

FOLLOWING JESUS
Making Disciples of Oral Learners

NEW BELIEVER DISCIPLESHIP TRACK
PERSIAN ORAL BIBLE PROJECT
Completed November 27, 2002

*******MODULE 3--LIVING IN THE FAMILY OF JESUS*******

- I. Intro: Making Disciples of Primary Oral Learners (Executive Package)
- II. Choosing to Follow Jesus
 - A. Preparing the Way to Follow Jesus (OT stories)
 - B. Answering the Call to Follow Jesus – (NT stories)

III. Living in the Family of Jesus

A. New Believers

B. Church-Planting Movements/Multiplying Churches

For future development:

- IV. Becoming Like Jesus
 - A. Nurturing Spiritual Children
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- V. Serving Like Jesus
 - A. Ministries of the Disciples' Cross
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 - A. Multiplying Spiritual Disciples
 - B. Equipping Spiritual Leaders
- VII. On Mission With God

Part One: NEW BELIEVERS

Welcome to the Persian Oral Bible and its Discipleship Track. The 65 stories in this series are based on “Following Jesus” Module 3 entitled, “Living in the Family of Jesus.” It is intended that the following discipleship story set immediately follow the Evangelism Track. The Discipleship Track must be used with Christian believers. If some of those in your group have not made a profession of faith, please take them back through an abbreviated form of the Evangelism Track (Following Jesus Module 2). Group participants who have completed the Evangelism Track with you and are hesitant or tentative about their decision, but still have a high interest in following Jesus as a disciple should continue into the discipleship module. Please evaluate the following stories for their appropriateness to local worldview issues. These are presented as a guide and should be tested carefully before used with groups of Persian believers.

A time of worship may be conducted from the start within your small group of believers. The following scripts do not mention worship until the New Testament stories beginning with the worship offerings of the Magi. Please feel free to begin prayer and worship with new believers prior to the story. The idea is that this storying group is becoming a church. It is a discovery process that will be infinitely reproducible over time as believers in this group take the gospel to other groups.

PK

No. 1 Intro Pt. 1—Confirming the Need for a Messiah--Adam/sin; Abraham/Covenant; Moses/Law -- Genesis 3:8-13; Genesis 12:1-3; Lev 4:16-21

STORY INTRODUCTION

You have accepted the invitation that has been extended to you to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. Welcome to the family of Jesus! As a Persian Christian with a Muslim background, you may have many questions about becoming a follower of Jesus. This series of Bible stories was developed with new believers in mind. The title for this series is, "Living in the Family of Jesus". The stories are based upon a wonderful discipleship series called "Following Jesus." First of all, let me say, discipleship is more than just telling Bible stories. It is not about learning a lot of disciplines, and it is not an academic study program. Discipleship is a relationship with Jesus Christ in which you follow Him. That's why we're calling this "Following Jesus." So what we're trying to communicate is that you follow Jesus in certain ways. In this series, I am going to be asking you to do the things that you're going to do as you follow Jesus. Other believers in our group of believers will be an accountability group. Together we will help each other to struggle with the issues of how to live as a Persian who is a believer. Everything we do will be based on Bible stories. God's truths for being disciples of Jesus will work out in our lives. Today's story is from three places in the Bible. Who remembers the story of Adam and Eve and their sin? Can anyone tell that story for our group? (*Review the story if nobody tells it.*) Who remembers the story of the covenant or promise that God made with Abraham and Sarah? Who can tell that story? (*Review the story if nobody tells it.*) Who can remember the story of Moses receiving the Law or Commands from God? Who can tell that story? (*Review the story if nobody tells it.*) Today's story is a composite of these three Bible stories. As you listen to it, see if you can determine why this story is important for new believers to understand. Listen for references to the way that God wants to have a relationship with us. How can we have a relationship with God? Here is our story, "Confirming the Coming of the Messiah."

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Jesus was the foretold Messiah.

Gap -- Review--Jesus as Savior is rejected

Intro Pt. 1—Confirming the Need for a Messiah--Adam/sin; Abraham/Covenant; Moses/Law
Genesis 3:8-13; Genesis 12:1-3; Lev 4:16-21

When God created the world and everything in it, He saw what He had made and it was good. God created men and women in His image and it was good. God made Adam and placed him in a special garden called Eden. He gave Adam a wife named Eve. Adam and Eve lived in the Garden as caretakers. They were instructed by God not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. A serpent who was crafty tempted Eve to eat of the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Eve shared the fruit with Adam. They suddenly became aware that they were naked and made clothes for themselves out of fig leaves. When the man and woman heard God walking toward them, they hid from His sight. The Lord called out, "Where are you?" Adam and Eve explained to God that they had eaten from the forbidden tree and God cast them out of the Garden. He punished the serpent with an important prophecy saying that the offspring of Eve's would crush his head. God gave Eve increased pain in childbearing and made Adam's work drudgery. Many generations passed and sin increased among the people. Several generations after the flood of Noah, an obedient man named Abram and Sarai obeyed God and left their home in Ur. God told them to leave their country, their people and their father's household and go to the land He would show them. He promised Abram that he would make his descendants into a great nation. He said that through Abram's offspring all peoples on the earth would be blessed. This covenant was reinforced through Isaac, Jacob and his twelve sons. One of those sons, named Joseph, was sold by his brothers into slavery in Egypt. What was meant for evil, God used to care for Jacob and Joseph's brothers. By the time a famine struck Canaan, Joseph was second in command in Egypt and gave his family shelter. The families lived in Egypt and grew until a Pharaoh, king of Egypt, rose up and enslaved Jacob's descendents. But God provided a deliverer. God sent Moses to demand that God's people be set free from bondage. When the people were freed following a series of miracles, God led the people to Mt. Sinai where

He gave His laws to Moses. God instructed Moses to erect a Tent of Meeting. An altar was constructed for sacrifices that would shed blood to take away sins. The priests and leaders were to have their sins taken away first. Then a bull was to be sacrificed. The blood was to be sprinkled on the altar before the Lord in the Tent of Meeting. The rest of the blood was to be poured out at the base of the altar where they burned the offering. The priest made the sacrifice to take away the sin of the community. And this is the story from God's Word.

POST-STORY DIALOG

Let's review three stories that tell how God deals with sin. In the story of Adam & Eve, what did God ask? What did God do to them after they disobeyed? Why do you think that God separated Himself from Adam & Eve? Does God want to have a relationship with us? What keeps us from enjoying a right relationship with God today? Why did God say that Eve's offspring would crush the head of the serpent? Is there an aspect of the Messiah in that prophecy? Now, let's consider the story of Abram and Sarai. After God promised that they would have a son, He changed their names from Abram to Abraham and from Sarai to Sarah. Why did God make this promise to Abraham? Why did God want to bless all the nations of the world? Do you think that God cares about every nation today? Did you notice that all the nations would be blessed through Abraham's offspring? What do you think that meant? Is there an aspect of the Messiah in that prophecy? Now, let's consider the last story segment. What system was put into place to help the whole community when they had sinned? What is special about the shedding of blood? What kind of cost do you think should be required for forgiving all of your sins? Did you note that the sin offering had to be made over and over again? Is there an aspect of the Messiah in that prophecy? Now, let's draw all three stories together. How did Jesus fulfill the prophecy of overcoming "the serpent" (or sin)? How did Jesus bless all nations as the offspring of Abraham? Why did Jesus shed His blood? Application: Find someone you can trust outside the group attending this session who is a believer in Jesus and tell them today's story. Invite them to participate in the Discipleship Track, "Living in the Family of Jesus." If they cannot attend the scheduled storying session, arrange a time to meet with them so that you can tell them a new Bible story between your regular story sessions. In our story for the next session, we will again visit the idea of Jesus being the perfect sin offering. Be sure to join us. We want to close with a memory Verse for Week 1 (for five sessions) -- 2 Timothy 3:16-17: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

CLOSING

No. 2 Intro Pt. 2--Accepting Jesus as Lord-Jesus/Son; Mediator Heb 7:23-8:7; 9:11-15

STORY INTRODUCTION

The story in our last session was a composite of three stories. Who can tell the composite story? How did Jesus relate to each of the three stories? Accountability: Did you have an opportunity to tell another trusted believer about yesterday's story? Have you arranged a time to tell him or her the stories that we will be telling? Are you having difficulty memorizing the stories? Should you speak them as poetry? Should you sing or chant them? What will help you learn these stories? Should we review them more frequently? Now, let's prepare for this story by thinking about the blood sacrifice required in the commands Moses received from God. Why did God demand that sins be forgiven and forgotten? As I tell today's story, identify one or two ways that you think Jesus made a perfect sin offering. Here is the story from God's Word. I call it "Jesus is Our Mediator."

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Jesus is the perfect sin offering; our mediator before the Father

Gap -- Review-Jesus as Savior is rejected

Intro Pt. 2--Accepting Jesus as Lord-Jesus/Son; Mediator

Heb 7:23-8:7; 9:11-15; 10:19-25

Since the time of Moses and his brother Aaron, who was the first high priest, there have been many such priests. They eventually had to stop their service because they died. One after the other, each priest served, but they died. However, Jesus lives forever. He is our high priest on a permanent basis. Jesus is able to save everyone who comes to God through Him now and forever. He is alive to intercede for them on a continuing basis. Jesus is the high priest to meet our need. He is holy! He is blameless! He is pure! He is set apart from sinners! He is greater than any high priest who has ever lived! Jesus does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He became a sacrifice by shedding His blood and dying on the cross once and for all. As our high priest, Jesus offered Himself as the perfect sin offering to cover our sins. Under the old covenant law, high priests were weak men. However, through the new covenant with Jesus, God appointed His Son who was made perfect and will always stay that way. Jesus is our high priest. He sits at the right hand of the throne of God's royal Majesty. Jesus serves as high priest in the true tabernacle set up by God and not something built on earth by man. The job of every high priest was to make sacrifices and give gifts, and Jesus provided a gift and sacrifice, too. On earth we have godly men who serve in tabernacles and churches, but that is just a poor imitation; merely a shadow of what Jesus does in a spectacular church in Heaven. Even Moses warned the people to be very careful to build a Tent of Meeting according to the pattern given to him at Mt. Sinai. However, earthly imitations fall far short of the glorious sanctuary where the Lord lives. As our high priest, Jesus is superior to that of any earthly priest or holy man because He is a superior mediator for our sins. His promises are better than the old ones. The old covenant had to pass away in order to provide for the new one that Jesus established. When Jesus as Messiah came to earth, He brought with Him the promises of a new covenant, which were delivered from the perfect sanctuary in Heaven. He entered the Holy of Holies, the Most Holy Place not by means of the blood of goats and calves. Jesus became our High Priest by His own blood sacrifice. The old covenant put sprinkled blood and ashes on the outside of a person to ceremonially cleanse them on the outside. However, the blood of Christ cleanses our consciences from sinful acts that lead to death. Christ, through the Holy Spirit's power, offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice to God so that we may serve the living God! That means that Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant relationship between God and us. Those who are called and accept the invitation to become a believer in Jesus Christ may receive eternal life. Jesus died as a ransom to set everyone free from the sins that they have committed. Let me conclude this way—We can be certain that we can enter the Most High Place by the blood of Jesus. That curtain to the holy place has been opened by both Jesus giving His body and with his becoming our great priest over the whole house of God. Therefore, let us draw close to God with our heart that is both full of faith and cleansed from a guilty conscience and having washed our bodies with pure water. Let us hold on without swerving from what we profess, for he who promised it is faithful. And let us consider

how we may spur one another on toward both love and good deeds. Finally, let us not give up meeting together as some do, but let us encourage one another because the Day of Jesus' return is approaching! And that is the story from God's Word.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Let's review this story from God's Word. Who is a high priest to a Christian? How did Jesus become the mediator between God and us? Does God need continual sacrifices after Jesus shed His blood? Who does God want us to put our faith in? Can you trust God? Think back over all the stories you have heard from God's Word. Does God ever lie? Does God hate sin? Does He always provide a way to help us have a way to become acceptable to Him? How does today's story relate to our stories of Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, and Moses and the Law? Will you trust Jesus to forgive you of your sins? If you have not yet done so, will you accept His gracious gift of eternal life today? Application: Will you find more than one believer who will meet with you to form another storying group? Share these stories that you learn here with those in your new group. Memory Verse for Week 1 -- 2 Timothy 3:16-17: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

CLOSING

No. 3 Intro Pt. 3--Having faith in Jesus Hebrews 11:1-40

Accepting Jesus as Lord-Jesus/Son; Mediator

STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can tell me the story of “Jesus is Our Mediator” from our last session? What does it mean to be a mediator? Why was it necessary for Jesus to become our high priest? Accountability: Were you able to tell our last story to another believer? Did you invite them to participate with our group? Or did you establish a time when the two (or more) of you can conduct your own storying sessions? Pre-story dialog: Now, who can tell me if salvation is based on works or on faith? What story have you heard where Jesus instructed us to have faith in Him and not try to earn eternal life by a series of good deeds? (John 6:22-69, story #39 in the Evangelism Track) Immediately following the Feeding of the 5,000, the people wanted to follow Jesus because of His miracles. However, Jesus told them, “For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:40) Our story today is a list of heroes from the Bible. It describes the faith that they had not only in God, but in the Messiah that He was to send. As you listen, see how you would define the word, “faith”. Here is the story, “Having Faith in Jesus.”

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Salvation is by faith in Jesus, not by our works.

Bridge -- New--Jesus was sinless / OT patriarchs known but skewed

Intro Pt. 3--Having faith in Jesus

Hebrews 11:1-40

This story needs to be developed. The entire chapter should be easily developed into a story.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Name one or two of these Bible characters. Why did you mention them? Who did these people of God look forward to coming as Savior? What was the repeated characteristic that helped them anticipate the coming of Jesus? How do you describe the concept of “faith”? If these great men and women of history anticipated Jesus on faith, could you accept Him upon faith? Application: Think back to all the Bible stories that you know. Choose one Bible story to tell in our next session where the Bible character exhibited great faith in God. Memory Verse for Week 1 -- 2 Timothy 3:16-17: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

CLOSING

No. 4 Intro Pt. 4--Calling Peter, James & John Luke 5:1-11

STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can tell the story from our last session about all of the men and women who were faithful? Accountability: Who can tell a Bible story about a person who showed great faith in God? (Each person tells the story.) What does the level of faith these characters had indicate about the relationship they had with God? Is a relationship with God important? Pre-story Dialog: Now we come to a very critical point of being a disciple. Jesus said if any man will come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. (Matthew 16:23) In doing this, I'd like for us to talk about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. I'm going to give you the definition right now, but we'll come back to it many times. See if you can memorize it. The definition of true Christian discipleship is this: "Following Jesus is a personal, lifelong, obedient relationship with Jesus Christ." That's the heart of the definition. "Following Jesus is a personal, ...lifelong, ...obedient relationship with Jesus Christ. If we follow Jesus, He does three things in our lives: He transforms my character into Christlikeness. He changes my values to Kingdom values, and He involves me in His mission in the home, and in the church, and in the world." Throughout the series of Bible stories, we will often come back and remind you of this important definition. I hope that it will help you appreciate your new life in Christ Jesus! Our Bible story today focuses on the way that the disciples of Jesus followed Him. What did it cost them to follow Jesus? Did they follow Jesus and other religious leaders or just Jesus? This story is a review of a story you have already heard, but this time, consider the story as a follower of Jesus. Keep the definition of discipleship in mind as I tell this Bible story, "Calling Peter, James and John."

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Jesus calls us to be His followers.

Bridge -- Review--Christians follow Jesus exclusively

Intro Pt. 4--Calling Peter, James & John

Luke 5:1-11

One day Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, and the people crowding around Him and listening to Him were really amazed by the word that He brought from God. Now, by the water's edge there were a lot of boats and two of them were owned by some fishermen who were washing their nets. He actually got into one of these boats that belonged to a man by the name of Simon, and He asked them to put out a little ways from the shore. Then Jesus sat down and He taught the people by sitting in the boat. And the people were there on the shore. And when He had finished, He said to Simon, "Put out into the deeper waters here and let your nets down into the water and see what you can catch." Now Simon looked at Jesus and said, "Now," he called him master, "Master, we've worked hard all night and we haven't caught anything, but because you say so, I'll let down the net." Now when Simon and his friends and the other fishermen there had done so, they caught such a huge number of fish that their nets actually began to break as they started pulling them into the boat. Well, they signaled for their partners to come on over to the boat where they were and to help them. And do you know what happened? They filled the boats so full that they actually began to sink. Now when Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and he actually was so amazed, he said, "Go away from me Lord. I am a sinful man." And when his fishing buddies that were there with him, his co-workers were there, they were absolutely amazed at all this amount of fish that were there. The men's names who had been helping him were James and John, who were known as the sons of Zebedee. And these were Simon's partners. And Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid, for from now on you will catch men." So they all pulled their boats up on the shore and they left everything and they followed Jesus. Now that was our story for today.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Who can tell this story to our group? What did Peter, James and John do when Jesus told them to follow Him? Why did Jesus say that they would become "fishers of men" or "catch men"?

When Peter, James and John left their fishing, do you think they understood the future very well?

