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**Word to Life**’s are sermon-aligned study guides, created to help the church dive even deeper into the passages we study together on Sundays.

Each week there will be five studies to help you prepare for the upcoming weekend sermon. This will also be a great discussion tool at your next LifeGroup meeting.

We hope you enjoy and grow deeper in your faith!

**Week 13: Acts 4:32-37**

**Day 1: The Unity of One Heart**

**READ: Acts 4:32-37**

**EXPLORE:**

There is a tremendous amount of beauty and power that can be jammed into only one verse in the Bible. This is certainly the case with Acts 4:32. For the purpose of today’s Word to Life Study, we are going to slow down and take in the magnificence of church unity that is visible in this verse.

In the English Standard Version, the first portion of Acts 4:32 reads, “*Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul*.” This translation is a good and helpful interpretation of the Greek wording, but there is an even stronger statement of unity that is present within the original language. Instead of reading as, “*those who believed were of one heart and soul*,” the literal translation of the Greek is, “*for those who believed, the multitude’s heart and soul was one*.” The change is small, but it is significant, nonetheless.

In the literal translation of the original Greek, the idea is that one heart and soul was formed by the church in their witness to the world. Whether it was spiritual unity or material unity, the early church formed one heart and one soul as they spoke with boldness, served one another, and loved their neighbors. Similar to our current contexts, the ancient church represented different ages, cultures, conditions, and personalities. They were strangers and yet when they met Christ, they were brought together to form one heart. There is no escaping the fact that God-honoring unity is evidence of the Holy Spirit’s work in the church and its mission to the world.

At this point, we should collectively point out that God-given unity is not the same thing as man-made uniformity. Man-made uniformity exists out of an allegiance to behavior and culture rather than the Gospel. God-honoring unity is an essential and unwavering commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ primarily from which behavior and fruit of the Holy Spirit will naturally take root and grow.

The unbelieving world should be able to look at the church and marvel at the spiritual and material unity that is so plainly permeating their community. In the formation of one heart, the church ought to live as though the Gospel is true, behave as though people are made in the image of God, and serve as though the total victory of Christ is sure. With one heart and one soul, the unified and God-glorifying Church can reflect the goodness of God to a world in need.

**Big Idea:** Church unity is not the same as man-made conformity; it is the individual’s willingness to allow the Gospel of Jesus to form one heart in the community of faith.

**APPLY:**

* **Question**: Today’s study focused on how the multitude of believers became of one heart. With this in mind, can you foster church unity without losing the individual personhood? Why or why not?
* **Question:** What are some factors that stand in the way of church unity?
* **Question:** Do you agree or disagree with the idea that not all unity is a good thing?

**Week 13: Acts 4:32-37**

**Day 2: Luke’s View of Money**

**READ: *Assorted Passages Below***

**EXPLORE:**

In the introduction of the Word to Life Studies we discussed how the book of Acts is the latter half of a two-part volume written by Luke. Knowing that our author had coordinated both the Gospel of Luke and Acts as one continuing work, it can be beneficial to study how a certain topic is addressed in both Luke and Acts.

Today we are going to take a look at what Luke teaches about money throughout his Gospel account. Financial giving and material unity have been discussed previously, but today’s Word to Life Study is going to slow down and take an individual look at Luke’s instruction regarding money.

**APPLY:** Take time to read the passages below and write down what is being taught about wealth. After reading the biblical texts, answer the summarizing questions included below.

* **Read:** Luke 12:13-21
* **Read:** Luke 12:22-34
* **Read:** Luke 16:19-31
* **Read:** Luke 18:18-34
* **Read:** Luke 19:1-10
* **Summarizing Question:** What are some themes that you uncovered as you were reading the texts above?
* **Summarizing Question:** How could Luke’s writings and teachings in his gospel account help you to better understand Acts 4:32-37?

**Week 13: Acts 4:32-37**

**Day 3: Honoring God in Your Finances**

**READ: 2 Corinthians 8-9 and Acts 4:32-35**

**EXPLORE:**

In yesterday’s study we had the opportunity to take a brief look into how the Gospel of Luke addresses finances. In order to understand the Jesus community that is being created in our study of Acts, it is helpful to study what Christ explained and exemplified. If we desire to have a well-rounded approach to honoring God with our finances, we would do well to establish a few biblical principles that are made visible in the Scriptures.

First, Jesus consistently encouraged and challenged his followers to have freedom in finances. The idea of having freedom in finances is expressed in a few different ways. Namely, Jesus never spoke out in favor of debt. The Scriptures do not present debt in a positive light. Additionally, Jesus does not encourage saving in such a way that those who have need are left unserved. Jesus had a consistent track record of fiercely attacking greed. The early church followed the example of their Messiah by radically giving to the church and furthermore to those in need. In summary, the idea of God-honoring freedom in finances does not promote selfish hoarding of money and it certainly denounces debt.

Second, Jesus consistently stressed the significance of stewardship. Whether his teaching was about time, relationships, opportunities, or finances, the notion of stewardship was often at the forefront of Jesus’ instruction. The biblical idea of stewardship is one of joyfully managing and skillfully supervising that which has been entrusted to you by God. When a Christ-follower recognizes that he or she has been entrusted to diligently work and faithfully cultivate that which God ultimately owns, stewardship can be incredibly impactful. Stewardship is not only useful every day, but it is integral for eternal influence. In our personal finances, we are given an opportunity to build up our “stewardship muscles” to honor God.

Finally, the early church continued the ministry of Christ when they continued the pattern of giving voluntarily, joyfully, and lavishly. The act of giving was designed by God as an act of worship. Simply, we give and live lives of generosity because we have been abundantly blessed by God in Christ. Often, giving can be tough and sacrificial. However, our patterns of giving should not be motivated from a place of obligatory compulsion, but God-exalting cheerfulness.

These principles and so many more appear not only in the life of Christ, but in the lifeblood of His Church. As we have been reading and studying through Acts, we ought to be challenged by the repetitive pattern of God-honoring giving to esteem God more deeply through our personal finances.

**Big Idea:** The early church modeled what Jesus taught when they (1) had freedom in their finances, (2) exercised good stewardship, (3) and cheerfully gave to those who had need.

**APPLY:**

* **Question**: Finances can often be one of the trickier topics to address in church life. Why do you think this topic is so complex?
* **Question**: Which of the three principles in today’s Word to Life study do you find to be the most challenging? Why do you think that is?
* **Activity:** If you have not done so already, take time to read 2 Corinthians 8-9 and write down some additional principles that you observe.

