s promise and John’s response.

### Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each lesson of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God’s Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone “sees” the same emphases, and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

### Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.