Think about the faith that was required of people we have learned about--people like Abraham who moved to another country, Moses who trusted God to free the Hebrew slaves, Joseph was

sold into slavery and then made a king and those who followed Jesus and lived for Him. Notice that before following Jesus, Simon Peter confessed that he was just a lowly man; a sinner. Do you feel too unworthy to follow Jesus? So did Peter! However, Jesus urged him to follow Jesus. Did Peter do any kind of works or did he follow Jesus just based on his faith at the time? What message is there for all Christians? Now that you have heard stories about Peter's years with Jesus and how he became a leader in the church in Jerusalem, did Peter do what Jesus asked? What about John and James? Did they remain faithful to Jesus to guide their lives? Do you remember that it was John who was present with Jesus during the trial and crucifixion? James was later beheaded for being a follower of Jesus. What does this story mean to you as a Christian? Should you follow Jesus' example of calling others to follow Him? Do you tell God's stories regularly as a way to share your faith? In this story, notice that Jesus did more than just tell about God and His coming Kingdom. What is the extra thing that he did that led to calling Peter, James and John? Notice that Jesus did not immediately ask the men to follow Him. Instead, He asked them to trust Him with their work of fishing. What was the result? Should you ask others who are not believers to trust Jesus with their work? What was a result of Peter's obedience to Jesus? What can you do to turn everything in your life over to Jesus? If you have become a Christian, has your new faith caused you to make changes in your lifestyle? Are you a fisher of men? Now, who can remember the definition of "discipleship?" "Following Jesus is a personal, ...lifelong, ...obedient relationship with Jesus Christ. If we follow Jesus, He does three things in our lives: He transforms my character into Christlikeness. He changes my values to Kingdom values, and He involves me in His mission in the home, and in the church, and in the world." Does Jesus call His disciples to follow Him? Is this an exclusive relationship? What does this say about your priorities as a follower of Jesus? Application: Are you willing to change your life to follow Him? Please name some of the changes that a Persian believer will need to make in order to follow Jesus. Before our next session together, I want you to take an inventory of your life. Are there things that you need to change in order to follow Jesus in faith as a disciple? I'd really like you to find another believer, tell this story to him or her and ask for the Lord to lead you and help you grow in faith. Memory Verse for Week 1 -- 2 Timothy 3:16-17: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

CLOSING

No. 5 The Bible as scriptural authority John 17:17, Matthew 24:35 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (MV)

STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can tell the story from our last session? Why is the story of “Jesus Calling Peter, James and John” important to us today? What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus? What is the definition of “discipleship?” (*“Following Jesus is a personal, ...lifelong, ...obedient relationship with Jesus Christ. If we follow Jesus, He does three things in our lives: He transforms my character into Christlikeness. He changes my values to Kingdom values, and He involves me in His mission in the home, and in the church, and in the world.”) **Accountability:** Did everyone come up with something in their life that they need to change in order to be a follower of Jesus? Even with the things that we just identified, trust that we will continue to identify changes that will be necessary for us to grow in our faith. Did you find a believer with whom you could tell the story and pray with them? What happened in your life because of that prayer? **Pre-story dialogue:** Where do our stories that we have been telling come from? Who can tell the story of the Bible as scriptural authority? It was one the very first stories that we told in this series (Evangelism Track #1). This story will be a review for us as we begin to walk back through God’s Word to look for truths. Think about the reason why God gave us the Bible. What does God want us to learn from His Word? Here is the story, “The Bible as Scriptural Authority.”*

BIBLE STORY

Truth: The Bible is the authoritative Word of God.

Barrier -- Review-Bible as authority; Scripture unavailable

The Bible as scriptural authority

John 17:17, Matthew 24:35 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (MV)

A long time ago, there was wise teacher. His name was Paul, and he wrote instructions to a young man whose name was Timothy. Timothy was just beginning his life’s work, so Paul wrote to encourage him because he remembered the sincere faith of young Timothy. In fact, he reminded Timothy. He said you have grown up in a household where your mother and your grandmother before her had this same sincere faith in God. Where did their faith come from? Well, Paul reminded Timothy; he said your mother and grandmother’s faith has come from the Word of God. He said to Timothy, continue in what you have learned and be true to it. Since you were an infant, you’ve known the Holy Scriptures that you wise about salvation through faith in the One sent from God. Paul also reminded Timothy that all Scripture is God breathed and it’s profitable to us. It is useful for training, teaching, and helping us do the right thing. Another of God’s spokesmen said about that process that none of the prophets of old who’ve given us God’s Word spoke according to their own thinking, instead, each of them was led by God’s Spirit. So, though God’s Word was written by a variety of men over many generations, what they wrote has consistency and agrees because it was God’s Spirit who was guiding them in what to write. Over a period of many years the writings that God guided people to make were gathered into a written form of His Word. And because God was speaking to each of those people they recorded it in the language that they and their people spoke. In recent times God has caused His Word to be put into the language of many, many different people all around the world so that people all over the world know His Word, and know the God who wants to communicate with us. Then they can experience the blessing that God has given. So the stories that we tell from God’s Word are about people a long time ago but they were recorded by God’s guidance so that they would be blessing to us as well. God has said that “these things are written for our encouragement, to teach us what is right and to teach us what is wrong.” And so that we will know the truth and know the God who has given us this truth. This concludes our Bible story.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Let’s review some key verses about the Bible and its authority for Christians. Here are a few questions for you to consider: How do we know the truth of God? Does He want us to know His Holy Word? Why do you think God gave us a collection of stories that reveal the very nature of God? Each of the stories in this collection are from God Himself. Does anyone know how the

Bible became translated into this language? (*Tell the story if you know it.*) They are full of truth without any mixture of error. You can trust them to be inspirational and impact your life. The Bible is a wonderful collection, but they are more than stories. The Bible helps to teach us about God's ways. He wants us to live as we should and have a right relationship with Him. Are you equipped for living rightly before God? The Bible helps us to know and do the will of God. Will you commit to understand God's Word? Will you listen to these stories and meditate on each one? Our Memory Verse for Week 1 (first five sessions) has been from 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Second Timothy was the second letter that Paul wrote to Timothy. Timothy was becoming a follower of Jesus, so he needed to know about the authority of Scripture. Can you say this verse with me? "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Let's look at each element of this verse in order to help you memorize it: The phrase, "All Scripture is God-breathed" means that God literally spoke His ideas and His thoughts so that men of old could preserve them. Most of God's Word was passed through the generations by word of mouth. Huge passages would be memorized and recited as accurately as possible. It was eventually written down and handed off to generations after generations who protected the integrity of God's Holy Word. The next phrase says the Bible is, "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." What are some examples of this in our own group? What has been learned? Have we used stories to change the way someone was thinking or living? What has been corrected in your thinking? Who has learned the right way to live through the Bible stories? The last phrase says, "So that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for ever good work." How has the Bible helped you to become equipped for good works? What are some examples that come to mind? Let's say that whole Bible verse together, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." 2 Timothy 3:16-17.
Application: Please memorize this verse before we meet next time. Thank you!

CLOSING

No. 6 Adam & Eve Genesis 3:1-24

STORY INTRODUCTION

The first five Bible stories of this new series helped you confirm your faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. Who can review all five stories? Why are each one of them important? Accountability: Let's take stock in what we have been held accountable in doing as new believers in Jesus. Did you tell each story that you heard? Were you successful in getting a group together to whom you can tell each of the Bible stories? Did you memorize the Bible verse about Scripture? Who can say it? Pre-story Dialogue: We have said that discipleship is a personal, lifelong, and obedient relationship with Jesus Christ. The emphasis is on the relationship. Listen for the relationship that Adam and Eve enjoyed before their sin and the relationship with God after they sinned. How close should our relationship be with God? Here is the story of Adam & Eve.

BIBLE STORY

Truth: God wants us to have an unblemished relationship with Him.

Barrier -- Review- Following Jesus is a personal, lifelong, obedient relationship with Jesus Christ.
Adam & Eve

Genesis 3:1-24

Now God had told Adam that you may eat from any tree that is in the garden, except you must not eat from the tree that is in the center of the garden, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God told him in the day you eat from that tree you will surely die. Now the serpent was the craftiest of all the animals that the Lord had made and one day the serpent came to the woman in the garden and asked her, did God really say that you must not eat from any tree in the garden? The woman answered the serpent you can eat fruit from any of the trees in the garden, but God said you must not eat from the tree that is in the middle of the garden and you must not touch it or you will surely die. Oh, the serpent said, you will not surely die, for God knows that when you eat from that tree your eyes will be open and you will be like God knowing good and evil. The woman went and looked at the fruit from that particular tree and it looked good for food and it was pleasing to the eye and it was also desirable to have wisdom, to know like God. So she took some and she ate it. And she gave some to her husband, the man who was there with her, and he ate it. And when they did eat it their eyes were opened and they realized they were naked and they were ashamed and so they made some coverings for themselves out of leaves and hid themselves. Now in the cool of the day, the man and the woman heard the sound of God coming from the garden and so they hid among the trees in the garden. But God said to them, where are you? And the man answered, I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked so I hid. And God said, who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from? The man answered, he said, the woman, the woman you gave me, she gave me some the fruit and I ate it. And the Lord said to the woman, what is this you have done? And the woman said, the serpent, he deceived me and I ate it. So the Lord spoke to the serpent and said that because you have done this you are cursed above all the animals, you will crawl on your belly all the days of your life, through dust. And I will put hatred between you and the woman and hatred between your offspring and her offspring. The son of the woman will crush your head and you will strike his heel and to the woman God said I will greatly increase your pains in child bearing. Only with great difficulty will you give birth. Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you. And to the man, he said, because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree which I told you that you shall not eat from that tree, cursed is the ground because of you, only by painful toil will you raise your food from the crops. They will produce thorns and weeds for you and only by the sweat of your brow will you have food. From the ground you were made and to the ground you will return at your death. And then God made coverings for the man's and the woman's nakedness, he covered them with clothing made of animal skins. And then God said if we allow the man and woman to remain in the garden they may eat from the tree of life and remain in this state forever. And so he sent the man and the woman out of the garden and placed at the entrance there a flaming sword, which moved back and forth, and an angel to ensure that they could never again return. This is the story of the disobedience of Adam and Eve.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Let's review this story in light of all the stories that we have told and reviewed. How many men did it take for sin to enter the world? Does it make sense to you that by one man, Jesus, that the answer to sin came into the world? By one man, Adam, all of his descendants -- everybody in the world -- fell under God's judgment of sin. However, by one man, Jesus, we have the opportunity to have our sins forgiven and become holy before God. Sin separated Adam from God. However, by faith in Jesus, we are brought back into right relationship with Jesus. Now, take a look at this story from a Christian perspective. What does it mean to you that God provides for us as sinners? Do you see how God cared for Adam and Eve? What kind of relationship does God want with each of us as believers in Jesus Christ? Was God's relationship with Adam & Eve personal or impersonal? Did the relationship last all of their lives? Does God want an obedient relationship with us? Application: Think of everyone in your family. With whom do you have the best relationship? How long have you known this person? Do you talk to this person often or is he or she distant? What can you learn about the relationship that you have with your closest relative and your relationship with God? What will you do right away to strengthen your relationship with the Lord? Here is a new Memory Verse for Week 2 (second set of five lessons) It is from Matthew 11:28-30: "Come unto me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

CLOSING

No. 7 God's covenant with Isaac, not Ishmael Genesis 15:1-19

STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can tell me the story from our last session? How was the relationship that Adam & Eve had with God broken? How important is the relationship that we maintain with God the Father?

Accountability: Who do you have the best relationship with in your family? Did you think about why you have a great relationship with them and how this relates to our relationship with God?

Pre-story Dialogue: Following Jesus is a personal, lifelong, obedient relationship with Jesus Christ. Our story today shows us that if we follow the Lord, He does three things in our lives: He transforms my character into Christlikeness. He changes my values to Kingdom values, and He involves me in His mission in the home, and in the church, and in the world. Listen for each of these characteristics in our story today about Isaac receiving the blessing of Abraham. You have heard it before. However, this time please listen for the way that Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael followed Kingdom values and became involved in God's mission in their homelife.

BIBLE STORY

Truth: God wants to bless the whole world.

Barrier -- Review-Islam reveres Ishmael's lineage, not Isaac

God's covenant with Isaac, not Ishmael

Genesis 15:1-19 -- See Ev Track No. 8

The word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision saying, "do not be afraid Abram", for that was what he was before God changed his name. "I am your shield. Your reward will be very great." Abraham answered, "Oh, sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless? Will my servant, Eliezer, be the one to inherit my possessions? Since you have given me no children, surely a servant in my household will be my heir." Then the word of the Lord came again to Abraham saying, "Your servant will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body". Then the Lord took Abraham outside and said to him, "Abraham, look up at the heavens and count the stars, if indeed you can count them, so shall your descendants be". After these words, Abraham believed the Lord. And so the Lord credited this faith to Abraham as righteousness. Again the Lord spoke, "I am the Lord who brought you up out of a foreign land to give you this land so you may take possession of it". But Abraham said to the Lord, "Oh, sovereign Lord, how can I know I will gain possession of it?" So the Lord instructed with these words, "Bring me a young cow, a goat, and a ram, each three years old. Also bring a dove and a young pigeon". Abraham brought each of the animals and the birds as the Lord, as the Lord had instructed. He cut each animal, dividing them into two pieces and arranged the halves opposite each other on the altar. But the dove and pigeon, he did not cut in half. During the day, Abraham kept the birds of prey from the carcasses on the altar. As the sun was setting, Abraham fell into a deep sleep and a thick and dreadful darkness descended over Abraham. Then the Lord spoke, "Abraham, know for certain that one day your descendants will be strangers in a country that is not their own. There they will be mistreated and even enslaved four hundred years, but I the Lord will punish that nation your descendants serve as slaves. And afterwards your descendants will come out with great possessions. You will go to your father's in peace at an age of many years. Then in the fourth generation, your descendants, Abraham, will come back to this land. For the sin of the people who live in this land has not yet reached its full measure for my judgment". After the Lord had spoken these words and the sun had set and there was darkness upon the land, a smoking fire pot with a flaming torch appeared and passed between the pieces of the sacrifice. So, it was on that day the Lord made a covenant with Abraham saying, "to your descendants, I give this land, from the Great River to the south to the Great River to the North, the land that is now occupied by many other peoples". That is the end of the Bible story.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Let's review this story. When we told it previously, we focused on God keeping his promise to Abraham and Sarah to provide a covenant. Do you see how God kept his promise to bless all nations by sending Jesus as God's only Son as a fulfillment of this prophecy and promise? Did God keep his promise to Abraham, Sarah and Isaac? How does God's covenant through Isaac

become a reality? How did Abraham's personal and obedient relationship with God bless the whole world? How can every nation of the world be blessed by Isaac's offspring? Did you note how Jesus made this promise become fulfilled? How did Abraham have his character transformed? How did he change his values? How did God involve Abraham in His mission? Who can recite the definition of discipleship? ("Following Jesus is a personal, lifelong, obedient relationship with Jesus Christ. If we follow the Lord, He does three things in our lives: He transforms my character into Christlikeness. He changes my values to Kingdom values, and He involves me in His mission in the home, and in the church, and in the world.") Application: Please tell this story to someone who is a believer. See if you can identify all the ways that Abraham was blessed through his obedience to God. Please begin memorizing the Memory Verse for Week 2 -- Matthew 11:28-30: "Come unto me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

CLOSING

No. 8 Abraham, Isaac sacrifice with promise of a Messiah Genesis 22:1-18

STORY INTRODUCTION

What was our lesson about in our last session? Accountability: Who was able to tell our last story to someone else? What was their response? Did they have a misunderstanding about the blessing of Isaac and not Ishmael? How should we respond in a Christian way to those who do not believe like we do? Pre-story Dialog: We are continuing to review several key stories. This is the story of Abraham being tested by being told to sacrifice Isaac. Would someone like to tell the story? As you listen to the story, I would like you to consider how God honored Abraham's faithfulness. Who can define the word "faith"? As you listen to this story, think about the faithful relationship that Abraham had with God. Here is the story of the Sacrifice of Isaac with the promise of a Messiah.

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Jesus was the foretold Anointed One, the Messiah.

Barrier -- Review-To be Persian is to be a Muslim (Essential for Salvation)

Abraham, Isaac sacrifice with promise of a Messiah

Genesis 22:1-18

Some years passed after the birth of Isaac. One day God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham." "Here I am," Abraham answered. God said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering to me on a mountain that I am going to tell you about." So early the next morning Abraham got up and he saddled his donkey, he took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac, they cut the wood for the burnt offering and set out for the place that God told him about. On the third day Abraham looked up and he saw the place where he was to make the sacrifice. He said to his servants, you stay here with the donkey while the boy and I go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you. So Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and loaded it on his son Isaac and he himself carried the fire and the knife. The two of them walked along. As they were walking together Isaac spoke up and he said to his father, Abraham, "Father?" "Yes my son?", Abraham answered. We have the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering. Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering my son." And so the two of them walked on together. When they reached the place that God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and he arranged the wood on it and then he bound his son Isaac and he placed him on top of the wood on top of the altar. And he reached out his hand and he took the knife and he was just about to slay his son when an angel of the Lord called out from heaven, "Abraham, Abraham." "Here I am," Abraham replied. "Don't lay a hand on the boy," the angel said. "Don't do anything to harm him. Now I know that you fear God. Because you have not withheld me your son, even your only son." Abraham looked up and there in the thicket behind was a ram caught by horns. And so he took the ram and he sacrificed it as a burnt offering in place of Isaac. He substituted the ram for his son. And Abraham called that place the Lord will provide and to this day it is said on the mountain of God it will be provided. And the angel of God spoke from heaven to Abraham a second time and said because you have done this and not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars above or the sand of the sea. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies and through your offspring; all the nations of the earth will be blessed because you have obeyed me. So Abraham and Isaac left the mountain and returned to the servants and returned to their home. This is the story of the testing of Abraham.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Why did God test Abraham's loyalty? Why did God intervene? Was there a substitute sacrifice provided to Abraham? What were the key elements of God's promise? Why do you think that God wants to bless all nations? What do you think the "seed" referred to? How should a Christian view this story? What priority does your relationship with Jesus have over everything else that you know? How has Abraham's character been transformed by this time? Does he trust God? Application: Do you need to trust God more? What kind of a faith relationship do you

have with God? Your assignment this week is to walk by yourself for 30 minutes or so. Pray as you walk. Assume a humble attitude. Ask God to increase your faith. Let's work on our Memory Verse for Week 2 – It is found in Matthew 11:28-30: "Come unto me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Let's take this in segments so that you can memorize it. "Come unto me, all you who are weary and I will give you rest." This verse is a quote from Jesus to His disciples. Do you believe that you can take your wearisome troubles to the Lord? How do you do that? How can Jesus give you rest? Do you remember the story of the Holy Spirit being the comforter? The second portion of the verse is "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." What is a yoke? If an oxen is yoked to a sickly and weak partner, will that make the other ox's work easy or hard? How do you see yourself being yoked with the strength of Jesus? Here's the last phrase, "For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Have you ever seen a horse or donkey that is carry a very heavy load? Do you believe that Jesus wants to be involved in your life so that He allows you to enjoy lighter loads? What is a burden that you carry that Jesus can help you carry or lighten? Give it to him right now! Here is the verse one more time. Matthew 11:28-30: "Come unto me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

CLOSING

No. 9 Joseph encounters his brothers Genesis 44:1-45:3

STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can say the definition of discipleship? “If we follow the Lord, He does three things in our lives: He transforms my character into Christlikeness. He changes my values to Kingdom values, and He involves me in His mission in the home, and in the church, and in the world.” How was our last story about Abraham sacrificing Isaac related to discipleship? Accountability: Did you spend time in prayer with God for 30 minutes this week? What were the results? What would happen if you prayed with God every day? Should we trust God to deepen our relationship with Him? Pre-story Dialogue: Our story today is a review about Joseph. As I tell the first part of the story today, please listen for the way that Joseph became involved in God’s mission in the world. Here is the story “Joseph Encounters His Brothers”.