**Week 13: Acts 4:32-37**

**Day 4: Why Encouragement Matters**

**READ: Acts 9:20-40 and Acts 4:36-37**

**EXPLORE:**

In Acts 4:36 we are introduced to one of the subtly great and influential leaders in the development of the early church named Joseph. The biblical text makes it clear that this particular Joseph was affectionately known as Barnabas (*meaning son of encouragement*). As his name would suggest, Barnabas shows us what it looks like to be captivated by the Gospel and live a life that is encouraging to others. In today’s study, we will observe how Barnabas’s ministry of encouragement not only brought people into the church, but how it sustained people in the church.

Our introduction to Barnabas is not long, but it is very significant. This follows the typical style in Luke of briefly introducing us to a character only to explore their deeper significance in later chapters. For example, even though Barnabas’s generosity and encouragement are introduced in Acts 4, his lifestyle of relentless encouragement is detailed at greater length in Acts 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15. What is introduced in Acts 4 is interwoven into much of the narrative of Acts 9-15.

In the story of Paul’s conversion that is recorded in Acts 9, Barnabas models how encouragement can bring an outsider into the community of faith. Before Paul was included in the Christian community by Barnabas, he was denied fellowship in the Jerusalem church. Many people were terrified of Paul, formerly Saul, and rightfully so. Barnabas believed in Paul’s conversion. He trusted God’s work in the lives of the unlikely and, as a result, Barnabas encouraged others in the first century church to receive their new brother.

In Acts 15:1-35 there was a debate about allowing Gentiles into the church as equal members with the Jews. Barnabas, alongside Paul, stood up for the Gentile believers and helped them to have equal access and status within the church. The example of Barnabas should remind us that bold encouragement is a powerful tool used to bring people into the church. The church still needs sons and daughters of encouragement today that will make room for the outcast and the unincluded. How many people like Paul are unincluded because there was not a courageous encourager to stand in the gap and welcome them to the community of faith.

Barnabas’s life of encouragement did not only help people to get into the church; it helped to keep people in the church. For example, when Paul and Barnabas set out on their first missionary journey, John Mark had failed to serve well. As a result of his previous failure, Paul did not want to include John Mark in future travels. Despite his previous failures, Barnabas took John Mark along and encouraged him in the process. Much like John Mark, people in the church today still fail and grow discouraged in life and ministry. Many of these situations can be restored and reinvigorated through the careful and diligent ministry of encouragement.

The church needs the ministry of evangelists, elders, deacons, teachers and many more. These are all important and necessary, but perhaps what we often need most is the ministry of encouragement. The ministry of encouragement that is plainly visible in the life of Barnabas not only catches those who falter, but it calls home those who are lost.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Big Idea:** Christian encouragement welcomes and sustains people in the community of faith.

**APPLY:**

* **Question**: Think of a time in which you felt very encouraged. What was the occasion, relationship, and surrounding context that made that encouragement so powerful?
* **Question:** What is the difference between biblical encouragement and empty flattery? How can you make sure that your encouragement is God-honoring and not selfish in nature?
* **Optional Activity:** If you have the time, read Acts 15 and take notes about the actions of Barnabas. In Acts 15, what impression does Barnabas leave? How do his actions help us understand what true encouragement is like?

**Week 13: Acts 4:32-37**

**Day 5: Acts 4 and the Old Testament**

**READ: Joshua 13:33, Numbers 18:20-24, Deuteronomy 10:9, and Acts 4:36-37**

**EXPLORE:**

One of the objects of the Word to Life Studies is to explore some elements in a biblical text that could otherwise be omitted from a typical sermon. The goal is not to unearth the most obscure biblical conversation, but rather to provide intentional focus to a significant topic that may be unfortunately unaddressed in the weekend gathering. Today we will be diving into one of the underdeveloped elements of Acts 4 that might be overlooked and underappreciated.

Acts 4:36-37 presents the Levite, Barnabas, as a model member in the early church. He was not only an encourager of others, but a faithful and generous giver to the first-century church. The Scriptures explain that Barnabas sold a field that belonged to him and laid the proceeds at the apostles’ feet. This is a selfless act, but it does raise some questions. Namely, how was Barnabas able to sell property if he would have been forbidden from owning land as a Levite?

Levites were a tribe of priests that lived with many restrictions to keep and duties to perform. They were charged with taking care of God’s house and His people. As a result of this calling, they were called to not own land and take an inheritance. Whether it was in Joshua, Numbers, or Deuteronomy, the Old Testament often prescribed restrictions for the Levites which did not apply to the other tribes in ancient Israel. So, the question remains: How or why did Barnabas own land, when the Hebrew Scriptures would have forbidden it?

Here are a few helpful thoughts for handling this issue. First, there is good evidence that the restrictions detailed in the Old Testament had been abandoned by the time of Barnabas. For example, the prophet-priest named Jeremiah owned land during his ministry. Second, it is possible that Barnabas would have been a Levite by heritage and not in actual service. It is reasonable to think that Barnabas possessed Levitical lineage without being a practicing priest in the formal sense. Third, Deuteronomy 18:8 explains that Levites could have owned property from their fathers even as the tribe did not collectively receive an inheritance. Finally, regardless of whether or not Barnabas inappropriately owned land, he lived as a model of generosity and encouragement. In a sense, Barnabas was a model Levite.

Sometimes we can miss the proverbial forest for the trees. We can miss the purity and devotion of Barnabas’s ministry if we stop at a surface level question. The true calling of the Levites was toward a lifestyle of servant leadership and selfless giving. When Acts 4 introduces us to Barnabas, it is abundantly clear that he is a model servant who is sincerely generous. In the same way that the Levites were called to take care of God’s people and His house, Barnabas’s generosity served the fellowship of believers. His life represents a beautiful example of what it looks like to be a God-honoring, self-sacrificing Levite in the community of faith.

**Big Idea:** Barnabas represents the heart of true leadership that God desired originally for the Levites.

**APPLY:**

* **Question**: Some critics of the Bible will point to seeming inconsistencies or tensions as proof that the Scriptures are ridiculous or contradictory. Have you ever encountered this way of thinking in your life? How have you learned to think through those “contradictions” in your personal life and with others?
* **Activity:** Summarize in your own words how Barnabas is a model of what the Levitical priesthood was supposed to be in the Old Testament.

**Week 14: Acts 5:1-11**

**Day 1: Public Praise and Personal Piety**

**READ: Acts 5:1-11**

**EXPLORE:**

As we have seen from last week into our study of Acts 5:1-11 today, a lot can change in the span of only a few verses. Acts 4 concluded with the powerful example of Barnabas who sold land and gave completely and humbly to the church. Now, at the opening of Acts 5, we are meant to contrast the humble generosity of Barnabas with the prideful deception of Ananias and Saphira.

Similar to Barnabas, Ananias and Saphira sold property and gave to the community of faith. Unlike the God-honoring example in Acts 4, the mischievous couple chose to give with selfish reservation and willingly attempt to deceive the apostles. The sinful undercurrent of their actions was connected to their desire to be publicly praised without possessing true generosity.

Public admiration is a tricky thing. It is not, in and of itself, sinful or damaging. Nonetheless, public praise does open the door for tremendous good or immense evil. In the example of Ananias and Saphira, we see the dangers that can be found in the unrighteous desire to receive accolades without possessing true virtue. The biblical text makes it abundantly clear that although Ananias was the one who initially desired to keep back some of the funds, Saphira was in agreement with his actions.

At first glance, their actions may not seem especially heinous or deserving of divine judgment. After all, they gave to the church! To this end, we desperately need to notice the full weight of what they chose to do in Acts 5:1-11. When the biblical text tells us that they “kept back” some of the funds, the Greek wording that is used is directly tied to the notion of embezzlement. In Titus 2:10, the same word is used and it is translated plainly as stealing. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament[[2]](#footnote-2), this same word is used to describe Achan’s defiance of God in his coveting and stealing of treasure.[[3]](#footnote-3) Their crime was not an innocent mistake, but a purposeful and tactful deception against the people of God.

In the example of Ananias and Saphira, we should be reminded of the powerful contrast presented in the actions of Barnabas. It is a dangerous thing to desire public praise without personal piety. As we continue to study this week, we ought to heed the warning and take caution.

**Big Idea:** It is a dangerous thing to desire public praise without personal piety.

**APPLY:**

* **Question**: The actions of Ananias and Saphira were motivated by a desire to be praised by others. Do you think that the desire to be praised and honored by others is good or bad? Take time to think through and explore your answer.
* **Question:** Acts 5:1-11 is an intense story for us to process through and study together. As you read through this text initially today, what is your reaction to the deception and death that occurs in the lives of Ananias and Saphira?

**Week 14: Acts 5:1-11**

**Day 2: The Severity of Sin**

**READ: Psalm 51**

**EXPLORE:**

God hates sin. It is the opposite of His good design for our lives. Even when our sin seems to be directed toward another human, the Bible is abundantly clear that our sin is against God. It grieves the heart of God. Sin often harms another individual, but it is always against God. Acts 5:1-11 provides us with an opportunity to explore this truth in two different places.

First, when Peter encountered Ananias’s deceit, he sternly rebuked him saying, “You have lied not to man, but to God.” Although it seemed like the wrongdoing of Ananias was directed toward the church alone, Peter rightly connected his sin to deception before God. Second, when Peter later encountered Saphira, he said, “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord?” Their offense was not only levied against the people of that community, but the God who had created them.

Psalm 51 is written by David in which he confesses his sin and guilt before God. He had been caught and convicted not only of adultery, but also murder. In Psalm 51:4 David writes, “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.” Although he had sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah, he looked at his wrongdoing as a direct offense to God as well. Whether it is the example of Peter’s rebuke in Acts 5 or David’s confession in Psalm 51, the stark reality is that our sin is a deep offense against God.

Although sin’s effects in Acts 5 resulted in immediate death and judgment from God, we ought to be reminded that all sin rightly deserves death before a righteous and holy God. Deception leads to death, even if it is not immediate.

We need to notice Peter is not the one who makes them die. It is God who renders the judgment. The Scriptures are abundantly clear that God is the eternal, all-powerful, unrivaled judge of sin. However, we should never forget the beauty of the Gospel. Simply, God has made a way for sinful humanity to be saved through the sacrifice of Christ and the salvation that is offered by God’s grace through faith. Sin is severe, but God’s grace is greater still.

**Big Idea:** Our sin is not only an offense against others, but against a loving and holy God.

**APPLY:**

* **Question**: Do you often think about your sin as an offense against God and His good design? How would your perception of sin change if you began to look at sin this way?
* **Activity:** Take time to read the following passages and reflect in notetaking and prayer.

(Exodus 10:16; Joshua 7:20; Judges 10:10; Romans 3:23; Ephesians 4:24; Hebrews 2:7)

**Week 14: Acts 5:1-11**

**Day 3: The Power of a Question**

**READ: Acts 5:1-11**

**EXPLORE:**

Questions can hold tremendous power. They can cultivate connection between people, inspire new ideas, and uncover basic assumptions. Questions can have the ability to stop us in our tracks and make us pause and contemplate. They can encourage us to take action and even expose our motivations. When used properly, questions can encourage the Christ-follower and challenge the skeptic.

In his confrontation with both Ananias and Saphira, Peter asks questions. He provides them with opportunities to confess their wrongdoing. In his questions, there is space for them to think, experience conviction and repent of their wrongdoing. Peter purposefully asked questions that exposed and unraveled their sin to its core.

When he was communicating with Ananias, Peter asked questions that were directly convicting and condemning in light of his deception. When he questioned Saphira only a few hours later, Peter asked her questions to provide her with the opportunity to confess her deceit before God. Tragically, she failed to answer Peter’s question by not acknowledging and admitting her own sin.

At this point, it is important for us to remember that Peter was rather well-acquainted with being asked powerful questions. When Peter was asked tough questions about his connection to Christ before the crucifixion, he vehemently denied Jesus. On the other hand, when Peter was asked about the identity of Christ, he responded rightly! Peter was not just a question asker, but also one who had been on the opposite end of profound questioning. As a disciple of Christ, Peter lived everyday life with the greatest question asker in history.

In the Gospels alone, Jesus asked more than 300 questions. He knew the power of an effective question. As we can see in the Gospels, in Acts, and in life today, questions can be an excellent tool for both conviction and encouragement.