BIBLE STORY

Truth: God provides a way to overcome sin and restore a relationship with Him.

Barrier -- Review-Paranoia and Conspiracy Theory mindset

Joseph encounters his brothers

Genesis 44:1-45:3

Joseph said, “No, you’ve come to spy out the land, to see where our defenses are strong and where they are weak.” They said, “No, we’re twelve brothers in all. The sons of one man in the land of Canaan. The youngest is with our father and the other is dead.” Joseph said, “No you are spies and by this you will be tested. By the life of Pharaoh you shall not leave from this place unless your youngest brother comes. Send one of you that you may bring your young brother back that your words might be tested and I might know that you are telling the truth.” So he threw them into prison for three days. Now Joseph said to them, “Do this and live, for I fear God. If you’re honest men, let one of your brothers be confined here in prison and the rest of you go, carry grain back to your family, back to your household, bring your youngest brother back to me so that your words might be verified and you’ll not die.” And they did so. And they said to one another, “We are truly guilty concerning our brother because we saw the distress of his soul and he pleaded with us, yet we would not listen and now his distress has come upon us.” And Reuben said, “Didn’t I tell you, don’t sin against the boy, don’t sin against Joseph, you wouldn’t listen. Now all of this comes back upon us.” Joseph gave orders to fill their grain bags and to give the money that they had paid for the grain back to them, but to put it within their sack so they might not know it and this was done. So they loaded their donkeys and they traveled from there and as they stopped and opened their grain sacks to feed their donkeys, they saw this money. They saw that it was in the mouth of the sack and one of the brothers said, “My money has been returned. It’s in my sack.” And their hearts sank and they trembled and they feared and they said, “What is God doing to us?” because they didn’t want to be accused as thieves. When they came to their father, Jacob, they told him all that happened. They said the lord of the land spoke harshly with us and he said that we were spies, but we said to him, “No, we’re honest men. We’re not spies. We’re twelve brothers and our father.” But the lord of the land said, “By this I shall know that you are honest. Leave one of your brothers, take your grain for your family and go, but bring your youngest brother back to me that I may know that you are not spies, but honest men and I will give you your brother and you can trade in this land.” And so they are emptying their sacks, they found that in every sack was money. And when their father saw the bundles of money, they were dismayed and their father said, “Oh, you grieve me, my children. Joseph is no more. Simeon is no more and now you want to take Benjamin back. Take him away from me. Reuben said, “You might put my two sons to death if I do not bring him back to you. I will return father.” But Jacob said, “My son shall not go down with you for his brother is dead. He alone is left. If harm should befall him when you are taking him, I don’t know what I’ll do.” But the famine was so bad in the land that their grain ran out and they had nothing left to eat and so their father said, “Go back and buy us more food.” And one son, Judas, said, “We can’t go back unless we do as he instructed.” So their father said to them, “If this must be so, then do it. Take some of the best products of the land in your bag, carry them down to this man as a present. Give them to him. Take the money that’s in your hands and double it. Take it back to them saying, “It must be a mistake that we have this money. And take your brother also. Return to the man. May God

grant you compassion in the sight of this man that he may release your brother and also Benjamin. But as for me I am a grieving man. I grieve because of my children.” And so the brothers took Benjamin back with them to the house of Joseph in the land of Egypt. “Bring the men into the house. Slay an animal. Make ready for them for they are to dine with me at noon,” Joseph said. So the men did as Joseph said and they brought his brothers to the house and they prepared the meal. Now the men were afraid because they were brought to Joseph’s house and they said, “Oh, it’s because of the money that was in our sacks, the money he thought we have stolen from him.” They came near to Joseph’s house and they were told to enter. They said, “Oh my lord, we’ve come down the first time to buy food and when it came about that as we left, we discovered this money was in our sacks, so we brought it back. And then we brought more money to buy more food. We don’t know how this money was put into our sacks.” Joseph said, “Don’t be afraid. Your God, the God of your father has given you treasures in your sacks. I had your money.” Then he brought Simeon out to them. And then the man brought all the men into Joseph’s house and gave them water to wash their feet, gave their donkeys food and they prepared a present for Joseph for noon time for they had heard that they were going to eat a meal with Joseph. When Joseph came, they brought into the house to him the present, which was in their hand which their father had told them to bring. They bowed down before him. He asked them about their welfare. “How is your father? Is he alive?” They said, “Your servant, our father is well. He is alive.” Then they bowed down. As he lifted his eyes, he saw his brother Benjamin and he said, “Is this your youngest brother of whom you spoke?” And he said, “May God be gracious to you my son.” Joseph hurried out for he was deeply stirred at seeing his brother and he began to weep. After Joseph washed his face from weeping and he controlled himself, he went back to his brothers and said, “Serve the meal.” And so they ate with Joseph by themselves and even ate the bread of the Hebrews, which is something Egyptians did not do. They were all seated around Joseph and they ate a meal with him. And then Joseph commanded his household servants saying, “Fill the men’s sacks with food, as much as they can carry and put each man’s money into the mouth of the sack. And then put my silver cup in the mouth of the youngest, Benjamin and put his money in there, as well.” The servant did as Joseph had told him and as soon as it was light, the brothers went on their way. Just as they had gone out of the city one of Joseph’s servants came up to them, “Why have you repaid evil for good?” the servant accused the brothers. Is this not the one cup that I find in your sack from which our lord drinks? Why have you done this wrong to him?” And so they seized the brothers and brought them back to Joseph, accusing them of stealing Joseph’s cup. And each of the brothers lamented and grieved as they returned to the city. They went to Joseph’s house and while they were there, they fell to the ground before him and Joseph said to them, “What evil deed have you done? Do you know that this cup is important to me?” One of the brothers, Judah, said, “What can we say my lord? What can we say? How can we justify ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants. Behold we are the lord’s slaves, both we and the one in whose possession this cup has been found.” But Joseph said to his brothers, “Far be it for me to do grant you any freedoms as you request. The man in whose possession the cup has been found, he shall be my slave, but as for you, go in peace to your father.” And Judah approached him and said, “Oh my lord. May your servant please speak a word in your ears? Don’t be angry with us. We know you are equal to Pharaoh. My lord asked the servants, have you a father or a brother and we said to you, we have an old father and we have a little brother and we have another brother who is dead and then you said bring him to me that I might set your eyes upon you, but we said to you he can’t leave his father, for if he should leave, his father would die. But you said, unless your brother comes, you shall not see my face again. And so we did as you said. We came back to buy food. We brought our brother. Now we can’t let him, our youngest brother, Benjamin, stay with you for surely our father would die. So please let me remain in his place as a slave to you, but let him return with my brothers back to our father.” Well, Joseph couldn’t control himself anymore because of all that was being said and he began to cry, and he cried out, “Have everyone leave here!” So there was no one there when Joseph was with his brothers and made himself known to them and he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it and the household of Pharaoh heard it and Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?” But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. This is the story from God’s Word. It will be completed in our next session.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Who can tell this story from memory? Why did Joseph hide his true identity? Was it a conspiracy of hate or was Joseph trying to see if his brothers had changed for the good? Do you think the brothers were afraid or happy to know it was their brother Joseph? Have you tried to trick someone out of hate? Would God want you to be suspicious of trickery or trusting? Of others? Of God? Why not seek to begin trusting God and His ways? Application: How did Joseph become part of God's mission to the world? Is it possible for God to use you on His mission? Where are the needs around you? Identify at least one problem that others where you work or live are experiencing. Be prepared to share it with the group in our next session. Here is the Memory Verse for Week 2 -- Matthew 11:28-30: "Come unto me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

CLOSING

No. 10 Joseph explains God's Grace to Brothers Genesis 45:1-28

STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can tell the first part of our two-part story from our last session together? Who was Joseph? Why did he have such a bad relationship with his brothers? Accountability: Did you identify at least one problem that others where you work or live are experiencing? *Leaders, at the end of the session today, be sure to listen as your group discusses problems that others outside your group are having in their lives.* In the conclusion of the story of Joseph, we find the brothers in trouble with Joseph. Joseph is now second to Pharaoh in power throughout Egypt. Joseph's brothers have come to Egypt, but Joseph had his servants place a silver cup in the bag of Benjamin, Joseph's own brother. How do you think Joseph will treat his brothers? If God has transformed Joseph's character, how do you think he will respond? Here is the rest of the story of Joseph as he explains God's grace to his brothers.

BIBLE STORY

Truth: God provides a way to overcome sin and restore a relationship with Him.

Gap -- New-No understanding of Grace

Joseph explains God's Grace to Brothers

Genesis 45:1-28

But Joseph said to his brothers, "Far be it for me to do grant you any freedoms as you request. The man in whose possession the cup has been found, he shall be my slave, but as for you, go in peace to your father." And Judah approached him and said, "Oh my lord. May your servant please speak a word in your ears? Don't be angry with us. We know you are equal to Pharaoh. My lord asked the servants, have you a father or a brother and we said to you, we have an old father and we have a little brother and we have another brother who is dead and then you said bring him to me that I might set your eyes upon you, but we said to you he can't leave his father, for if he should leave, his father would die. But you said, unless your brother comes, you shall not see my face again. And so we did as you said. We came back to buy food. We brought our brother. Now we can't let him, our youngest brother, Benjamin, stay with you for surely our father would die. So please let me remain in his place as a slave to you, but let him return with my brothers back to our father." Well, Joseph couldn't control himself anymore because of all that was being said and he began to cry, and he cried out, "Have everyone leave here!" So there was no one there when Joseph was with his brothers and made himself known to them and he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it and the household of Pharaoh heard it and Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. And Joseph said to them, Please come closer to me and they came closer and he said, "I am Joseph your brother whom you sold into slavery in Egypt. Don't grieve. Don't be sorry. Don't be angry because you sold me here. God has made good of this. God sent me here to save your lives because of the famine. I was here and you could find something to eat." Please send for my father and tell him that God has made his son lord of all Egypt. Tell him to come down to me and do it right away. I'll prepare a place for you. In the land of Goshen here in Egypt there you, your families and livestock will live near me. I will provide for you there because there are still five more years of famine to come. I don't want anything bad to happen to you. Go quickly and tell your father – my father and Benjamin's father – about my position here in Egypt and everything you have seen. And Joseph fell upon his brothers and he wept and his brother, Benjamin, wept and he kissed all of his brothers and they all wept with joy and they all sat down and talked as family. When this news of Joseph's brothers being in Egypt reached Pharaoh, everyone including the officials of the land were pleased. Pharaoh sent word to the brothers to load their animals and return home. They were encouraged to bring their father and their families back to Egypt. In order to help them make the return trip easier, they could even leave everything behind because everything in Egypt – all the best – would be at their disposal. Joseph gave the brothers carts and they traveled home to get Jacob and bring him to Egypt from the land of Canaan. Joseph lavished his wealth upon his brother Benjamin and gave generous gifts to his other brothers, too. As he sent his brothers on their way, he told them not to do anything that would slow them down. When they arrived in Canaan, they told Jacob that Joseph was still alive and ruler over Egypt. Jacob was stunned and did not

believe them. But the brothers told their father everything that Joseph had said to them. When he saw the Egyptian carts, it revived his spirit and Joseph said, "You've convinced me that Joseph is alive. I want to go see him before I die." And soon they were living in the land of Goshen down in Egypt. Well that's the end of the story from God's word.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

The full ending of this story was new to you. Who can tell the story? Can you draw a parallel between the story of Joseph and Jesus? Did you see how Joseph was used by God to save his family from starvation during the famine? Do you see how God used Jesus to save the entire family of mankind from their sins? Did the brothers do anything to deserve salvation? Of course not; they had been extremely evil to Joseph. Were they sorry for what they had done? Did you do anything to earn salvation by Jesus Christ? Of course not, so please understand that salvation is not by works, but by faith in God. When God provides a free gift of salvation, we call that grace. Grace is God's gift of salvation. He cared for us while we were still sinners, just like the way that God cared for all of Joseph's brothers even though they were sinful. God wants to extend his grace to everyone that would believe that Jesus was the Son of God who died for our sins and is our only way to eternal life. Joseph's brothers and father moved from Canaan to a land that was specially prepared for them. Do you think God has prepared a special place for believers? The parallels between the story of Jesus and Joseph are striking! Application: Please tell this story to your friends and family and see what other parallels you can find! This is the last day we will have our Memory Verse for Week 2. Can you say it with me from memory? Matthew 11:28-30: "Come unto me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

CLOSING

No. 11 *The Passover Exodus 12:1-31*

STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can tell us the whole story of Joseph from beginning to end? Accountability: Did you tell the story to anyone else since we last met? What were some of the parallels that you were able to draw between Joseph and Jesus? Pre-story dialogue: We are still thinking about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. We have spent some time in the Old Testament reviewing stories that help us identify what it means to have a relationship with God. We have also drawn parallels between the stories before Jesus came to earth and after Jesus came to earth. We have defined discipleship as a personal, lifelong, obedient relationship with Jesus Christ. If we follow the Lord, He does three things in our lives: He transforms my character into Christlikeness. He changes my values to Kingdom values, and He involves me in His mission in the home, and in the church, and in the world. Who can say that definition to the group? We have reviewed Bible stories about Adam and Eve, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph. Now we need to revisit the stories of Moses and the Children of God. God wanted a personal relationship with His people. Yet, they had become slaves in Egypt over time. He wanted to transform their character and values, but they were under the influence of their slave masters. God wanted to involve them in His mission and be a blessing to their homes, their worship centers and ultimately to all the nations as He had promised Abraham, but they were slaves. Please remember that God accomplishes His will through ordinary people who are obedient to Him. God appeared to Moses and invited Him to participate in His mission. Moses traveled with Aaron, his brother, to Egypt and demanded that the slaves be set free. Despite a series of horrifying plagues, the Pharaoh would still not relent. This leads us to our story today. How did God show His mighty power? How did God begin to restore the people to a right relationship with Himself? Please view this story as a Christian. How does God want to work in the lives of ordinary people? Here is the story of "The Passover."

BIBLE STORY

Truth: God wants us to obey Him.

Barrier -- Review-God is at work to accomplish His will.