**Big Idea:** Good and powerful questions can encourage, challenge, and convict.

**APPLY:**

* **Question**: When is a time when a powerful question really challenged you in one way or another? What was it about that question that made it powerful?
* **Question:** In your opinion, what is the key to asking a good question?
* **Question:** James 2:14-28 is filled with good questions. Spend some time reading through this passage and notice the role of God-honoring questions in bringing about both conviction and encouragement.

**Week 14: Acts 5:1-11**

**Day 4: God’s Judgment and His Compassion**

**READ: Exodus 34:6-7**

**EXPLORE:**

There is no denying the intensity and tragic nature of Acts 5:1-11. After lying about their giving to the community of believers, Ananias and Saphira both fall dead. This passage, and others like it, could leave us to question why God is so violent and angry. We might ask, “Couldn’t God have rebuked them in a different way without having both of their lives come to a sudden, ominous end?”

When we read this biblical text, we may tend to wonder why God did not give them more chances to repent. Acts 5:1-11 can make us nervous and even fearful before a powerful and holy God. When we honestly look at the example of Ananias and Saphira, it is not that hard to see our own reflection in their life story. We are deceitful.; we wrestle with pride, and yet we still have breath in our lungs and time to live. How is it that God could bring such immediate judgment upon this couple and yet spare us? How is it that we are spared so often, despite our brokenness?

It is precisely within stories like these that we ought to be reminded of exactly how gracious God has been to us each and every day. Exodus 34:6-7 says this, "*The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation*.’”

The profound truth that is visible in Exodus and throughout all of Scripture is that God is compassionate, holy, and powerful at the same time. Because of his great compassion, the everyday sinner can experience God’s love. Because of his holiness and power, he will bring about the judgment and destruction of evil. It would not be loving or compassionate for God to leave evil unpunished.

The same God who is present and active in the Old Testament is working in the New Testament. The truth is that although sin has severe and certain consequences, God has made a way for those who repent of sin and receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior to be saved. Acts 5:1-11 should remind us of the severity of sin, but it should also lead us to marvel at the God who graciously provides us with another chance and another day to experience His grace. His grace is active despite of our brokenness.

**Big Idea:** God is a merciful, compassionate, and just judge. This should lead us to reverence and overflowing worship.

**APPLY:**

* **Question**: When you consider Acts 5:1-11, does it seem like God’s judgment is too harsh? Why or why not? If you considered how similar we often are to Ananias and Saphira, how would that impact your reading of the story?
* **Question:** Exodus 34:6-7 has a specific time and context in which it was written. Take a moment to uncover the setting and situation of Exodus 34. What was taking place? Who is taking part in the discussion in these verses? How might the setting add weight or meaning to your initial reading of Exodus 34:6-7?

**Week 14: Acts 5:1-11**

**Day 5: The Trinity in Acts**

**READ: Optional Resources**

**EXPLORE:**

The idea of the trinity could rightly be described as one being or essence (that is God) in which there are three distinct but co-equal divine persons who are the father, the son, and the Holy Spirit. Even though you will not find the formal word “Trinity” written within your Bible, it is a theological term that has been formed to describe the truths that are visible about God throughout the Scriptures. From the Old Testament to the New Testament, there is a consistent assertion of one God in three distinct, co-equal and divine persons.

We cannot begin to scratch the surface of all these references in one Word to Life study, but we can talk specifically about the trinitarian significance of the Holy Spirit in Acts 5:1-11.[[4]](#footnote-4) In the second day of this week’s study we discussed how the sin of Ananias and Saphira was not only against others, but ultimately against God. In his string of interrogating questions, Peter accused Ananias of being moved by Satan to lie against the Holy Spirit. Even though God had been lavishly pouring out the Holy Spirit upon the early church, Ananias and Saphira had grieved the heart of God by lying to the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, when Peter continued his rebuke of Ananias he said, “*You have not lied to man, but to God*.”

Peter is asserting in Acts 5:3-4 that the Holy Spirit is God in the same way that Christ and the Father are God. It is subtle, but significant, nonetheless. Attempting to deceive the Holy Spirit is synonymous with attempting to lie to God. The divinity of the Holy Spirit does not devalue the divinity of Jesus or the Father; rather, the Holy Spirit is a co-equal divine person within the one being that is God. I know that this presents a lot for us to think through, but this is the reality of our God who has made Himself known throughout human history.

Out of the immense and immeasurable love of the trinity, creation occurred. From the perfect holiness and compassion of the trinity, redemption has been offered to us. In the perfect communion and power of the trinity, God will bring about the restoration of all things. Acts 5 serves as another reminder of the significance of the Holy Spirit; it should encourage us as believers to live and worship empowered by the third part of the trinity that is moving within and amongst us.

**Big Idea:** Acts 5:1-11 joins the rest of Scripture in proclaiming that the Holy Spirit is God.

**APPLY:**

* **Activity**: Watch the 5-minute video “*Is the Trinity Biblical?*” by Jonathan McLatchie. You can find this video easily by searching through an internet browser
* **Additional Resources:** Below are some suggested resources for your continued study of the trinity.
  + **Book:** *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything (*Fred Sanders)
  + **Book:** *Forgotten God: Reversing our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit* (Francis Chan)
  + **Article:** *Five Reasons the Trinity Matters So Much* (The Gospel Coalition- Kaitlin Miller)
  + **Video:** “*Can the Trinity be defended philosophically?*” (Jonathan McLatchie)

**Week 15: Acts 5:12-16**

**Day 1: The Power to Profess Christ**

**READ: Acts 5:12-16**

**EXPLORE:**

The discussion of signs and wonders is one that has long existed within the Church, often bringing both confusion and division. The question of whether the existence of signs and wonders is worth taking some time to explore. Acts 5:12-16 gives us a lot to think about in this regard. Simply stated, the Holy Spirit continues to work through the Church today using signs and wonders. However, there are some important things to understand about this continued work of the Holy Spirit.

**The Holy Spirit worked in a special way through the apostles.** The Apostles were given a special empowering of the Spirit to do signs and wonders. In the Old Testament we have the opportunity to witness sporadic and special wonders throughout thousands of years. When Jesus came, He brought with Him an explosion of signs and wonders that were used to validate what His identity and authority (John 10:38). After the ascension of Christ, the disciples were consistently given signs and wonders as a validation of their God-given authority in continuing to lay the foundation of the early church.