The Passover

Exodus 12:1-31

Now, the Lord gave the following instructions to Moses and Aaron while they were still in the land of Egypt during the time that the plagues were occurring. God said to Moses, "From now on, this month will be the first month of the year for you, announced to the whole community that on the tenth day of this month, each family must choose a lamb, or a young goat, for a sacrifice. Should the family be too small to eat an entire lamb, they can share the lamb with another family in their neighborhood. Now whether or not they share in this way depends on the size of each family and how much each person can eat. The animal you choose for this sacrifice must be a one-year-old male. It can either be a sheep or a goat, but it must have no physical blemishes. Take special care of these lambs until the time of the sacrifice, and in the evening of the fourteenth day of this first month, each family in the community must slaughter its lamb. Now, they're to take some of the lamb's blood and smear it on the top and sides of the doorframe of the house where the lamb will be eaten. During that evening and night, everyone must eat roast lamb with bitter herbs and bread made without any yeast at all. The meat must never be eaten raw, and it cannot be eaten boiled. Roast all of the meat, including the head, the legs, and the internal organs. None of the meat must be left when daylight comes the next day. Whatever is not eaten that night must be burned before morning. Wear your traveling clothes as you eat this meal, as though you were prepared for a long journey. Wear your sandals, carry your walking sticks in your hands, and eat the food quickly, for this is the Lord's Passover. On that night I'll pass through the land of Egypt and kill all the firstborn sons and firstborn male animals in the land of Egypt. I will execute judgment against all the gods of Egypt for I am the Lord. The blood you smeared on your doorpost will serve as a sign to me. When I see that blood, I'll pass over you. This plague of death will not touch you when I strike the land of Egypt. You must remember this day forever. Each year you will celebrate it as a special festival to the Lord. For seven days you may eat only bread made without yeast. On the very first day you must remove every trace of yeast from your

homes. Anyone, anyone who eats bread made with yeast at any time during the seven days of the festival will be cut off from the community of Israel. On the first day of the festival, and again on the seventh day, all the people must gather for a time of special worship. No work of any kind may be done on these days except in the preparation of food. Celebrate this festival of unleavened bread for it will remind you that I brought you as a people out of the land of Egypt on this very day. This festival will be a permanent regulation for you to be kept from generation to generation. Now, only bread without yeast may be eaten from the evening of the fourteenth day of the month until the evening of the twenty-first day of the month. During those seven days, there must be no trace of yeast in your houses. Anyone who eats anything made with yeast during this week will be cut off from the community of Israel. These same regulations applied to the foreigners living with you as if they had been born among you.” The Lord said again, “During those days you must not eat anything made with yeast. Wherever you live you [don’t] eat bread that has yeast in it.” Then Moses called for the leaders of Israel and said, “Tell each of your families to slaughter the lamb, tell them to slaughter the lamb that they have chosen and set apart according to these rules for the Passover. Drain each lamb’s blood into a basin. Take a cluster of hyssop branches and dip it into the lamb’s blood, strike the hyssop against the top and sides of the doorframe, staining it with the blood. Remember, no one is allowed to leave that house until morning. For during that night, the Lord will pass through the land and strike down the Egyptians. For when He sees the blood on the top and sides of your doorframe, the Lord will pass over your home. He will not permit the destroyer to enter nor strike down your firstborn. Remember, these instructions are permanent and must be observed by you and your descendants forever. When you arrive in the land the Lord has promised to give you, you will continue to celebrate this festival.” “Now, your children will ask what does all this mean? What is all this ceremony all about?” And you will reply, “It is the celebration of the Lord’s Passover, for He passed over the homes of the Israelites in Egypt, and though He killed the Egyptians, He spared our families and did not destroy us.” And all the people who heard Moses give these instructions bowed their heads and they worshipped. So the people of Israel did just as the Lord had commanded them through Moses and Aaron. At midnight, the Lord killed all the firstborn sons in the land of Egypt from the firstborn son of Pharaoh who sat on the throne, to the firstborn son of the captive in the dungeon. Even the firstborn of their livestock died. Pharaoh and his officials and all the people of Egypt woke up during the night, and loud wailing was heard throughout the land of Egypt. There was not a single house where someone had not died. They were sent from Moses and Aaron during the night. “Leave us,” He said. “Go away, all of you. Go and serve the Lord as you’ve requested. Take your flocks, take your herds and be gone. Go, but give me a blessing as you leave.” All the Egyptians urged the people of Israel to get out of the land as quickly as possible. Israelites took with them their bread dough made without yeast. They wrapped their kneading bowls in their spare clothing and carried them on their shoulders. And the people of Israel did just as Moses had instructed and asked the Egyptians for clothing and articles of silver and gold. The Lord caused the Egyptians to look favorably on the Israelites, and they gave the Israelites whatever they asked for. So, like a victorious army, they plundered the Egyptians. That night the people of Israel left Rameses and started for Succoth. There were about 600,000 men, plus all the women, and the children. And they were all traveling on foot. Many people who were not Israelites went with them, along with the many flocks and herds that they had. Whenever they stopped to eat, they baked bread from the yeastless dough they had brought from Egypt. It was made without yeast because the people were rushed out of Egypt and had no time to wait for bread to rise. People of Israel had lived in Egypt for 430 years. In fact, it was on the last day of the 430th year that all the Lord’s forces left the land. This night had been reserved by the Lord to bring His people out from the land of Egypt. So this same night now belongs to Him. It must be celebrated every year from generation to generation to remember the Lord’s deliverance. Now, that is the story of the Passover and God’s deliverance of them from the Egyptians.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Let’s review this story from God’s Word. Who can tell this story? What can we learn about this story as a Christian? How did Jesus celebrate the Passover with His disciples? What is the significance of the blood sacrifice of the lamb? How is Jesus like a lamb? Do you remember the story we told about Jesus being the perfect sacrifice? Why did Jesus need to die? How is the

Passover observance something that Christians can appreciate? Did God provide for His people? Application: Share with the group how God has provided for you. In other words, how has God accomplished His will in your life? Memory Verse for Week 3 – Romans 12:5: “In Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.”

CLOSING

No. 12 The Ten Commandments Exodus 20:1-17

STORY INTRODUCTION

There is one, possibly two stories that we need to review before our story in this session. Who can tell the story of the Passover? *[If time]* Who can tell the story of Jesus the Perfect Sacrifice? *(No accountability for this session since the group did an application exercise at the end of Story No. 11. You may check to see if stories are being shared with others or extra groups that might have been formed outside of your group for storying.)* Pre-story Dialogue: Today's Bible story finds Moses and the Children of God in the desert. They have arrived at Mt. Sinai. God wants to help the Hebrews know how to live and so Moses is given a set of Laws. Think about these laws from the perspective of a Christian. Are they just a collection of good behaviors or is there something deeper? How should a disciple of Jesus consider these laws? This will be an important topic for our story today and for our next session. Here is the story of "The Ten Commandments."

BIBLE STORY

Truth: God provides a way to overcome sin and restore our relationship with Him.

Bridge -- New-Poetry memorized; love metaphors

The Ten Commandments

Exodus 20:1-17

And God spoke all these words to Moses who in turn told them to the Children of Israel. I am the Lord, your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other Gods before me. You shall make no idol for yourself in any form, anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord, your God. For the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses His name. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Honor your Father and your Mother so that you may live long in the land the Lord, your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give a false testimony against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor. Now when the people saw the thunder and lightening and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and they said to Moses, speak to us yourself and we will listen, but do not have God speak to us or we will die.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Let's review this story. Have you been able to memorize this set of rules known as "The Ten Commandments"? Maybe you could write a song using these commands as a way to help you memorize these verses. Let's review God's commands once again to help you memorize them. Are you to worship anyone but God? Are you to worship idols? Are you to treat God's name with disrespect? What should we do on the Sabbath day? How are we to treat our parents? What does God think about killing other people? Why are men and women not to commit adultery? Are we to take what does not belong to us? Are we to say things that are not true about other people? And, finally, why does God want us to be content with what we have and not desire things that belong to other people? Does that help you to remember the Ten Commandments? Application: Please practice memorizing these commandments and tell them to someone who can help you remember them! Memory Verse for Week 3 – Romans 12:5: "In Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."

CLOSING

No. 13 Day of Atonement Leviticus 4:1-21, 27-28, 35

STORY INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our story session. We have almost completed our review of the stories before the birth of Jesus. Accountability: Before we start our Bible story for this session, who can recite all of the 10 Commandments? Pre-story dialog: What is sin? When does sin occur? Is sin only sin when you are caught? Does God know about our individual sins? Are we accountable to God for every sin? What is the only hope that the world has to have their sins forgiven? Today's Bible story is a review of the old way that sin was forgiven using a blood sacrifice. What do you remember about Jesus being the High Priest and also the perfect sacrifice? Please keep that story in mind as I review the story for you "Day of Atonement".

BIBLE STORY

Truth: God provides a way to overcome sin and restore a relationship with Him.

Barrier -- Review--Sin only happens when caught

New--Day of Atonement

Leviticus 4:1-21, 27-28, 35

The Lord said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, when anyone sins unintentionally or does what is forbidden in any of the Lord's Commands, then they need to follow a certain procedure. For instance, if an anointed priest, a religious leader does something wrong, that actually brings guilt on the people, he must bring to the Lord a young bull without any defect as a sin offering for the sin he has committed. He is to lay his hand on its head, and he is to kill it before the Lord. Then the anointed priest shall take some of the bull's blood and carry it into the tent. He is to dip his finger into the blood and sprinkle some of it on the altar seven times. And it's to be done in front of that curtain that separates the altar from the very holiest of the sanctuary. The priest shall then put some of the blood on the horns of the altar and of the fragrance of the incense, and that is before the Lord in the Tent of the Meeting. The rest of the bull's blood he shall pour out before the base of the altar of the burnt offering at the entrance to the Tent of the Meeting. Now, you're supposed to take all of the fat from the bull. You're supposed to take the inner parts, like the kidneys and the fat around the loins, and the covering on the liver and the kidneys. And just as the fat is removed from the ox that is sacrificed, then the priest shall burn them on the altar as an offering. But the hide and all of its flesh, as well as the head and legs, and the inner parts, that is the rest of the bull must be taken outside of the camp to a place that is ceremonial clean, and it's the place where ashes are thrown. And these items are to be burned in a wood fire on the ash heap. Now that is what's supposed to be done for the priest. And it's very similar for the whole Israel community when they sin either intentionally or unintentionally so that they bring guilt upon themselves. They are to go, the priest is to go before the whole assembly and a young bull should be offered as a sin offering. The elders of the whole community are to lay hands on the bull's head, and the bull is supposed to be slaughtered before the Lord. Then the priest is to take some of the bull's blood, as we heard before, for himself, and he shall dip the finger into the blood and sprinkle it before the Lord seven times in front of that curtain. He's to put some blood on the horns of the altar before the Lord in the Tent of the Meeting. He's to take the rest of the blood and pour it at the base of the altar at the entrance of the Meeting. And then he is to remove the fat and all of the inner parts, and he is supposed to take it outside of the camp to the ash heap and burn them there with everything that is there. And that's what is supposed to be done for the whole community when it sins. Now, when a leader sins unintentionally or does what is forbidden by the commands of the Lord, then he is guilty, and he is to bring a goat that is without any defect to the place of the burnt offering. Then the priest is to take some blood from that goat, put it on his finger, put it on the horns of the altar, put it at the entrance and at the base of the altar. He's supposed to burn the fat on the altar, as he burned the fat of the other offerings. In this way, the priest will make atonement for the man's sin, and he will be forgiven. Now if a member of the community, anyone, just a regular member sins unintentionally or does what is forbidden from the Lord and he is guilty, he must be aware of that sin. And then he is to bring a female goat without any defect. And he is supposed to lay his hand on the head of the goat and kill it at the place of the burnt offering. And then the priest is to take some of the blood with his finger. He is

supposed to take the horns of the altar of the burnt offering and pour the offering out on the rest of the altar. He is supposed to remove the fat that is removed and he is supposed to burn that on the altar as a pleasing aroma before the Lord. In this way, the priest is to make atonement and he will be forgiven. If he brings a lamb as a sin offering, he is to bring a female one without defect and he is to lay his hand on his head and he is supposed to take that as a burnt offering and slaughter that that is there. The priest shall take some of the blood from the sin offering, put it on the horns of the altar of the burnt offering, and he is supposed to pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar. He shall remove the fat, just as the fat is removed from the lamb of the fellowship offering, and the priest shall burn it on the altar on top of the offerings made by the Lord in the fire. And this way it will make atonement for him for the sin he has committed and he will be forgiven. Now that's our story.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

This was a new story to you from God's set of laws. What does this system say is necessary to be made right with God? What did God tell Moses to do so that sins could be forgiven from the High Priest, the congregation, leaders and individuals? What is so special about the blood that it must be shed to forgive sins? Do you think it was costly for the people to keep sinning and having to sacrifice another lamb to forgive them of their sins? Now consider this story from the Christian perspective. Do you see a parallel between the blood shed by the animals and the blood that Jesus shed on the cross? Note that the High Priest had to ritually purify himself over and over again. Think back to the story about Jesus being our High Priest. Who can tell that story? Would you agree that Jesus has fulfilled the blood requirement once and for all?

Application: In your prayer time this week, thank God for Jesus being the sacrifice that takes away our sin. Tell this story to another believer. When you tell the story, be sure to emphasize that Jesus made the sacrifice once and for all for everyone. Have you learned this week's Memory Verse for Week 3? It is Romans 12:5: "In Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." Let's review the verse section by section to help you learn it. The first portion is, "In Christ we who are many form one body." Have you ever seen men and women who comprise the United Nations? They are from all over the world. However, they often refer to themselves as a body. What does it mean that Christians are part of one body? Do you believe that all the Christians in the world make up a group or a body of believers? This body belongs to Jesus and was paid for by His sacrifice. The last portion of that verse says, "each member belongs to all the others." If we belong to Jesus and are unified in Him, then we have the opportunity to belong to other members, too. This means that believers share unity in Jesus. Here is the Bible verse again: Romans 12:5: "In Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."

CLOSING

No. 14 Man's Predicament – Composite story

STORY INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our story session. Since we have started our time together, has anyone developed a poem or a song? Perhaps it relates to the stories we have told or maybe it relates to life as a Persian Christian. The Persian culture is full of many world-class poets and songwriters. (Allow time for the recitations.) Accountability: Did anyone tell the blood sacrifice story to someone else? What was their reaction? Did you learn a new truth as you told the story? Pre-story dialogue: Before leaving the Old Testament, I want to review the story of Man's Predicament. It is a composite story covering generations prior to Christ. Each of the heroes of the Bible that I mention have their own unique stories. However, this story compresses these stories into a timeline for two reasons. First, the stories are from God's word; God gave them to us. Secondly, I want you to know that there are many other Bible stories that we will hear that have not yet been told to you! In fact, I probably have not heard them all. However, the stories have been preserved in written form and it is my responsibility to share these with you. As I tell this story, keep in mind that mankind had been sinful for thousands of years. No matter what man tried, a personal, lifelong and obedient relationship with God seemed impossible. However, the Lord knew that a Messiah was needed; Jesus must come. Please listen to this story and memorize it. It will serve as a convenient tool to help you be a witness when time is very short. Here is the story, "Man's Predicament".

BIBLE STORY

Truth: God provides a way to restore us to a right relationship with Him.

Barrier -- God provides a way for salvation

Man's Predicament

Composite Bible story

In the beginning when God created the man and woman, He created them in His image, in His likeness. They had fellowship with each other. He talked with them and they understood Him. They lived in the blessed state of the garden that He made for them. But the day came that they did not keep His Word and they disobeyed by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of the good and evil. And when they did they were, their eyes were open and they were aware of their nakedness and they were ashamed and they hid from God when He came in the cool of the day. Their relationship with Him was broken because of their disobedience. In this way sin entered the world. Yet God showed mercy on them in His judgment. He did not destroy them. And He even clothed them and covered them with the coverings of animal skins. But He sent them out of the garden and there they lived outside of the garden and the sin of Adam and Eve was seen in their sons as well. One son, Cain, killed Abel. And yet God did not give up on His plan to restore fellowship with the people that He had made. And so He blessed Adam and Eve with another son, Seth, and through him additional generations were born. But during the time of Seth's descendent, Noah, all the people of the earth were wicked and all their thoughts were continually wicked and it grieved God to see this. His fellowship with man was badly broken by these many sins and so God wipes out all of the earth in His judgment, preserving only Noah and his family to begin again and to start the relationship with man afresh. He made a covenant with them and in due seasons after many generations He chose one of the descendents of Noah, a man named Abraham, and promised that through Abraham, God would bless all peoples that Abraham's descendents would be numerous and through them great good would come. With the passing of many generations, Abraham's descendents did multiply as God has said. God blessed the Egyptians through the descendents of Abraham. He brought the descendents of Abraham who were then called Israelites out of Egypt with God's mighty hand. He took them to a land that He had promised them, a land that was rich with crops and with natural resources and with good cities to live in. And as he blessed them there, you would say now at last the fellowship between God and people will be excellent. But when they became prosperous in the good land that God gave them, they turned away from God's ways. They forgot the Lord who had blessed them so and had brought them out of Egypt into that good land. And so God gave them over to the hands of their enemies who came against them and triumphed against them. And the people cried out to God and said oh, we have sinned, we have turned away from the ways of our God. They said,

please deliver us, and God in His mercy, raised up deliverers. And time and time again this happened over and over. During all of this time people were making the sacrifices for sin that God had told their forefathers to make. He had specified how to sacrifice different animals to make different kinds of sacrifice including one for the removal of the sins that they had committed. The people continued to do the sacrifices year by year, the high priest went in and made the specified sacrifice to remove the people's sins for the preceding year, but each year again, the people returned to their sins. God raised up from the people a king. The king's name was Saul. And he did not follow the ways of God and so God replaced him with another king, a king after God's own heart, he said. This king's name was David. To him God made a promise, He said that when your days are done and you will rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you. They will come from your own line and I will establish the kingdom of your offspring and you will have an offspring that will rule eternally. David had many sons and then after his death Solomon followed him. After Solomon's death the kingdom split. Ten of the tribes of Israel formed one kingdom and the tribe from which David came, the tribe of Judah, and another formed a separate kingdom. And many of those who were God's people didn't follow His ways. Well they knew the sacrificial system that they had with God's law and even then they broke fellowship with God because they wanted to follow the ways of the surrounding peoples. God sent them prophet after prophet to call them back to fellowship with Him and yet their hearts were not turned toward God. The majority of the people followed the ways of the others religions and of the other peoples in the regions. So after many warnings God allowed their enemies to come in against them and in judgment carried away the ten tribes leaving only the two tribes, including the line of David. Even among that group they did not follow God's plan consistently. There were some who followed God's ways, who trusted Him well, but many did not follow His ways. Many of the kings who were descended from David did not follow the ways of God. God in His love and mercy sent them prophet after prophet to warn them, turn back to the ways of God. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and your mind and your strength. But even they did not heed these warnings from the prophets. As a result God let their enemies come in against them and carried them away into exile for 70 years. But God did not forget His people. He brought them back from the exile at the end of those 70 years and restored them to the land that He had promised them. And the people began to rebuild and some of the groups said we must turn back to the Lord our God. He has judged us and He has disciplined us because we have been wicked and sinful people. Our hearts have not been towards God. And so they sought to restore the land and follow the law. But with the passing of time many of them turned their hearts away from God as well. They were waiting, waiting for the fulfillment of the promises that God had made through the various prophets, about a coming one, who would rule with righteousness and justice, who would be called a wonderful counselor, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, who would be called Mighty God. They waited for the one whom the prophet said there would be no end to His reign. These and many other prophecies caused the people to look with longing because they knew that the law had not changed their heart and they knew that though they did the sacrifices for the covering of sin, their heart was not changed. They still were prone to sin. And then came a time in which there was no new revelation from God. For 400 years God's people waited for the fulfillment of the prophecies that He had given. They waited and they wondered. What can man do in this circumstance?

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Who can tell this story? Here are several questions that will be important for you as a follower of Jesus. It is helpful to remember what it was like to be separated from God prior to your life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ, the Messiah. Following Jesus is the only way to eternal life. These questions will help you share your faith and help others know the way to Jesus.

- What do these series of stories reveal about man's nature?
- What do they reveal about man's efforts to have fellowship with God?
- Do those efforts succeed? If they succeed for a time, do they succeed from generation to generation? Why?
- What has God been doing in order to establish fellowship with the people He has made?
- What kind of steps did He take?

- What kind of actions did He carry out?

What were the consequences of those steps and those actions? Application: Think of a poem or song you have heard that describes man's predicament without a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. Maybe there is a famous Persian poet that you have memorized that describes the hopelessness of man without faith in God. Maybe you would want to develop your own poem or song that illustrates today's story of Man's Predicament. Think about life in today's times without Christ this week. Think about life without a personal relationship with our Heavenly Father. Before we end, I need to ask if you have you memorized our Memory Verse for Week 3? It is from Romans 12:5: "In Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." Who can say this verse for our group? Prepare: To prepare for our next session, I want each person to bring something that a baby needs. You may bring something that belongs to your own baby or something from when you were a baby. Thank you!

CLOSING

**NOTE: MOVING INTO NEW TESTAMENT--Living in the Family of Jesus
No. 15 Jesus' birth narrative Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 2:1-39**

STORY INTRODUCTION

Our story today is about Jesus' birth. Thank you for bringing items that belong to a baby. Please hold those while we review our last lesson of Man's Predicament. Who can tell the story?

Accountability: (1) Did you have an opportunity to share last session's story with someone since we last met? Is there someone that should hear that story? Will you tell it to them? (2) Who thought of a Persian poem or song that tells of life today without a personal relationship with God? Did anyone develop his or her own poem or song? (Allow time for sharing.) Pre-story dialogue: Today's story is about wonderful events around Jesus' birth. Please share with the group the baby item that you brought. Why is it important to the baby? Is anyone in the group [planning to be married, married, planning to have children, pregnant, have children, grandchildren, etc. as appropriate to do so). Now, who can tell me why the birth of a boy or girl is so important? Why is the death of a newborn or young child so troubling? If anyone has a baby, please share your hopes for your child. In our story today, think about all the events surrounding the birth of Jesus. Think about the story from God's viewpoint. Why was it necessary for a Messiah to come? Why was it necessary for Jesus to be born? Why did God have the angels announce the birth of Jesus? Here is the story of Jesus' birth as recorded in the New Testament.

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Jesus is God's only Son.

Bridge -- Review-Isa/Jesus/Mary known/skewed (Essential for Salvation)

Jesus' birth narrative

Matthew 1:18-25 & Luke 2:1-39

The prophet had said that the anointed one would be born in Bethlehem, a small town in Judea, the home of David. But Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth, a town in Galilee in the northern part of Israel. In those days, foreigners called Romans ruled the land of Israel. Mary was engaged to Joseph, but before they were united, she learned that she was going to have a baby through the power of the Holy Spirit. Now Joseph was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace Mary publicly, so he planned to divorce her without many people knowing. Then in a dream, an angel appeared to Joseph and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife. She has conceived with a baby from the Holy Spirit. When this baby is born, be sure to call him Jesus because He will save His people from their sins." This fulfilled the prophecy that said "The virgin will give birth to a son and they will call his name Immanuel, which means "God with us." When Joseph woke up, he obeyed the angel and took Mary as his wife. However, he did not have intercourse with her until she gave birth to a son. Joseph remembered what the angel said and named the baby Jesus. ... Now, before Jesus was born, a Roman ruler gave orders for a census to be taken of the entire world that they governed. Everyone was to return to his own town to register. Now Joseph was a descendant of a king named David, so he took Mary, his wife, and went down to Bethlehem. It was near the time for Mary to give birth to her child. ... While Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem, Mary gave birth to her firstborn son and she wrapped him in cloth and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in an inn because of the census. In the fields near Bethlehem, there were shepherds keeping watch over their sheep at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord was shining down from heaven upon them and the shepherds were terrified. The angel said, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Messiah, the Lord and this will be a sign to you. You will find the baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly, a great number of angels appeared and began to praise God saying, glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests. When the angels had left them and gone away into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and they found Mary and Joseph and the baby who was lying in a manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what the angels had said about this child. All who heard the shepherds were amazed. So the shepherds returned to their flocks praising God for what they had seen and heard. Mary

treasured these things and kept them in her heart. On the eighth day as it was their custom to circumcise the baby, Mary and Joseph remembered what the angel had told them and named the baby boy Jesus. They took him to the Temple in Jerusalem to present Jesus to the Lord. This was to fulfill the Law of Moses which said, "Every firstborn male is to be dedicated to the Lord." They offered a sacrifice of a pair of two small birds--doves or young pigeons. When they arrived at the Temple, they met a righteous and devout man named Simeon who was waiting for the salvation of Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him and had let him know that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah! When Mary and Joseph took Jesus to fulfill the Law, Simeon took him into his arms and praised God. He said, "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, now I can die as your servant for I have seen your salvation with my own eyes. You have prepared this in sight of everyone. He's a light for the Gentiles and for glory to your people." The child's mother and father were amazed at what he said. Then Simeon blessed them and told Mary, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in this nation. He will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts are revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul, too. There was also a prophetess named Anna who was there, too. She was very old and had lived with her husband only seven years after marriage. She was a widow until age 84. She never left the temple, but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that moment, she thanked God and told about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. When Joseph and Mary had done everything that was required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to their home. *[Feel free to add Jesus in the Temple if time allows.]* And that is our story from God's Word.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Let's review this story in light of what you know about Jesus' life and ministry. Why was it necessary that God send His only Son to earth? Think about what the angel said to the shepherds. If you had been a shepherd, would you have believed that the Messiah had been born? Why did the heavenly host sing about peace on earth? When Joseph and Mary took the infant Jesus to the temple, what was important that Simeon and Anna said to them about Jesus? Do you see that God was at work in the hearts of many people who were looking forward to the Messiah coming to earth? A poem is recorded in the Bible that presents Jesus' birth with tremendous truth. Have you ever created (*avoid the word "written"*) your own poem? Think about it, while I recite this poem. A disciple of Jesus named John, wrote the poem.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. ... The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize Him. He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him. Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:1-5, 9-14)

Application: Would several of you recite an original poem or sing a song in our next session that celebrates the birth of Jesus? Thank you for bringing the baby items to this session. As you carry them home, tell this story of Jesus' birth to someone who asks about the items. Be sure to point out how God sent Jesus as His Son to be the Messiah as promised. Memory Verse for Week 3 – Romans 12:5: "In Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." Preparation: In our next session we will have a special celebration for Jesus' birth. I will bring refreshments for our party, but I want you to bring worship offerings. You may

bring money, livestock, produce or other things that you will give to honor Jesus. We will collect those and use them as a collection to help those in our group.

CLOSING

No. 16 Magi visit the Christ child Matthew 2:1-23

STORY INTRODUCTION

Today's Bible story is a new story about Jesus' birth. Accountability: First, however, let's begin by singing songs or recitations that you have developed that celebrate His birth. Who would like to lead us? (*Allow time for this if there are several. If nobody has a song or poem to share, please have at least one participant tell the birth narrative for review of the last session.*) Did you tell the story of the birth of Jesus to anyone after our last session together? Pre-story Dialogue: In our last session, I asked you to bring gifts as an offering of worship. Please hold those until the end of our session. Our story today is one that you heard before about several wise men or Magi who learned of the birth of a Messiah. They traveled from the east to find him. Evidently it was several months since Jesus' birth because He is called a child in the story. Previously we approached this story from the perspective of the Magi searching for Jesus. In this telling, please listen to the way that the Magi worshipped Jesus. What did they bring Him to show their devotion? Think about the proper response to worship for a follower of Jesus. Here is the story "The Magi Visit the Christ Child."

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Jesus was the foretold Anointed One, the Messiah.

Bridge, possibly Gap -- New--To be Persian is to be Muslim; Muslims give alms to the poor (act of worship to God); Zoroastrianism is a competing religion

Magi visit the Christ child

Matthew 2:1-23

Some time after Jesus had been born in Bethlehem, there came wise men from a country to the east seeking the one born king of the Jews. They had seen a star and followed it to Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, they went to King Herod asking for the location where the new king was born. This disturbed the King to think that a rival to his throne might have been born. However, the king called together the experts of God's Word and asked them where the Messiah was to be born. The experts reported that a prophet of God named Micah had received a word from God many centuries earlier. Micah had reported that out of Bethlehem would come a ruler who would be as a shepherd." King Herod then called the wise men--the Magi—and asked the time that the star had appeared. Herod said that they should search in Bethlehem for the child and report back to him when the child was found, but he really wanted to kill the child. The wise men followed the star to Bethlehem. The star stopped over the place where the child was living and the wise men were overjoyed. They entered the house where Mary and Joseph were living and they found the child with his mother Mary. They bowed down and they worshipped him and they presented expensive gifts of gold and incense and ointment called myrrh. An angel warned the wise men in a dream not to return to King Herod, but to return to their country by a different road. When they were gone, an angel warned Joseph in a dream to take Mary and the baby Jesus and go to Egypt and live there until the wicked king died. When Herod heard that the Magi had outsmarted him, he was outraged and gave orders to kill all the baby boys less than two years old. This accounted for the timing that the wise men had told him. After the king died, the angel again told Joseph to return to the land of Israel. But Joseph feared the new king. After being warned in a dream, he returned to the town of Nazareth in Galilee and there Jesus would live.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

This is a new story for you. Who can tell the story? Where were the Magi from? Did you know that some Bible scholars believe that the Magi were from Persia? If so, what does this story mean to those who would say that to be a Persian is to be a Muslim? What had the Magi seen that led them to King Herod? Do you think that God uses supernatural events today so that people can find Jesus? How did the King know where to look for Jesus? Do you think that Persians today are looking for a Messiah? Do you think Persians can find Jesus today if they listen to God's Word? When the Magi found the house where the child was living, what did they do? Why did the Magi give Jesus and his parents presents of expensive gifts? (Optional question--Did you know that frankincense today is found in only one country--Iran?) Do you think that giving gifts should be a normal part of a Christian's worship? Christians around the world

celebrate Christmas each year on December 25. Some Christians also celebrate Epiphany, which is the coming of the Magi on January 6. Unfortunately, the emphasis has been placed on the Magi's gifts rather than worshipping the Christ, so December 25 is the main celebration day; a holy day. Christians meet together to sing hymns and tell the Christmas stories we have told in this session and the last session. Sometimes families and friends exchange gifts as a way of remembering the Magi's acts of worship. Application: Please think about the gift you brought today to celebrate Jesus' birth. Think what it means to you to be giving the offering as an act of worship. Would you give the money or other item as a show of love for Jesus? (Be sure to stress the importance of accountability as a group for how the money will be spent or sold to honor Christ.) Should our story sessions always include worship? Should our story sessions include giving offerings as an act of worship? How can we honor the Lord with our possessions and our time? Will you spend time this week looking for people who are looking for the Messiah? As you tell this story to someone you know, ask him or her if they are like the Magi who were looking for Jesus. Memory Verse for Week 4 -- John 15:5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." Prepare: Continue the practice of bringing an offering as an act of worship.

CLOSING

No. 17 John's Message and the Baptism of Jesus Matthew 3:1-6; 11-17 and John 1:29-34

STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can tell our last story? How did you feel about giving your gift as an offering to the Lord? Would someone like to sing a song or say a poem that they have written? Accountability: Did anyone share the story of the “Magi Visiting the Christ Child” with someone else? Were they seeking the true Messiah? What were they seeking instead? What are some artificial messiahs among Persians today? Now, did you bring an offering this session? Will you give it to the Lord? *(Collect the money or items and stress the proper stewardship of the fund. Perhaps the group could enlist a responsible treasurer.)* Pre-story dialogue: Our story today is very important for a number of reasons. You have heard this story previously. It is the story, “John’s Message and the Baptism of Jesus.” Does anyone remember this story and can tell it for us? As I retell the story, I want you to describe John the Baptist. Please tell me the central truth of his message to the people. How is the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit represented in this story? Next, please listen carefully for the reason why Jesus wanted to be baptized. What does it mean for our group of believers? Here is our story from God’s Word.

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Jesus is our example for righteous living.

Truth: God wants us to have faith in Jesus.

Truth: God is one with three characteristics—the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Gap -- New-Ordinance--Baptism / Review--To be Persian is to be Muslim / Review-Trinity misunderstood (Father, Son & Mary)

John's Message and the Baptism of Jesus

Matthew 3:1-6; 11-17 and John 1:29-34

The beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begins this way. Isaiah the prophet said: "I will send my messenger ahead of you who will prepare your way, a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight paths for Him.'" And so, John came baptizing in the desert region and preaching of baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him.

Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist and his food was locusts and wild honey. And this was his message. "After me will come one more powerful than I. The thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to stop Him and said to Jesus, "I need to be baptized by you! Why do you come to me like this?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now. It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." And so John consented and baptized Jesus. As soon as Jesus was baptized, He came up out of the water and at that moment, Heaven was opened. Jesus saw the Spirit of God descending in the form similar to a dove. It landed on Him. And a voice from Heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love. With Him I am well pleased." ... Another disciple of Jesus wrote that when John saw Jesus coming toward him he said, "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This is the one I meant when I said a man who comes after me has surpassed me because He was before me. I, myself did not know Him. But the reason I came baptizing with water was that He might be revealed to Israel." Then John said, "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on Jesus. I would not have known Him except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me. The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is He who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. I have seen and testify that this is the Son of God." That is the story from God's Word.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Let's review this story. What was John doing in the wilderness? Why do you think that the people came out to hear John? What were some of the things that John preached about? Now, let's view this story from a Christian perspective -- Think for a second about John the Baptists' hesitancy to baptize Jesus. Why would he do that? What did Jesus say to John? Do you see how baptism was an example for Christians to follow? Why do you think God's Word says that

Jesus came up out of the water? Was Jesus sprinkled with water or was He immersed under the water? If Christians are to follow Jesus' example, how should they be baptized [meaning immersed]? Do you remember what happened next? When this story was told earlier, the emphasis was given to the presence at the baptism of the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus and God's voice of affirmation. Do you see how the Trinity comes together as God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit? Application: Should new believers be baptized? Why should believers be baptized? (*example, not salvation*) How should this be done? (*immersion*) Who should do the baptizing? (*believers*) When should believers be baptized? (*after conversion*) When can we baptize new believers in our group? (*Discuss and set a time. You may want to wait until the story of Pentecost in Acts 2 or Peter & Cornelius in Acts 10.*) Tell this story often. As you tell it, let me encourage you to meditate about this story's meaning for your faith, following Jesus' example through the ordinance of baptism and your belief in God as the Trinity. Memory Verse for Week 4 -- John 15:5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

CLOSING

No. 18 Temptations of Jesus in the Wilderness Matthew 4:1-11

WORSHIP

Begin this and all future story sessions with a time of worship. (*Begin with prayer, receive offerings and encourage the singing of Christian songs and recitals of Christian poems developed by the group participants or other Persian believers from other groups. From now on each story script in Following Jesus will only mention "worship" which is intended to describe the elements mentioned here. The idea here is that this group is becoming a church through a Bible-based discover process. The Bible story being told substitutes for what literates call "Bible reading" and "expositional sermons". These are not part of the Persian oral learners' world and must be avoided.*)

STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can tell the story of "John's Message and Jesus' Baptism?" Why is it so important to follow the examples that Jesus establishes for us? It has been awhile since we have mentioned it, but let's review our definition of discipleship. Who knows it by heart? "Discipleship is a personal, ...lifelong, ...obedient relationship with Jesus Christ. If we follow Jesus, He does three things in our lives: He *transforms my character into Christlikeness*. He changes my values to Kingdom values, and He involves me in His mission in the home, and in the church, and in the world." Accountability: Let's review our plans for baptizing new believers by immersion. Pre-story Dialogue: According to the Bible, immediately following His baptism, Jesus was led into the wilderness where He was tempted. I want you to really listen as I tell this story and discern, number one, who was tempting Jesus? Secondly, how long was Jesus in the wilderness? See if you can pick out that number of days as I tell the story. Third, what did Jesus do when He was tempted? Fourth, what do you suppose happens when we respond to temptation like Jesus responded? And then last, how does this story relate to the aspect of discipleship that following transforms my character into Christlikeness? Now this is the story from Matthew's account of the temptation of Jesus. This is the Bible story.

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Jesus was tempted but He never sinned.

Truth: Believers use Scripture to defend their faith.