**Throughout Scripture, signs and wonders are, without fail, connected to sermons and the Word.** Whether it was in the ministry of Christ or the service of the apostles, Scripture consistently connects the miraculous with a message. The wonders arrive with the Word. These signs and wonders were not intended to be an *end* in and of themselves, but a *means* to an *end*. Like all good signs, the miraculous moves of God consistently point to the greater reality of God Himself. Today, we should always be concerned if the signs and wonders we are witnessing are not accompanied with the true Gospel of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit still powerfully works as He determines what is best for the spread of the Gospel and the building up of the Church. It is not surprising that we see an increase of signs, wonders, visions, and dreams in places where God’s people are under great persecution and lacking access to God’s Word. We see then that the Spirit works in different ways and in different places according to the will of God in bringing about God’s redemptive plan.

**Big Idea:** The Holy Spirit does still move in power today, but the apostles were given a special empowering to build the foundation of the Church.

**APPLY:**

* **Question**: People tend to lean in one of two directions: either they are expecting miracles from the Spirit all the time, or they don’t expect many miracles at all. Which way do you lean and why?
* **Question:** In your own words, how did signs and wonders empower the early disciples in their ability to profess Christ? How did signs and wonders equip the onlookers to receive the work of God in the Gospel?

**Week 15: Acts 5:12-16**

**Day 2: Gospel Advancement Beyond Boundaries**

**READ: Mark 5:21-43**

**EXPLORE:**

Have you ever experienced something so incredible that words seemed to fail to do it justice? Try as we might, there are some moments in life that are so awe-inspiring that words can only give us a slight glimpse into the incredible. In recounting the movement of the Holy Spirit in the early church, Luke quite literally had his hands full trying to describe tongue-like fire, breath-taking sermons, and now the continuously miraculous growth in and amongst the community of faith.

In Acts 5:14 we are told that more believers than ever before were added—both men and women. As we read through overarching summaries like this, we must be careful not to miss the underlying significance of these few words. Namely, we need to notice that the author, Luke, goes out of his way to remind us that the massive increase in the early church crossed boundaries of gender, socio-economic status, language, and culture.

Think of all of the incredible women who are interwoven into the expansion of the Gospel in the story of Acts. Here, we encounter Mary (the mother of Jesus), Tabitha, Mary (the mother of John Mark), Rhoda, Lydia, Damaris, and Priscilla. Impressive as that list is, it does not begin to scratch the surface of the ways in which God empowered and equipped women in the building up of His Church. Skeptics of the biblical text often claim that the Scriptures have a low regard for women, but this represents a shallow view of the Bible and an ignorance of its surrounding historical climate.

It makes sense that the early church expanded in men and women; because the ministry of Jesus Himself was directed toward both men and women. Mark 5:21-43 is one of many reminders of the ways in which Jesus radically served and ministered to the marginalized. Beyond all barriers, the Gospel is an invitation to encounter the redemptive work of Christ, belong to (or become part of) the community of faith, and be changed by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

**Big Idea:** The Gospel advances beyond barriers through the work of the Holy Spirit and the accomplished work of Jesus Christ.

**APPLY:**

* **Question**: *Inclusivity* is a major buzz word in today’s culture. What do you think is a biblical definition of inclusivity? In what ways is a biblical definition of inclusivity different from or similar to the contemporary concept of that term?
* **Activity:** Take time to read the background stories represented in the list of women provided from the book of Acts. What stands out to you from their stories?

**Week 15: Acts 5:12-16**

**Day 3: The Church Has Left the Building**

**READ: Acts 1:8 and Matthew 28**

**EXPLORE:**

As we continue in our study of Acts, it can be really helpful to cycle back into earlier texts in order to see how the church is progressing in accordance with the commands and promises of Christ. For example, in Acts 1 we can see Christ commanding the disciples to stay in Jerusalem until they are given the promised Holy Spirit. Additionally, they are told that once they have received the Holy Spirit, they will be tasked with powerfully testifying the work of Christ not only in Jerusalem, but also in Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

We studied this expansion of the Gospel in Week 2 of the Word to Life Studies, but now, in Acts 5, we are able to see a part of this commissioning play out in the early church. In Acts 5:16 we read, “*The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed*.”

The miracles made possible through the power of Jesus expanded beyond Jerusalem and into the surrounding areas. This part in the church’s development was a partial fulfillment of what Jesus had promised in Acts 1:8. We could summarize it simply. Instead of the disciples immediately going into all of the world, all of the world had immediately come to them. This was not necessarily bad or indicative of a lackluster desire to share about Jesus. Nonetheless, there was still more work and more expansion that needed to take place in order to fulfill all that Jesus had commanded.

For us today, it is really important for us to pay attention to passages like this and the tensions therein. The reality is that sometimes people who are far away from God come to the community of faith in a search of healing, truth, and redemption. If we consider the command of Christ is Acts 1:8, we ought to be challenged at this point. The commission from Christ was not to brin the far reaches of the earth physically to the church, but to send the body of believers out into the world.

Being mission-minded is not an optional dimension of Christian spirituality; it is a core commitment. Even though the disciples were commanded to witness worldwide, it took the persecution that we will see begin in Acts 8:1 to move the church into that great calling.

Let’s be a people who hear and obey the call of God to share the goodness of Jesus with the whole world!

**Big Idea:** Sometimes the world comes to the church, but God’s call in Acts is to primarily send the church into the world.

**APPLY:**

* **Question**: Consider the fact that the early church did not move outside Jerusalem until they were forced to because they were being persecuted. In your opinion, does that mean the disciples failed to live out the commission they received from Christ in Acts 1:8? Why or why not?
* **Activity:** Pray that God would burden your heart for global missions. Take some time to pray through and write about how you might be resisting the call to share the Gospel with those around you. Ask your LifeGroup to hold you accountable in what you write down.

**Week 15: Acts 5:12-16**

**Day 4: Battling Against Fear**

**READ: Acts 5:12-16, John 15:18-19, and Revelation 3:14-22**

**EXPLORE:**

Acts 5:13 reads, “*None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem*.” This verse begs the question, “Why would others not want to join them?” Were they afraid of the power that was on display? Was there a sense of residual fear because of what happened to Ananias and Saphira? Possibly, they were afraid because their connection to Christ could result in imprisonment. Although the text does not explicitly tell us why they were afraid, it does make us aware of the presence of fear and the ways it can affect us. Fear can often paralyze us and prevent us from joining in the work of Christ.