Gap -- New-Jesus was sinless / Believers use Scriptures to defend their faith

Temptations of Jesus in the Wilderness

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting 40 days and 40 nights, Jesus was hungry. And so the devil came to Him and said, if you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread. Turn these stones into something that you can eat. Jesus answered, it is written man does not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. Then the devil took Jesus to a holy city and had Him stand on the highest point of the temple. And this is what the devil said to Jesus. If you really are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written, He will command His angels concerning you and they will lift you up in their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. But Jesus answered him. It is also written, do not put the Lord, your God to the test. Again, the devil took Jesus to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. All this I will give you, the devil said, if you will just bow down and worship me. But Jesus said to him, away from me Satan, for it is written worship the Lord, your God and serve Him only. Immediately the devil left him and angels came and cared for Jesus. And that is our Bible story

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Who can tell this Bible story? Why was it significant that the temptations of Jesus immediately followed His baptism by John? Can Christians today expect to be tempted? Can we expect temptation to come at different times than others? Why? Now, let's consider each of the temptations one by one. Why did the devil tempt Jesus to turn rocks into bread? Have you ever had a physical need and had selfish thoughts? Why did Jesus say that God's Word was better than bread? Now, why was Jesus tempted to prove that He was the Messiah to everyone

gathered at the Temple? What did Jesus say to resist the devil? When the devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and asked Jesus to worship the devil, why did Jesus resist the temptation? Do you believe that Jesus was tempted just as people are today? Did Jesus ever sin? What did Jesus rely upon to keep from falling into sin? Can you trust the stories of God to help you avoid sin? Why did the devil try using God's own Word against Jesus? Did Jesus resist the devil? What happened when Jesus told the devil to flee? How does Jesus transform the thoughts of his disciples? Who can state our definition of discipleship? What was that part that mentioned "transforms my character into Christlikeness"? What did you learn today that would transform your character into Christlikeness? Application: Since Jesus never sinned, do you believe He can help you avoid temptation? Tell this story to a friend and think about the temptations in your own life. What stories from the Bible come to mind that will help you resist sinful temptations? Be sure to thank the Lord for helping you resist temptation by the power of God's Word! Memory Verse for Week 4 -- John 15:5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

CLOSING

No. 19 Jesus and Nicodemus John 3:1-21

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WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can tell us the story of the temptations of Jesus? “Discipleship is a personal, ...lifelong, ...obedient relationship with Jesus Christ. If we follow Jesus, He does three things in our lives: He transforms my character into Christlikeness. He changes my values to Kingdom values, and He involves me in His mission in the home, and in the church, and in the world.” Pre-story dialogue: Who remembers the story of Jesus calling his disciples Peter, James and John? Do you think everyone followed Jesus? Do you remember the story of Nicodemus? Did he follow Jesus as a disciple? We know that he was not listed among the Twelve. I'd like to discuss the story of Nicodemus for how it applies to this point. What does the future hold for followers of Jesus? Did the Lord ever make promises about the future that a disciple can anticipate? Brainstorm with me for a few minutes, and let's name the stories that Jesus told about the future. One specific story that Jesus told conveyed a truth about eternal life. Do you remember the story of Jesus and Nicodemus? Who was Nicodemus? I want to have the story retold in a few minutes. However, I want to prepare you to listen to the story in a new way. When Jesus met with Nicodemus, what were the conditions that Jesus put on eternal life? Could anyone receive eternal life? How can a follower of Jesus have assurance that eternal life awaits him or her? And, finally, please listen for the Kingdom values possessed by a follower of Jesus. Please listen as the story of Jesus and Nicodemus is retold.

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Following Jesus changes our values into Kingdom values

Bridge -- Review-Persian Christians have an eternal relationship with God

Jesus and Nicodemus

John 3:1-21

Now there was a man, a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews, named Nicodemus. And he came to Jesus by night, and he said to Jesus, “Teacher, we know you must be from God for no one can do these things unless he is from God.” And Jesus answered Nicodemus and said, “Truly, truly I say to you unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.” And Nicodemus said, “How can a man be born again? Does he enter his mother’s womb and be born a second time?” And Jesus said, “Truly, truly I say unto you, unless one is born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is of the flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is of the Spirit. Do not marvel that I say to you, you must be born again. The wind blows where it wishes to and you hear the sound of it. But you don’t know where it comes from, you don’t know where it’s going.” And it’s the same with the Spirit of God and the Spirit of God in your life. And Nicodemus said, “How can these things come to be?” And Jesus said, “You’re a teacher of Israel and you don’t understand these things? Truly I say to you we speak of that which you see, we speak of that which you hear and what you know, and you don’t receive our words, you don’t receive our witness. And so how can you believe if we speak of spiritual things? And so I tell you this, just as Moses lifted the serpent up in the wilderness even so the Son of Man must also be lifted up, for God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” And Jesus continued by saying, “For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world but that the world through Him might be saved.” Now that was our Bible story for today.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Let's review this story from a Christian perspective. Who can tell it? Let's talk about that story.

- When Nicodemus and Jesus talked together, why did Jesus say that rebirth was necessary?
- Now, how does a child learn all that is necessary to grow into adulthood?
- What is it like to be a spiritual baby in Christ?
- What does it take for a follower of Jesus to grow from childhood to adulthood spiritually?
- What does it mean for a follower of Jesus to have the Holy Spirit in their lives?
- How does being a follower of Jesus change your values into Kingdom values?
- Now, with that as a background, what did Jesus say to Nicodemus about eternal life?
- How can believers trust that following Jesus means following Him in this life and into eternity?

Application: How will you apply this lesson to your own life? Now, how would you use this story? Is there someone that you know that needs this story? Please tell the story as a reminder to other believers that following Jesus lasts throughout this life and into eternity. The definition for following Jesus is the same as discipleship. Who can say our definition we learned about discipleship? *[Discipleship is a personal, lifelong, obedient relationship with Jesus Christ in which He transforms my character into Christlikeness, changes my values to Kingdom values, and involves me in His mission in the home, the church, and the world.]* Tell this story to a Christian friend. Pray together that you both will not be afraid and bold in sharing stories about Jesus. Memory Verse for Week 4 -- John 15:5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

CLOSING

No. 20 Disciples are Jesus' Mother, Brothers, and Sisters Mark 3:13-34; (ref. Matthew 10:37)

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Our session today is about the disciples who accepted Jesus' invitation. It is also about being a part of God's family. In fact, that is the title of this series, "Living in the Family of God." However, first, it is important that we identify stories that we have heard. I want us to name Bible stories we have heard and they related to our definition of discipleship.

Let's take each section of the discipleship definition and name a Bible story and tell why it relates:

Discipleship is a personal (Adam and Eve – because they knew God on a daily basis)

Discipleship is lifelong (Abraham and Sarah – because they were blessed with a baby at 99!

Discipleship is an obedient relationship with Jesus Christ. (Moses or Mary – they obeyed even though they did not have all of the answers or knew what God fully intended for them).

He transforms my character into Christlikeness. (Temptations of Jesus—He didn't sin and can help me not to sin.)

He changes my values to Kingdom values, (Nicodemus needed to be born again—start anew).

Who can tell the story of Nicodemus to help us review that story?

Pre-story Dialog: Today's story will help you to see how Jesus involves His disciples in His mission in the home, and in the church, and in the world.

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Following Jesus takes priority over any other relationship (family, friends, ancestors, enemies, and governments)

Bridge -- New-Strong family ties

Disciples are Jesus' Mother, Brothers, and Sisters

Mark 3:13-35

Jesus was on a mountainside. And He called out the names of those He wanted to come to Him. He appointed twelve men to be with Him and that he might send them out to preach and have authority over demons and to drive them out. Here are the twelve he appointed: Simon--Jesus called him Peter; then James and John, the sons of Zebedee who He called Sons of Thunder; Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James who was the son of Alphaeus, Thaddeus, Simon who was a Zealot; and Judas Iscariot. Judas Iscariot was the one who betrayed Jesus. Then they all went into a house. Pretty soon another crowd gathered there. There were so many people in the house they couldn't even eat. When Jesus' family heard about this, they went to take try and help him. They said, "He is out of His mind." And the teachers of the law who traveled down from Jerusalem also accused Jesus. They said, "You are possessed by Satan! Since He is the prince of demons, he is able to drive out demons!" So Jesus called out to them and gave them a parable. Jesus said, "How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, then he can't stand. It's the end of him. In fact, nobody can go into a strong man's house and steal his belongings. You have to tie up the strong man first and then you can safely rob him. I tell you something that is very true--all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven! He is guilty of an eternal sin." Jesus said that because they were saying that He had an evil spirit. Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. They couldn't get in the house, so they sent word into where Jesus was sitting. They told Jesus, "Your own mother and brothers are outside looking for you." And Jesus said to them, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" Then he looked at those seated in a circle around Him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother!"

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

This is a new story to consider. How many of the twelve disciples of Jesus can you name? Why did Jesus set aside a dozen men out of the hundreds who were following Him? Out of the Christians in our group, is/are a leader(s) emerging? (Option: If you know a group of Christians,

have any of them been designated as leaders?) Now, let us consider another part of this story where Jesus calls his followers his mother and brothers. How important is your own family? Why do you think Jesus said that following Him was more important than family bonds? In another reference, Jesus told his disciples, "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me." [Matthew 10:37] What does this say about the level of priority that Jesus is given in a Christian's life? Application: Let me encourage you to tell this story to a family member that you care for very much. When you tell it, see if you think Jesus is asking Christians to stop loving their family members. Not at all! Instead, consider that Jesus asks Christians to put their love for him at such an intense level, that love for all others diminishes in comparison. Our Memory Verse for this week has been from John 15:5: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." What does this verse mean? To help us learn it, let's discuss it phrase by phrase: "I am the vine; you are the branches." If Jesus is the source of our very lives, how close should our dependence upon Him be? "If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit" is the next segment. It is actually a promise that Jesus wants to make us productive so that God is glorified through our behavior. The last part of the memory verse is "apart from me you can do nothing." What happens to a branch when it is severed from a vine? Let's say the verse together: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:5. Prepare: Brainstorm all the symbols you know that represent Christianity. (Dove, crown of thorns, fish, cross, etc.) Did you know that the early Christians used the symbol of a fish and would write it on their meeting places. (Do not mention the Greek letters ICTHUS with Persian oral learners. Instead, use the secondary meaning that we are to be "fishers" of men.) Christians have also used signs like the anchor to symbolize Jesus is our anchor in times of stormy trouble. They were also able to hide the cross in the top part of the anchor in times when it was dangerous to be a Christian. Again, fishermen use anchors while casting their nets from boats. And, of course, the best-known symbol is the cross. We will begin a special study of the Disciples' Cross beginning with our next session. The Disciples' Cross is a very special collection of stories that you will not want to miss!

CLOSING

*** **BEGIN DISCIPLES' CROSS** ***

No. 21 The cross / RELATIONSHIP / Peter's confession and Jesus' rebuke Matthew 16:13-28

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Who would like to review our previous story about Jesus and His Disciples? I am excited to introduce you to the first of several stories that we will use a cross as a learning symbol. Do you remember the story of Jesus on the cross? What does the cross symbolize? The next six stories form what believers around the world – in more than 50 languages – have come to call the Disciples' Cross. In these stories, we will use a cross as a way of learning about discipleship. Who can say our definition of discipleship? "Discipleship is a personal, lifelong, obedient relationship with Jesus Christ. If we follow Jesus, He does three things in our lives: He transforms my character into Christlikeness. He changes my values to Kingdom values, and He involves me in His mission in the home, and in the church, and in the world." Pre-story dialogue: Now, who can describe a cross? (*two wooden beams lashed or bolted together; top and bottom/left and right; horizontal and vertical beams, four nailing points, etc.*) What was a cross used for? In this story, listen for how Jesus introduced the idea of a cross and discipleship. Please listen for the answers to Jesus' questions to his disciples regarding His true identity and purpose. Who did they say that Jesus was? How great of a priority should we place upon the relationship that we have with Jesus?

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Disciples' Cross Intro and RELATIONSHIP

Gap: FOLLOWING JESUS REQUIRES YOU TO DENY YOURSELF (placing Jesus above all relationships and other life priorities)

Title: Peter's Confession and Jesus' Rebuke

Scripture: Matthew 16:13-28

Story: We find Jesus with His disciples, and He is on the coast at Caesarea Philippi and with the disciples gathered about Him. He asks them, "Who do you hear people saying that I am?" Some of them said that people out there are calling Him John the Baptist, some others call Him Elias, some others say He's Jeremiah, and others say He's other of the prophets. But then, Jesus asks His disciples, "I want to know who do you think I am?" Simon Peter was the one that answered and he said, "Why, you're the Christ, you're the Son of the Living God." Jesus immediately responded to Simon Peter and said, "You're blessed. You aren't told this, it didn't come from humans, but my Father, who is in heaven has told you this." Then Jesus said directly to Peter, "I tell you, you are Peter, a small stone, and upon this rock I will build my church, and even the gates of hell itself cannot stand in its way." After this discussion time with them, He began to tell His disciples of what He was going to do and that He would go to Jerusalem. He would endure a number of things in going to Jerusalem and in being in Jerusalem. The elders and the chief priests there would do a lot of things to Him and say a lot of things about Him, but that He would be killed by them, but on the third day He would rise, and He would live. Immediately upon hearing this, Peter grabbed Him, and Peter said, "Oh no! These things just will not happen to you." Jesus turned and said immediately to Peter, "Get behind me Satan, you are an offense to me because you follow the things that are of man and not those that are of the Lord." Then Jesus said to all of the disciples, not just to Peter, "If any of you or anybody wants to come after me as a disciple, he must deny himself. He must take up his cross and follow me. For whoever tries to save His life is going to lose it. And whoever will lose his life because of me; he will save it. But what benefit is it to anybody if he gains everything there is to own in this whole world and loses his own soul? What can any man give in exchange for his soul? But the Son of Man will come in His glory and the glory of His Father, with His angels, and then He will reward every man according to His works. And I say to you folks, there will be some standing here which will not see death because they'll see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Would someone please volunteer to tell this Bible story? This story is a transition for some Persians who have just decided to follow Jesus and the believers who are faced with denying some things. How would you answer Jesus' question? How do you see Jesus? Think about the time you were coming to Christ. Would someone like to explain to the group how they first heard the truth about Jesus? What did you first think? Where did you position Him in your own understanding? What about other believers that you have known? Did they first think He was just an ordinary man or a myth? What was the process by which you came to believe that Jesus was more than a prophet? Please share with the group how you came to see Jesus as the Christ in order to be a disciple? Do you think Peter really understood who Jesus was in His confession, or was it just totally given to him by the Father? How do we know that he understood just a little? If Peter had really understood, he would not have said what he did. Have you ever been guilty of following those things that are more human and more of the devil and not of the Lord? How would you explain Jesus to other Persians who are not believers? What is your lifelong obligation concerning following Jesus? What will it take for you to take up your cross and follow Jesus as a disciple? How can you give top priority to Jesus? Application: In the time before our next session, please ask three non-Christians what they believe about Jesus. Please remember their answers to report in our next session. Ask their permission to tell them today's story about "Peter's Confession and Jesus' Rebuke." The memory verse for this week is Matthew 16:24. It is taken from our story today. "Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.'"

CLOSING

No. 22 Bottom of cross / WORD / Obedient & Disobedient Sons Matthew 21:28-32

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can tell the story of “Peter’s Confession and Jesus’ Rebuke.” Accountability: Please share the answers that people gave to you about who they thought that Jesus was. Pre-story dialogue: Up to now we’ve talked about the relationship that a disciple has with Christ and with other people. Our second story is about obedience to God’s Word. If you think about the Disciples’ Cross, the bottom part of the cross represents obedience to God’s Word. It is through that obedience that believers stay in relationship to God. The New Testament is very clear that obedience is the key element and the difference among Jesus’ disciples. In fact, if you study the disciples, the only common characteristic they have is they were obedient. They actually did what Jesus said. Jesus continually said, “I do what I see my Father doing. I say what I hear my Father saying, and I expect you to do what I tell you to do. I expect you to say what I say.” Now, today’s story is one of my favorites. It’s a story where Jesus was doing some teaching and some priests and elders came to Him, and they questioned His authority. He answers their accusations with a parable. As I tell the story, please decide which of the two sons is truly obedient to his father. And this is the story from God’s Word.

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Disciples’ Cross (bottom of cross) Word of God

Gap: FOLLOWING JESUS REQUIRES OBEDIENCE TO HIM.

Title: Obedient & Disobedient Sons

Scripture: Matthew 21:28-32

Story: One day, Jesus went to the temple and the chief priests and elders of the people came to Jesus as He was teaching, and they said to Him, “By what authority do you do these things? By whose authority do you say these things?” And Jesus answered them and said, “I’ll ask you one thing, too, and if you tell me, I’ll also tell you by what authority I do these things. This is what I’ll ask. The baptism of John, from what source was that baptism? From heaven or from men?” Well, they began to talk amongst themselves and try to prepare an answer, and they said, you know, if we said from heaven, he’ll say to us, then why didn’t you believe Him? But, if we say from men, we’ll have the multitudes after us for they all hold John to be a prophet. And so they answered Jesus, and they said, “We don’t know.” And Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.” But then He said, “But what do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He came to the first and said, son, go work today in the vineyard. And that son said, ‘Yes, sir, I’ll work.’ But he didn’t go. And so the man went to the second son and said the same thing. But he said, ‘I will not.’ Yet afterwards he regretted, and he went and worked. And so I ask you, which of the two did the will of the Father?” Well, that’s the end of the story from God’s Word.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

In the parable that Jesus told, there were three characters: a father and two sons. Who would like to tell the story?

- Which of the three required a task that needed to be done?
- Who did he ask to do it?
- What was the response of the first son? What did he actually do? Did he really do what he said he would do?
- So, whom did the father ask next? What was that son’s response? But what did the second son actually do?
- After telling the story, what question did Jesus ask of the priests and the elders?
- What if he were to ask us the same question? Which one of these two would you be like?
- What is most important for followers Jesus to do?

Application: How does obedience to God strengthen our relationship with Him? I want you to think about this story. Tell it to someone if you can before we meet again. When you tell it again, see if you can identify at least one thing that you know God wants you to do. Think back over all the Bible stories that you know. What did God want us to do as believers? Will you begin doing it even before you report it back to our group? The memory verse for this week is Matthew 16:24:

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’”

CLOSING

No. 23 Top of cross / PRAYER--Praying in secret & Model Prayer Matthew 5:1-24 and 6:9-15

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can tell the stories about “Peter’s Confession and Jesus’ Rebuke” and “Obedient and Disobedient Sons” from our first two sessions in the Disciples’ Cross? Accountability: What is at least one thing that God wants you to do to be obedient to Him? How will this obedience strengthen your relationship with God? Pre-story dialogue: We’ve been talking about the vertical beam of the cross, which talks about our relationship with God. The bottom part of that bar we said is like the Word of God that we are to obey. The top part of that bar stands for prayer. We use many different kinds of prayer. We use worship prayers, we use petition prayers and intercessory prayer. We’ve used the cross as a symbol, and we’ve said the relationship is the key part of abiding in Christ. We’ve come to the first part of that, the bottom crossbar, which symbolizes obedience to God’s Word. Now we’re coming to the top part of the vertical beam, which is prayer. What is prayer? Prayer is what we call talking with God. As you listen to this prayer about prayer, listen for several things. What kinds of prayer are there? How should believers pray? How does prayer strengthen our relationship with God? As I story about prayer, also think about prayer used in worship, of thanksgiving, of requests, petitions, guidance, and so on. See if you can identify all of the kinds of things that are involved in the relationship and communion with God. Here is a story that Jesus used to teach His disciples about prayer.