In John 15:18-19, Jesus tells us, *“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.****19****If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”* Fear is something that every Christian will have to work through as they follow Jesus and join Him on mission. We are called to be bold and live courageously for the sake of the Gospel.

It has been said that courage is not the absence of fear; it is the faith to act in spite of it. Following Jesus will come with a great deal of tension and opposition. This tension is visible in those who observed the signs and yet chose to not join the movement of Christ. Even though the onlookers viewed the followers with high esteem, they did not want to join them. We need to note they allowed their fear was allowed to paralyze them into a tragic decision.

In much the same way, we need to recognize there is a spiritual battle going on all around us today. Life will present us with plenty of opportunities to experience fear-induced paralysis. As we stand for and speak on behalf of truth, we will most likely face opposition from those around us and from the culture within which we live. Some may seek to discourage, discredit, and even destroy us. Be reminded the example presented in Scripture is one of standing steadfast in the strength of the Lord made possible through the Holy Spirit.

It is only by God’s grace and His strength living in us that we can stand firm in the face of adversity. Revelation 3:21 says, “*The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne*.” We have the God of all power on our side and a hope that awaits us for all eternity. What do we have to truly fear?

**Big Idea:** Allow faith to overcome your fear. Decide to live boldly for Jesus.

**APPLY:**

* **Question**: What are some fears that have paralyzed you from doing the right thing?
* **Question:** How can you work to overcome your fears with faith?

**Week 15: Acts 5:12-16**

**Day 5: Everyday Togetherness**

**READ: Acts 2:42-47, 4:24-31, and 5:12-16**

**EXPLORE:**

As we continue to study Acts 5:12-16, it would be helpful to look at this passage alongside Acts 2:42-47 and 4:24-31. Take a moment now to look over these Scriptures, and jot down the similarities you see and any thoughts you may have about them.

You may have noticed several similarities and made many connections between the passages. You may have noticed the phrases, “all with one accord” or “had all things in common”. You may have also noticed common words such as, “signs and wonders,” hands, praise, healing, boldness, and fear. Lastly, you may have noticed that the Lord added daily to those who were being saved.

Why are all these things important? Throughout these passages it is clear that the spirit-filled church is unified (5:12), admired (5:13), and multiplied (5:14). The enemy desires to divide, disgrace, and decrease the church, and he will do it, if we do not pay close attention.

The enemy seeks to weaken the testimony of the Church. This attack aims not only at an individual, but also toward the Church as a whole. Do not lose heart! The wonderful truth is that the Lord is faithful to us as His Church. Through Christ, we are and will be completely triumphant over the enemy when we submit and surrender to Him.

As we continue our study of Acts in future weeks, we will see the believers continued in triumph together as they are empowered by the Holy Spirit. How did this take place? God used fellowship and community to preserve and add to His Church.

Intimate fellowship with the Lord and one another is integral to our growth, life, and Christian service. The Greek word that is translated “fellowship” is ‘*koinonia*”. It means more than just being together. It carries the idea and weight of having things in common, sharing with one another in deep close-knit participation.

When you found salvation in Christ through faith, you were forever added to the household of faith, and are now able to have *koinonia* communion with the Lord and with other believers. This is a deeply beautiful truth to which we belong.

**Big Idea:** God does not desire a believer to be alone, but rather to grow and serve in community.

**APPLY**:

* **Question**: How is *koinonia* (fellowship and community) evident in your day-to-day life?
* **Question**: Take time to read James 5:16. How might this passage work to further describe *koinonia*?
* **Activity**: Think of someone who doesn’t know the Lord. Pray that they would come to faith in Christ, and then be proactive toward them as the Lord directs.

**Week 16: Acts 5:17-42**

**Day 1: Prison Break**

**READ: Acts 5:17-42**

**EXPLORE:**

Few things in entertainment are as tense and terrifying as a prison escape in a movie or show. Obviously, there is danger inside the prison, but these stories of escape couple the intensity of captivity with the thrilling uncertainty of a life lived on the run. Escapes from prison are not just popular in media today, they were present in the life and ministry of the early church as well. The biblical text that we will be studying this week tells the story of the first of three miraculous prison escapes that take place in the book of Acts.

Acts 5:17-18 informs us that after the disciples healed and taught in Jesus’ name, the religious leaders became jealous and chose to detain the apostles in the public prison. Unsurprisingly, the miraculous God of healing was not delayed by a few bars and the Sadducees’ futile attempt to slow down the progress of the Christ-followers. This prison escape which is detailed in Acts 5:17-21 is deeply ironic and almost comical. Here are a few examples.

1. When the angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, the escape is astoundingly simple. There is no secretive lurking in the shadows. There is no elaborate plot. There is simply a one-verse summary of an angel opening the doors and instructing the apostles.
2. The apostles escaped, were gathered in the temple, and preaching before the religious council even noticed that they were missing. If this specific scene was portrayed in a movie, it could easily be more comedic than intense and gripping.
3. When the religious council questions the apostles in Acts 5:27-28, they fail to ask about how the prison escape took place. I don’t know about you, but that would be the first thing I would ask the escaped convicts. Instead, the council asked about why the disciples continued to refuse to their commands to stop preach. They wondered why the apostles continued to preach, but they appear seemingly disinterested in the fact that there was a miraculous prison break just hours before.
4. When they address the apostles’ preaching, they refuse to say the name “Jesus,” choosing rather to say, “this man.” Their continued unwillingness to say the name of the Christ is tragically ironic.

As we consider these ironic elements in Acts 5, we would do well to remember that God is not hindered by a few metal bars and earthly threats. Whether in the life of Peter in Acts 12 or the lives of Paul and Silas in Acts 16, God has a quite a reputation of liberating the captive to continue His mission. God is not limited by setbacks. Sometimes He works around them and other times He works in the midst of them.

When we are reminded of the miraculous escapes, we should also be reminded of the times in which God preserved His followers in prison. Many of the great works that comprise our New Testament exist because God is not only the provider of escapes, but the supplier of endurance. As we continue to study this passage throughout the week, be reminded that God can give deliverance, but He can also equip you for durability.

**Big Idea:** God does not always provide an immediate escape, but He can always provide endurance.

**APPLY:**

* **Activity**: In your own words, briefly summarize the order of events in Acts 5:17-26
* **Questions:** Sometimes God provides an escape and on other occasions He calls for endurance. Why do you think that God chooses one or the other? How have you experienced the tension between endurance and escape in your life?
* **Question**: Are escape and endurance mutually exclusive callings for the believer? Why or why not?

**Week 16: Acts 5:17-42**

**Day 2: Who is Gamaliel and why does it matter?**

**READ: Acts 5:27-42**

**EXPLORE:**

It often takes a powerful and dominant voice to silence the others. To break the chaos, clarify the confusion, and slice through the anger, an authoritative and respected voice is required. In the setting of Acts 5, the impressive voice and clarifying logic of Gamaliel thunders into the court of the religious council. The members on the Sanhedrin were ready to kill the early disciples until Gamaliel, a renowned teacher of the law, stood up and spoke in their defense.

Although we will spend a few Word to Life Studies this week unpacking parts of Gamaliel’s speech, we need to first discuss who he was and why it mattered.

Gamaliel was a famous pharisaic teacher and figure within first century Judaism. As Acts 5:33 informs us, Gamaliel was widely respected and revered in his cultural context. For this reason, the council understandably gave him space to not only give direction, but to provide sound reasoning. Although he is a well-recorded figure in ancient history, he is only featured in two places throughout the book of Acts. We are introduced to him primarily in Acts 5, but he is also discussed by the Paul in Acts 22.

After Paul converted to the Christian faith, he traveled the ancient world sharing about the crucified and resurrected Lord. In one specific moment in Acts 21:37-22:16, Paul was given the opportunity to proclaim the good news of Jesus on the temple steps in Jerusalem. In his temple sermon, Paul referenced his formal Jewish training by none other than Gamaliel himself.[[5]](#footnote-5) By referencing Gamaliel, Paul gave credibility to his education and to his common heritage with those around him. The reference to such a historically recognizable character like Gamaliel should increase our confidence in the truthfulness of Scripture. For Peter, John, Paul, and many in the first century, Gamaliel was a really big deal!

Even though the council had almost fully agreed to murder those in the early church, Gamaliel was able to change their plans and release the Christians.[[6]](#footnote-6) Gamaliel’s advice was an encouragement toward moderation, balance, and restraint. Gamaliel’s open-mindedness is admirable, but we should be challenged that a wait-and-see approach to the news about Jesus is dangerous.

Ultimately, God preserved the lives of those in His church through the powerful voice of Gamaliel. There is no limit to who God can use and how it is that He can use them for His glory. As we continue to read and study Gamaliel’s speech and the surrounding events, we should marvel at and be emboldened by the ways in which God continues to preserve His church.

**Big Idea:** The reference to Gamaliel adds historical credibility to the Scriptures and it demonstrates God’s unrivaled ability to preserve His church.

**APPLY:**

* **Question**: After reading Gamaliel’s speech to the council in Acts 5, what is your opinion of him? If you had to draw conclusions, what do you think Gamaliel personally believed about Jesus and His apostles?
* **Question:** Today’s Word to Life Study asserted that the reference to Gamaliel adds historical credibility to this story in Acts. How would the reference to Gamaliel add credibility to the biblical accounts?
* **Question**: Gamaliel possesses a wait-and-see response to the work of Christ and the movement of the early church. Is this a good thing? Why or why not?

**Week 16: Acts 5:17-42**

**Day 3: Time Will Tell**

**READ: Mark 13:3-6, Matthew 24:23-25, and Acts 5:33-39**

**EXPLORE:**

At some point in your life, you have probably heard the expression, “Time will tell.” You may have heard someone talking about an election cycle, a sports game, or a relationship and express the famous and well-known saying, “Time will tell.” In just three simple words, someone can express how a current feeling of confusion will soon be brought to clarity. In a sense, the expression, “Time will tell,” is an accurate summary of Gamaliel’s speech in Acts 5:33-39.

In response to the Sadducees’ anger over the claims about Christ, Gamaliel calms their violence by encouraging a more patient, temperate approach. He had good reason to say this. Throughout Jewish history, there had been many people who had claimed to be the promised Messiah for the people of Israel. Many had risen, started a movement, claimed to be a fulfillment of prophecy, only for their followers to fizzle out with the disappointment of another underachieving pseudo-Messiah.

Gamaliel’s logic was simple. He pointed to the false messiahs that had failed in the past to argue that only time would tell if the continuing movement of Jesus was indeed the real thing. The first false messiah that Gamaliel referenced was named Theudas. According to the Jewish historian, Josephus, Theudas died around AD 44 with a message of reconquering the Israelite promised land alongside a considerable following.

Some critical scholars have used the reference to Theudas in Acts 5:36 to question the reliability of the Bible. Simply, those who are critical of the Bible’s historicity question how Theudas could have been mentioned by Gamaliel if he had not yet died historically. One possible answer to this question is that there were two different people named Theudas who lived in the first century. Theudas was a popular name. As such, there is good reason to believe that the Theudas referenced by Josephus is different in personality and in message than the one who is alluded to by Gamaliel.

The second false messiah that is referenced by Gamaliel is named Judas of Galilee who was the leader of the zealots. One of the chief goals of the zealots was to restore political power to national Israel through force. Much like the pseudo-messiahs of the past, Judas’s following was only a blip in history and eventually disappeared to insignificance. There are a few big things that we need to notice as we conclude our thoughts on these false messiahs.

First, since sin entered the world, humanity has always been constructing and following false messiahs that fail to bring deliverance. Pseudo-messiahs did not end in the first century, they have just changed appearance throughout time. Second, Jesus warned about being led astray by false messiahs. In today’s reading of both Matthew and Mark we are given the opportunity to hear the impassioned call of the true Savior, Jesus as he encourages us to resist the false promises of counterfeit Christs. Third, Gamaliel’s advice was accurate. Namely, time has spoken to the truthfulness of the claims of Christ.

As followers of Christ, we play a pivotal role in testifying to the claims of Jesus. Throughout history, the work of Jesus has been proven again and again. Gamaliel was right. Time did indeed testify to the truthfulness of God’s work in Jesus.

**Big Ideas:** (1)Throughout history, people have not stopped developing and following false messiahs. (2) In history, time has testified to the uniqueness, sufficiency, and authority of Jesus alone as the true and eternal Messiah.

**APPLY:**

* **Question:** You may have to look it up, but what does the title messiah mean? How would you explain the term in your own words?
* **Question**: Today’s study asserted that people have not stopped creating and following false messiahs. Why do you think we continually get tricked by counterfeit christs?
* **Question**: What are examples of things that function as false messiahs today?