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Disciples’ Cross—top of cross is PRAYER

Gap: FOLLOWING JESUS MEANS TALKING WITH HIM.

Title: Praying in Secret & Model Prayer

Scripture: Matthew 5:1-24 and 6:9-15

Story: Now Jesus was in an area where there were a lot of crowds following him. He went up on the side of a mountain and he sat down and his disciples and all the people around him joined him right there. When he saw that they were together and they were ready to hear him speak, he began to teach them and he said, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted, blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled, blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy, blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God, blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the sons of God, blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad for great is your reward in heaven. For in the same way, the persecuted the prophets who were before you. Jesus went on to tell them many things while he was teaching. You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It’s no longer any good for anything, so it’s just thrown out with the trash. You are the light of the world, a city on a hill that cannot be hidden and people don’t put a lamp under a bowl; instead, they put it on a lamp stand and it gives light to everyone in the house and your life is to be like that. It’s to shine before everybody so that they can see what you’re doing and because of what you’re doing, they are able to praise God. Do not think that I’ve come to do away with the law and the things that the prophets had said. I came not to do away with them, but to actually fulfill them. I tell you the truth until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen will by any means disappear from the law that God gave his people until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of these commandments, even if it’s a little one, and teaches others to do that, even if it’s a little one, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever teaches and practices these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the religious leaders, the teachers, those Pharisees, and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. You’ve heard it said that it was said a long time ago, do not murder and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. But I want to tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Now the Sanhedrin, the religious council that was there, could actually put someone under judgment if they called someone a worthless

nobody. Anyone who even says something like, you fool, or you idiot, will be in danger of the fire of hell. Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First, go and be reconciled to your brother, then come and offer your gift. As Jesus was teaching his disciples, the disciples asked Jesus if they could know a prayer to pray or how to pray to God. And in teaching this passage from God's word, Jesus was able to teach about forgiveness in a special way being central to prayer. And this is how Jesus prayed. He said this then is how you should pray: "Our father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts as we also forgive those who do things against us, or our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your father will not forgive your sins." And that is the story from God's Word.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Please identify all the different things that Jesus taught about prayer. Who can tell this story? Can anyone recite the "Lord's Prayer"? (Say it together in unison.)

- During Jesus' day, how did the religious leaders of the Jews, and even the Jewish people, give their tithes and offerings to the temple?
- How did the people who were considered to be religious leaders pray to God?
- What was the reason why the leaders gave to explain why they should pray publicly and not privately?
- Were the religious leaders giving to God, or were they giving in ways to be seen and respected by the people instead of giving to God and being respected by Him?
- How did Jesus instruct believers to give their money to God?
- How did Jesus instruct believers to pray to God?
- How do we pray today and should we make any changes in the way we pray in order to follow Jesus the way He asks us to follow Him?

Application: Before we finish this story session on talking with God, let me encourage you to pray often. You can pray along with the people right there where you are listening. Also, maybe meet with individuals in the days and weeks ahead. Talk with them, pray with them, and provide an example to other believers. Let's commit to having prayer become a normal part of our group of believers. Prayer was as common as breathing for those first century Christians. Let's share answers to prayer, too. In our worship time in our next time together, what can we do to make prayer and our offerings a vital part of our time together? How can we pray for others? How can we avoid making this a repetitious and therefore meaningless ritual? How can we have a time of thanksgiving and praise to God? Will we have an opportunity to share how God is answering our prayers? Would you like to hold a prayer meeting? We could meet for several hours and pray together about concerns that are on our hearts. (Plan for a prayer meeting.) Before our next session, meet with another believer. When you meet, ask each other, "Has God answered a prayer for you?" Share what God is doing in your life. See if you can recite the Lord's Prayer together. Invite the believer to the prayer meeting. Have you memorized this week's The memory verse? It is from Matthew 16:24: "Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.'"

CLOSING

**No. 24 Right of cross / FELLOWSHIP / Greatest Commandment and the Good Samaritan
Matthew 22:35-40 & Luke 10:25-37**

WORSHIP

Accountability: Be sure to incorporate new ways of sincere prayer and giving offerings discussed in the last storying session. (Prayers for others, thanksgiving, praise and ways that God answered prayer.) Did you establish time for a special prayer meeting? Please remind everyone of the prayer time that will meet separately from your time of worship.

STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can tell the story of Jesus' teachings on prayer? What were some of the ideas that Jesus mentioned? Can you say the Lord's Prayer? (*Say the Lord's Prayer in unison.*) Pre-story dialogue: In this session, I want to introduce the fourth idea of discipleship. In the last three stories of the Disciples' Cross, we've dealt with our relationship with God, which was symbolized by the vertical and horizontal crossbars coming together to form a cross. The bottom part of the cross symbolized obedience to the Word. The top part of the cross represented talking to God in prayer. Now, as we come to the horizontal part of the cross, we'll have the left and right part of the crossbar represent different aspects of discipleship. Today, we want to focus on the right side, which we will use to represent fellowship. Fellowship means spending time with believers, but it also means loving others as God has loved us. Our focus is on Christian fellowship within the church. Fellowship is best experienced as a disciple in the context of a group of believers. In this context, a church is not a building. It does not mean structure, or form, or institution. The word, "church" means that a group of believers come together. This church is comprised of believers who have been baptized, committed and covenanted together to follow and carry out the five purposes of the church. These five purposes are worship, evangelism, discipleship, ministry, and in sharing their faith with others. This brings us back to fellowship between believers. Believers have a relationship with each other. Jesus started with His twelve disciples. Some would say that this group was really the first church. From this little group, then the church began to expand and multiply as we hear in the stories recorded in the book of Acts. There are also parallels in the Old Testament of the church being the people of God. But the concept of being a church comes specifically in the New Testament stories of Jesus and His followers. Do you remember when Jesus was in the Upper Room with His disciples just before He was arrested and crucified? Jesus taught His disciples, "A new command I give to you that you love one another as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are my disciples if you have love one for another." It is not the fact that no one has ever been told to love one another, but they've never been told to love one another as Christ has loved them. So Jesus becomes our model in how He relates to the body and how then we relate to one another. Now, before I tell the story for this session, there are several things I'd like for you to be listening for. Actually, all the Ten Commandments are summed up in one word. Look for that word in this story. Also, what is the greatest commandment, and why did Jesus give this commandment? What two things does Jesus say we are to love? Now, in this story there are three people I'd like to tell you about before we begin. One of them was a priest. That means that he was a leader in the Jewish religion. The second person was a Levite who, also, though not a priest, worked in the temple and was a religious person. The third person was a Samaritan who lived in the country just north of Judah. The Samaritans and the Jews did not like each other at all. And so the Samaritans were considered outcasts as far as the Jews were concerned. So be listening for these questions as I tell the story. Here's the story from God's Word.

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Disciples' Cross – right side of cross -- FELLOWSHIP

Gap: FOLLOWING JESUS MEANS LOVING OTHERS AS HE LOVES THEM.

Title: Greatest Commandment and the Good Samaritan

Scripture: *Matthew 22:34-40 & Luke 10:25-37*

Story: One time, an expert of the law came to Jesus and said to Him, "Teacher, what must I do to get eternal life?" And Jesus answered him, well, "What's written in the law? How do you read it?" And he answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, with all your

strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.” Yes! “You’ve answered correctly,” Jesus said. “Do this and you’ll live.” But the lawyer wanted to justify himself, and he said, “Well, and who is my neighbor?” And Jesus told this story: A man was going down from the city of Jerusalem to the city of Jericho. And on the way, some robbers captured him, stripped off his clothes, beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. A little while later, a priest came by and saw the man lying there, and he crossed over to the other side of the road and left him. A little while later, a Levite also came by, looked at the man, but went to the other side of the road and passed him by. Then a Samaritan, traveling that way, when he saw the man was hurt, he took pity on him, and he went to him, and he bandaged up his wounds. He put on oil and wine to help heal those wounds, then he put the man on his donkey, and he took him to an inn, and he told the innkeeper to take care of him. He gave him money and said if you need more money, when I come back here, I will pay for you. “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers,” Jesus asked. And the lawyer said, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.” And this is the story from God’s Word.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Now, let me ask you some questions.

- Did you pick out the one word in this story that would sum up the Ten Commandments?
- What was the greatest commandment Jesus gave? Why did he give it here?
- What two things does Jesus say we are to love?
- Who are the other men in the story?
- Who in this story did you expect to love the hurt man? Who really did love him?
- How did the Samaritan show his love? What else did he do?
- Who is your neighbor? Who are we to love?
- What is the real measure of how much you love God?
- How are we to show our love for God and others?
- Can you remember from other stories how Jesus showed His love to others?
- Who could you show love to this week? How would you do that?
- Can we ask you next week about the persons you showed love to this week?
- How can we show love like Christ did?
- So, what is the greatest commandment?

Application: Let’s plan a fellowship time outside of our storying sessions. This would be separate from our worship time (and separate from the prayer meeting discussed in the last storying session). What should our purpose be? How can we show love to each other when we meet? What should we do? Should we play games? Sing? Recite poetry? Would someone write a drama or story that we have learned and act it out? Could we go to a hospital and offer to pray with the sick and dying? What can we do to show fellowship together? Should we use our money from the tithes and offerings to enable us to have this get-together? The memory verse for this week is Matthew 16:24. Let’s say it together: “Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’” Preparation: Now, if you were told that a boy had fallen off of a cliff and you were needed to go and rescue the child, would you go? Would it make a difference if you told if he were alive or dead? Would you still go? What if it meant taking time off of work, from your crops or livestock, even leaving your family for a day—maybe three or four days? Would you go rescue the boy who could die at any minute? What if Jesus asked you to go and save a lost person by telling him the truth about Jesus? Would you go? Please think about your response until our next story session.

CLOSING

No. 25 Left of cross / WITNESS / Man of Peace Matthew 10:1-27 & Luke 10:1-20

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can tell the “Good Samaritan” story? What is the greatest commandment according to Jesus? Who can describe the four aspects of the cross we have covered in our Disciples’ Cross series? (*cross=relationship; bottom=obedience to God’s Word; top=prayer; and right=fellowship*) Accountability: What are the plans for our fellowship meeting? (Allow time for this.) We’ve talked about the disciple’s cross as being an example of how to understand discipleship. We could actually put ourselves on that cross, so to speak, with our feet founded in the truth, with our head reaching up to God in prayer, with one arm reaching out to other people who are in the church, with the other arm reaching out to people who are outside the church in the world. And now, we come to that point that following Jesus means to be a witness to the world. Imagine this being the left side of the cross. After the disciples had followed Jesus awhile, he gave them a command and sent them out to cities that he was going to go to later, and began to tell them what they should do and how they should work in order to help other people know about him. And so, we are going to talk about the man of peace, which is a concept that was used by Jesus. It is used in many, many countries around the world as people try to begin to share the gospel so that church can be established in that particular place. As we come to our discipleship time today, we’re going to tell you a story that is in two places in the scripture and we are going to tell it as one story. At this particular time in the life of Jesus and his preparing his disciples to minister to follow him, Jesus had been talking to his disciples about leadership and the harvest that was out there and the needs that were out there and the fact that there just were not enough leaders. This he had done a number of times and he had cried over Jerusalem and he had grieved over the fact that the sheep had no shepherd. Now this story that we are going to tell today is a story to where Jesus sends his disciples out and we want to learn from this. As we tell this story, we ask you to listen for a number of items the first of which is—what did Jesus tell them to do? Where did he tell them to go? What did he tell them to do after he arrived in that place? Also, listen for what were the conditions of their staying there, and their ministering there as he asked them to do. What would be the situation if persecution arose or if rejection occurred? Those are the main things we want you to listen for as we tell the story. After the story, we will come back and we will try to answer these questions and some other related questions that will come out of this story. So as we tell the story, please listen to see if you can find the answers to these questions.

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Disciples’ Cross – left side of cross -- WITNESS

Gap: FOLLOWING JESUS MEANS BEING A WITNESS TO THE WORLD.

Title: Man of Peace

Scripture: Matthew 10:1-27 and Luke 10:1-20

Story: Jesus called his disciples together and gave them authority, ability to expel impure spirits. He gave them ability to cast them out and to heal all kinds of diseases, and different kinds of weaknesses. After doing so, Jesus sent them on a mission and here is what he commanded them. He said, “Don’t go among the Gentiles or other language groups. Don’t enter into any city of the Samaritans. But instead, I want you to go only to those people who are considered to be the lost sheep of Israel. As you go among these people, I want you to preach and let it be known the reign of heaven is very, very near. Keep on curing the sick, cleansing the lepers, raising the dead, and keep on casting out demons. You have received, free of cost, and therefore, I want you to serve free of cost. Don’t acquire gold, silver, nor copper for your purses. Don’t even take a bag for your journey. I don’t want you to take two coats, no spare shoes, or even a staff. For the worker is worthy of the food he eats. And, when you enter into a city or town, ask for or look for who in it is worthy. And when you find a worthy person, you stay there, making his house your home until you leave that city or that village. When you come in the man of peace’s house, pray for peace to come upon that household. And, if the household is deserving, let your peace or blessing come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace or blessing come back to you. And whoever refuses to receive you or refuses to listen to or heed your message, when you do go out

of that house, that town, that city, shake the dust of that place off your feet. I promise you, the doom of the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on judgment day will be more bearable than the doom for that city. Be aware, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. Therefore, I want you to be as shrewd as serpents. I want you to be as harmless as doves. But beware of men, for they will drag you into their courts of law such as the Sanhedrin. They will beat you in their worship places and you will be dragged before governors and kings in order that you may witness for me to them and to the people groups or the ethnics in those places. Now when they bring you up to trial, do not give anxious thought to the manner and wording of your defense. For you will be told at that very moment what you ought to say. For it will not really be you who are speaking but the Holy Spirit of your Father who is speaking through you. Now brother will deliver up his brother to death, and father his child, and the children will take a stand against their parents and cause them to be executed. You will be objects of universal hatred because of your allegiance, your alliance with me. For he who holds out to the very end will be safe and will be sound. Now when they do persecute you or hunt you down in this city, you should flee and take refuge in another. For I truthfully say to you, you will not have gone over the cities of Israel before the Son of Man is come. Now understand the learner is not superior to his teacher, nor a servant above his Lord. The pupil should be satisfied to become like his teacher and the servant to be on the same level as his lord. If they call the master of the house Beelzebub, Prince of Evil, don't you think it will be much worse names that they will call you of His household? Do not fear those individuals for there is nothing covered or secretly hidden, which will not be made public and there is nothing hid that shall not be made open. When I tell you in darkness, I want you to speak in the light, and what is whispered in your ear, you should shout from the housetops." Now, this is our story for this session.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Who can tell the story? I gave you some listening tasks before we told this story. And now, we want to ask some questions, those and some others as well, about this story. *(There are many questions in this story. You might want to consider splitting these into two sessions; retelling the story before covering the second set of questions. You may want to set up this story as being very special and including it in your "fellowship" that is being planned. Make it the centerpiece. It is important to cover all of these questions prior to the assignment at the end.)*

- What did Jesus ask these believers to do?
- In what ways did he want them to represent him? Doing what?
- What were they going to tell the people? What did he say? "I really want you to be sure to tell them this."?
- At what point in these followers' lives in relation to Jesus did he send them out? Or think back through the other stories we've told. Was this late in his ministry before he was crucified? Was this early, closer to the time he called them? Do you have any recollection as to when this happened in their relationship with him?
- Now the only thing I want to ask you about that here as we hear this story—was that too soon to send these folks out? You may have said, "Man, this is a little earlier in my belief life to witness." How soon should somebody say to those disciples and those followers of Jesus, "It's time for you to go out and witness"?
- Are you willing to trust the leader to say, "It is now time to go out."? Is that what you see in this story? That's the question I'm asking. At what time and in what way did these people respond to Jesus and say, "I want you to go out and take the message." Does that bother you, this early time of going out?
- What are some other stories that we've told that talked about going to other people—where the scripture modeled going to other people? You remember the story of Hagar in the evangelism track. Do you remember the story of Jonah? Do you remember the other stories we told like this? Are there any others that we've told that you remember? Then how and why is this different? Is this a problem?
- In light of all these other stories that we learned about others which get the gospel, don't you think it's important that we say these things to ourselves as followers of Jesus here, that it seems Jesus is not teaching them that you won't ever go to others.