**Week 16: Acts 5:17-42**

**Day 4: The Unstoppable God**

**READ: Matthew 16:13-20 and Acts 5:33-42**

**EXPLORE:**

“*I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted*.”[[7]](#footnote-7) These words were spoken by none other than the faithful sufferer Job in the Old Testament book that bears his name. Even though Job had undergone tremendous, unthinkable hardship, he deeply believed in the persevering power and plan of God. This deep conviction that the work of God cannot be stopped is not only present in the life of Job, but also visible in the speech of Gamaliel in Acts 5.

In his attempt to calm down the religious elites, Gamaliel said, “*If it is of God then you will not be able to stop it*.” What is present in the speech of Gamaliel is true throughout the whole of Scripture. God is sovereign and in control. Despite persecution or hardship, if a movement is of God, it cannot be ultimately stopped. In a famous conversation with his disciples in Matthew 16, Jesus asks His disciples about His true identity. After a brief back-and-forth conversation, they describe Jesus as the Christ and the Son of the living God. Based upon the truthfulness of their confession, Jesus proclaims that the gates of hell will not be able to stop the movement of God in and through His church![[8]](#footnote-8)

For the followers of Christ that we are studying in Acts, their confidence in God far outweighed their fear of others. Gamaliel expressed what the early Christians already were living. God will have His victory. It is unstoppable. The hymn writer, William Cowper, expressed this idea in his famous song entitled *God Moves in a Mysterious Way*.

*God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform  
He plants His footsteps in the sea  
And rides upon the storm  
Deep in His dark and hidden mines  
With never-failing skill  
He fashions all His bright designs  
And works His sovereign will[[9]](#footnote-9)*

Gamaliel’s caution was about the undeniable sureness of God’s plan and His ultimate victory. He even challenged the Sanhedrin to take caution in case they were wrong and opposing the work of God by persecuted the Jesus followers. The irony is this moment incredibly plain. It was clear they were opposing the work of God. Think about it. The disciples had miraculously escaped prison, were preaching with confidence and boldness, and performing many signs and wonders. God was at work and it was clearly unstoppable.

The example provided through Gamaliel’s advice should encourage us to be bold and confident in the plan and providence of God. Echoing the response of Job, we should rightly join the many voices in Scripture that proclaim God’s unrivaled might and His unstoppable plan!

**Big Idea:** Regardless of how things may seem, God’s providence is unstoppable and certain. We ought to live out hope, boldness, and humility based on that truth.

**APPLY:**

* **Question**: What are some obstacles that make it challenging to trust in God’s plan in your life?
* **Question:** How did the council respond to Gamaliel’s advice? What does their response reveal about their feelings toward the advice, the disciples, and ultimately God?
* **Activity:** Take a moment and reread Matthew 16:13-20 with today’s Word to Life Study in your mind. What are some things that you notice about the passage?

**Week 16: Acts 5:17-42**

**Day 5: Honorable Dishonor**

**READ: Luke 6:22 and Acts 5:41-42**

**EXPLORE:**

The conclusion to our study of Acts 5 comes to a close with the bloodied and beaten followers of Christ boldly continuing to preach the Gospel of Jesus in their homes and in public. It is such a graphic and powerful summarizing statement. We are even told that they rejoiced in that fact that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus. In today’s study, we will focus on the question, “What does it mean to be worthy to suffer dishonor?”

It is a good question and one which we should not quickly skip over. What does it mean for a person to be counted worthy of suffering for Jesus name? How can you rejoice at something that is seemingly undesirable, painful, and even shameful? With bloodied bodies and threatened lives, how were these followers of Christ so resilient and resolute in their hope?

To answer this question and others like it, we should start with the promises of Jesus for those who would believe on Him and live their lives for Him. Simply, to follow Christ entails a willingness to suffer for Him. In Luke 6, which includes the lesser-known sermon on the mount, Jesus promised that those who follow Him will face persecution, slander, and shame. The way of Jesus is not easy, but it is worth it. Moreover, Jesus repeatedly speaks blessings to those who are willing to boldly proclaim truth even through intense resistance and persecution.

When Jesus commissioned His followers into ministry he warned of persecution, but He promised His presence. We should not get our thoughts twisted. The early church was not desperately searching for new ways to become persecuted. They were not turning every corner eagerly looking for a Jesus-hater to punch them in the face. They were not desiring pain, but they were not afraid of it either.

The church has not always maintained such a balance. Some Christians throughout history actually became enthralled with the idea of being martyred for their faith. Some believers in these harsh eras believed that being killed in your faith resulted in a higher level of spirituality and increased favor with God. This is not biblical, and it is not what the disciples proclaimed as they held each other up exiting the council in Acts 5.

Followers of Christ are not called to be infatuated with physical adversity, but according to the promises of Christ and the whole counsel of God’s Word we should not be surprised by it either! Suffering often produces deep prayer, a purity of Christian witness, a realization of Christ’s closeness, a clarity of focus, and an important awareness of God-honoring community. Suffering does not always produce those things, but it does hold the potential to produce those things. When it is done humbly in the name of Christ, suffering can provide a tremendous opportunity for the Gospel to advance. We ought to join our brothers and sisters in the joyful reality of God’s eternal goodness despite earthly suffering.

**Big Idea:** For the believer, it is an honor to suffer dishonor for the name of Christ.

**APPLY:**

* **Activity**: Read 1 Peter 4:13, 1 Peter 2:18–21, and I Peter 3:8–17. Where might God be calling you outside of your comfort zone for the sake of Gospel ministry? Write down some realizations and commitments and ask your LifeGroup to hold you accountable.
* **Question:** The balance between desperately pursuing persecution and desperately running away from any form of persecution can be a challenge. How do you personally manage the tension between Godly caution and Godly courage?



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1. Hooks, S.M. (1996) Sermon Outlines for Growing Christians (S.E. Stone, Ed.) (pp. 41-42). Cincinnati, OH: Standard. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Greek version of the Old Testament is called the Septuagint. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Joshua 7:21 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. If you would like to go deeper and continue the conversation, you may want to study the resources. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Acts 22:3 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Acts 5:40 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Job 42:2 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. For the full conversation see the scheduled reading in Matthew 16:13-20 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Cowper, William, “*God Moves in a Mysterious Way*.” 1773. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)