- Now, here's another question. How did he talk about, how did he describe the Jews that they were going to?
 - Were they not naturally saved under the covenant of God? What was the position of these Jews?
 - So they too...need to face the Messiah and choose him or not choose him?
 - What were some of the conditions for their going out?
 - When they got in whatever city they were going to, what were they supposed to do?
 - So are we saying that a part of this model of going out, that he did more than just say go out and preach—he told them how to go, to whom to go, and so they would go and find this man of peace? What else did he say about finding this man of peace and upon finding this man of peace, what might be the situation?
 - If he was go to in and if he did go in and found the man peaceable and friendly, he said, "Let your peace go in the house." Was that in the story?
 - In the story, did it say that he was to leave if there was no peace there at that moment? Some come to the story and understand the phrase in the story there that says "and when you leave" to mean it may be then or later, when you do leave this house or this city shake the dust off your feet. So he may or may not leave immediately. Is that the way you heard the story or not?
 - Why do you think Jesus wanted to do it this way? Why not just go through town and tell everybody down to the streets the story, the news? Why do you think Jesus would want him to find a man of peace, of kindness, of interest? Why do you think Jesus might want to do this?
 - Did our story talk to us about the problem that they might not be protected?
 - So even in this worthy house they may not be as protected as they would like to be. What did the story tell us that these people in the city would likely do to them?
 - In what ways would they be persecuted? What are some ways that in the story you said, you'd probably be?
 - What did he say that if you're brought to the trial, if there is a legal trial that occurs and you are [dragged] in before the governor or the court and now you're tried—what did he say do? What kind of preparation were they to make for this trial in their defense?
 - What do we have to count on, to lean upon, to trust in if we are persecuted in a place? ...Is that comforting to us?
 - In the story he said, "If you hear about this persecution"—did he say stay around and endure it? Is it shameful, is it wrong if when the persecution begins for a believer to leave the city? Is that shameful? Are they weak Christians if they do that?
 - Now, what did he say if a believer is by persecution driven out—what did he say about that city?
 - Well, what was the problem in Sodom and Gomorrah? Were there any believers there in Sodom and Gomorrah?
 - Now, do we know when that will happen? (No, this story does not tell us. Later on we will have other stories and maybe in those stories we will find that out.)
- [Consider the following as a separate question set for a second meeting time.]*
- So, how would you summarize what Jesus wanted these followers of his to do?
 - Now, this may be a difficult question for us because we have not talked about it in specific ways, but I want to ask it of you. Will the city be prepared in some way for our coming?
 - So, could we say God has gone before us? That we will be looking for what God has already put there? Are we safe to say that with this story? And that we are looking for a worthy person that God has prepared for the Gospel?
 - First of all—what did Jesus say to pray for?
 - Who did Jesus choose to send out?
 - And how many does this passage, this story tell us that he sent out that first time?
 - And he sent them out two by two. He didn't send them out just by themselves. Why is that important for us to travel with a partner?
 - Why did Jesus say in this story not to speak to people along the way?

- Did you pick up in the story that Jesus had a specific place in his mind and heart that he wanted his disciples to go to?
- These disciples were to enter places where Jesus eventually would arrive himself. That's why when you go out you are not to spend a lot of time talking with people along the way. You need to get where Jesus wants you to go. And so, let me ask you this question. Do you believe already in your heart and mind that there are places that you need to go with the gospel?

The thing that I really want to get into your hearts and into your mind is that Jesus has brought you into the family for a purpose. You are not a Christian by mistake or happenstance. You have been born into the kingdom. It is our responsibility to go to those next communities, market towns, cities, villages that haven't heard about Jesus yet and it is critical that we do get there—that we have a plan and that you get there. These that Jesus sent out had only received a little. They were with Jesus on a daily basis. They were around him. That's why they were called disciples. They were learners. He was sending them out to train them for the time that he would no longer be present with them. And so, that's what we're doing in this Bible study, this story time. You're getting ready to go into new areas, new places with the gospel. You're going to go out for a brief time and then you're going to come back and we're going to talk about your experiences. You're going to be able to tell me and those that are gathered here, the brothers and sisters, that you either did what this story said—you entered a village, you found the person of peace, you didn't take extra money, you didn't take extra shoes or coats and jackets and backpacks—that you went in light. You went in traveling quickly. You presented the gospel. People either responded to you or they didn't respond to you. You're going to pull up from your heart and your mind stories that you've been told concerning the kingdom of God, concerning who Jesus is, why Jesus came to this earth, what his purpose for being here was. You're going to discuss those things that you have learned in our story sessions. This also deals with the Holy Spirit moving in your heart to give you a recall of the stories you need specifically at that given moment. It's going to be a fascinating time for you as a disciple and a learner to be sensitive to Jesus and to His Spirit. Our time is just about gone today. I know you've got to leave. Let me give you a couple of things to take with you. I want you to be so sensitive to the Lord that as He moves in your heart to take the gospel to those new places that have never heard of Jesus, I want you to feel good about obeying God. Part of that obedience also means in the midst of potential persecution, finally coming to a point where there is persecution and potential for your arrest, Jesus' words to his disciples were, "It's okay to leave." And he uses a phrase that means, "Move out quickly." It's okay to leave. You're not disobeying. You're not to stay and suffer persecution for the sake of being pitied. You are a disciple. You must obey Jesus. And at the proper time, when you sense it's time to leave, move out. Leave. It's okay, because the next place that receives you may be so responsive to the gospel that it would be a great harvest. That is the goal to see people come to faith in Jesus. Becoming persecuted for your faith is not the goal.

Application: Did you think about what you would do if you were asked to go rescue a boy who had fallen off of a cliff? Did you also think what you would do if Jesus called you by name to go and tell someone about the gospel? With that in your mind, let me give you an important assignment for the next week or two. If necessary, we will suspend our meeting time to accommodate this assignment. I want you to take this lesson, finding the man of peace, going into a new area with the gospel, moving away from your own residence, your own community, going into a new place that has never heard the gospel before. I want you this week to go out and find the place that Jesus is laying on your heart—a place that has never heard the gospel before. As you enter that community, in that village, that city, that market town, wherever you are burdened to go, you stay in the home of that person of peace who greets you. You stay there as long as you sense God wants you to stay. You present the stories that you have learned. You are not a new believer. You are a disciple of Jesus and now you are simply obeying his command to go and preach the gospel. And so this next week or next few days, you go into that area and share what you know and then come back and report to the group what things God taught you. Tell the group the things you did right and the things that you did wrong. And let us pray for you and encourage you and prepare you to go out again and do what Jesus said to do,

“Make disciples.” You will now have an opportunity to live out the words of our memory verse for this week. “Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’” Matthew 16:24

CLOSING

No. 26 Crossbars together SERVING / James & John Ask for Highest Places Mark 10:32-45

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Accountability: Who has lived out the story “The Man of Peace” and took the gospel to others as witnesses? Receive reports from those who were witnesses making disciples. (*Allow time for this. Consider having a separate meeting to receive the reports—perhaps a fellowship meeting that was planned in previous sessions.*) Pre-story dialogue: And that leads us very naturally into serving others. When we think about the Disciples’ Cross, serving others goes across the whole horizontal bar, both to those who are believers and to the non-believers. It brings in elements of witnessing and fellowship. We’ve talked about relationship, obedience to the Word, talking to God, fellowshiping with the believers in a church and witnessing to those outside the church. In this session, we need to talk about the service, which was a basic element of discipleship. Jesus said that He laid down His life for His friends as one of the evidences of true service. And the whole life of Jesus is an example of that. If we think about the disciple’s cross as someone being on a cross we’ve said that there is a horizontal bar. One hand is reaching out to those who are already Christians. The other hand is reaching out to the world and those who are not Christians. You put both of those together, and you have serving others. That leads us very naturally into this, as Paul says in Galatians, that we’re to be servants of the household of faith and those who are outside the household of faith. So, serving others goes across the whole horizontal bar, both to those who are believers and to non-believers. And as we do that, we get opportunities, then, to witness. Jesus and His disciples were traveling to Jerusalem. And we’ve said that following Jesus is a personal, lifelong, obedient relationship with Jesus Christ in which He transforms our character into Christlikeness. And in this story, we see Jesus actually doing that in the form of discipline, if you will, directed at two men, James and John. And so we title this story, “A Selfish Request.” Listen for interruptions during Jesus’ explanation to His disciples about what is getting ready to happen. I want you to pull out from the story the selfish request made by James and John. Listen for the attitudes of the other disciples who overheard the requests from James and John. Now here’s our story from God’s Word.

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Disciples’ Cross – crossbars together SERVING

Gap: FOLLOWING JESUS MEANS TAKING UP YOUR CROSS TO SERVE OTHERS.

Title: James and John Ask for Highest Places

Scripture: Mark 10:32-45

Story: Jesus and His disciples were on their way up to Jerusalem. Jesus was walking a little bit ahead of them, and His disciples were shocked that He was going to Jerusalem. The others who followed were very afraid. Once again, He took His twelve disciples, that core group, aside and He began to tell them what was going to happen to Him. And this is what He said. We’re going to Jerusalem. There, the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and scribes. They will condemn Him to death and hand Him over to foreigners. They will make fun of Him, they will spit on Him, they will whip Him and then kill Him. But after three days, He will come back to life. James and John, sons of Zebedee, went to Jesus. They said to Him, “Teacher, we want you to do us a favor.” “What do you want Me to do for you?” Jesus asked. They said to Him, we want to sit at your right and on your left side after you come into your glory. And Jesus said to them, “You really don’t ask what you’re asking.” And He asked the question, “Can you drink the cup that I’m going to drink? Can you be baptized with the baptism I’m going to receive?” Quickly they responded “Yes, we can.” Then Jesus said, “You will drink the cup that I’m going to drink. You will be baptized with the baptism that I’m going to receive, but I don’t have the authority to grant you to sit at my right or my left. Those positions have already been prepared for others.” When the other ten apostles heard about it, they were very angry with James and John. So Jesus called all the apostles together and said to them, “You know that the acknowledged rulers of nations have absolute power over people and their officials have absolute authority over people. But that’s not the way it’s going to be among you. Whoever wants to become great among you will be your servant. Whoever wants to be most important among you will have to be a slave to everyone. It’s the same way with the Son of Man. He didn’t come so that others could serve

Him. He came to serve and to give His life a ransom for many people.” And that’s our story from God’s Word.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Who can tell this story?

- Who are the main characters in the story?
- Where were the disciples and Jesus going?
- What did Jesus describe to His disciples, and do you think they understood what Jesus was talking about?
- What did James and John request of Jesus? What did they want?
- What was Jesus’ response to them?
- [How] did the other disciples, or apostles, according to this story, feel about that request?
- [Is] there any example of putting others first in this story, or do we see people trying to put themselves first?
- Are there behaviors that need to change in this story? What behaviors do you see as a problem?
- Have you ever wanted something that you really didn’t deserve, and you selfishly tried to get it?

You actually see that what we're trying to do is to begin habits of relating to the Lord every day, thinking of His Word, whether it's a story which we're reminded of or hearing someone read the Word, praying to Him, relating to other believers, relating to lost persons, and serving, in general. These are the basic elements that we've talked about in the disciple's cross that would be the vertical relationship and the horizontal relationship.

Thank you for participating in this sequence called, The Disciple’s Cross, which we’ve incorporated into our ongoing series. [*Optional review*] What did Jesus say about status in the Kingdom of God? How should we serve others? Living as a Christian is important. The parts of the Disciple’s Cross give us a guide to living as a Christian. We finished it up in our last session, but in case you missed it, let’s review it right now. Draw a cross or imagine one. It will help you imagine how all these parts go together.

- At the heart of the cross, where the two beams come together, we have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. It is a picture of the daily life of a new believer who needs to be relating to Christ every day.
- The bottom part of the cross represents being grounded in obedience to the Word of God. Every day a disciple should think about or review the stories of how God worked in the lives of people. God begins to speak to you as a disciple and helps the disciple to obey everything He’s commanded.
- The top of the vertical beam represents prayer; all kinds of prayer. It covers the prayer of worship, of praise and of adoration to God. Prayer is also includes praying for other people. When you intercede for others before God, this is called intercessory prayer.
- On the right side, we have fellowship with those who know Christ. That is where we find the church.
- On the left side of the crossbar, we relate to those who do not know Christ out in the world. This includes our witness to them.
- When we bring the horizontal crossbar together, it represents service. We are to minister to those who are the household of faith and those who are out in the world.
- Finally, we recognize that we bear our cross, we deny ourselves, we take up our cross, and we follow Him. God gives us eternal life. That hope helps us withstand any kind of difficulty. In turn, that helps us understand that we can survive persecution, even if it means imprisonment, social discomfort, extra vocational struggles, slander, torture, or death. Despite all that the evil one can throw at us, we can be an effective witness for Him as a new believer in Jesus Christ.

Accountability: Who found a believer who had not heard of the Disciples’ Cross? What happened where you told him each part of the cross? How has learning the stories of the Disciple’s Cross affected you as a believer? Report to our group if the Disciples’ Cross helps the

believer to grow in their faith as a follower of Jesus. Review the stories in this set as often as possible. Our memory verse this week is from Galatians 5:22-23. It says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

CLOSING

**** END DISCIPLES' CROSS ****

No. 27 Feeding of the 5,000 John 6:1-15

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can tell our last story of James and John Asking for Highest Places? What did Jesus say about status in the Kingdom of God? How should we serve others? [*Optional review*] Who can tell all the parts of the Disciple's Cross?

- At the heart of the cross, where the two beams come together, we have living in Christ. It is a picture of the daily life of a new believer who needs to be relating to Christ every day. How does this best happen? It happens when the believer is doing all the things that we have talked about around the cross.
- The vertical bar of the cross symbolizes that we're to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.
- The horizontal bar reminds us that we're to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.
- The bottom part of the cross represents being grounded in obedience to the Word of God. Every day a disciple should think about or review the stories of how God worked in the lives of people. As the follower of Jesus begins to be obedient, then a relationship will form. God begins to speak to you as a disciple and helps the disciple to obey everything He's commanded.
- The top part of the vertical bar represents prayer; all kinds of prayer. It covers the prayer of worship, of praise and of adoration to God. Prayer is also includes praying for other people. When you intercede for others before God, this is called intercessory prayer.
- The horizontal bar represents how we relate to people.
- On the right side, we have fellowship with those who know Christ (the church).
- On the left side of the crossbar, we relate to those who do not know Christ (the world). This includes our witness to them.
- When we bring the horizontal crossbar together, it represents service. We are to minister to those who are the household of faith and those who are out in the world.
- Finally, we recognized that we bear our cross, we deny ourselves, we take up our cross, and we follow Him. God gives us eternal life that helps us withstand any kind of difficulty. In turn, that helps us understand that we can survive persecution, even if it means imprisonment, social discomfort, extra vocational struggles, slander, torture or death. Through all of that the evil one can throw at us, we can be an effective witness for Him as a new believer in Jesus Christ.

Accountability: Who found a believer who had not heard of the Disciples' Cross? What happened where you told him each part of the cross? How has learning the stories of the Disciple's Cross affected you as a believer? Pre-Story Dialogue: Today's lesson is similar to our last story about James and John. In this story, we see Jesus as a role model of using His power to serve others. Who can tell me Bible stories about God's power? They may be from the Bible that we have heard or they may be recent occurrences. Who can describe the thinking behind the Day of Power that Muslims observe during Ramadan? Who is the most powerful man or woman that you know? What makes a man or woman powerful? Was Jesus powerful when He was here on earth? Describe Jesus' power. As I tell the Bible story today, I would like you to learn about the power that Jesus displayed. This story is not new to you. Listen to it as a believer. As you do, listen for how Jesus used His power. How should His disciples use power that is available to them? Here is the story, "Jesus Feeds the 5,000".

BIBLE STORY (1:55)

Truth: Following Jesus means serving others.

Bridge -- Review-A "Day of Power" is when God works

Feeding of the 5,000

John 6:1-15

Jesus and His disciples crossed to the far side of the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and a great crowd of people followed Him because they had seen these miraculous signs that he had performed on the sick. Then Jesus went up on that mountainside and He sat down with His

disciples. And the Jewish Passover feast was near, so Jesus looked up and he saw this great crowd coming toward Him, and He looked over at one of His disciples named Philip, and He said, "Where do you think we ought to buy food [says "people" in transcript] for these people to eat?" And he asked this only to test Philip because He already had in mind what He was going to do. But Philip responded to Jesus, He said, "You know, it would take eight months of pay and we probably still wouldn't have enough bread that we could get for everybody to have a bite." Another one of the disciples that was sitting by Philip, who was Andrew, Andrew was Simon Peter's brother, he spoke up and he says, "Well, Jesus, here is a boy and he's got with him five small loaves made out of barley and he's got two fish with him as well. But again, like Philip was saying, how can we serve this among so many?" And Jesus just looked at them and He said, "Have the people sit down." And there was plenty of grass in that area where they were, and the men sat down, and there were about 5,000 men. Jesus took the loaves, He gave thanks, and He distributed that bread to those that were seated, as much as they wanted, and then He did the same thing with the fish. And when they had all had enough to eat, He said to His disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over and make sure nothing is wasted." And so they went around, and after everyone had eaten and were filled, they had everything put into those baskets. And when the disciples came back, there were 12 baskets of pieces of those loaves left over by those who had eaten it. After the people saw this miraculous sign that Jesus did, they said, "Surely this is the prophet who has come into the World." Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and by force make Him be the king, they just knew that He was going to be the king, the prophet that was going to help them, Jesus actually withdrew to the mountain by Himself.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

This is a story that you have heard before, but let's revisit it in light of Jesus' power. When we considered the story previously, we discussed the way that Jesus provided for His disciples despite difficult circumstances. As believers in Jesus, now consider this miracle from the disciples' viewpoint. Was this just a display of power so that Jesus could prove that He was the Messiah or did Jesus use it as an opportunity to help His disciples learn to trust in Him? Now, consider the story. Why did Jesus first go to Philip about the need for food? Did Philip show faith and trust Jesus or did He just provide information to Jesus? What about Andrew? What did he do to provide food for the multitude? Was he showing faith by bringing the boy with the small lunch to Jesus? Stop for just a second and consider the responses of the two disciples of Jesus. Could Jesus do anything with the information that Philip provided? If not, then what did Jesus do with the small lunch that Andrew found? As a Christian, what can we learn? Can God use people who have faith in Him? What are ways that God has used you since you became a believer? How can you show that you trust Jesus to use you to do His will? Do you think God just wants to exhibit His power or does God want to work through His disciples that trust and obey Him despite impossible odds? Application: Please find a Christian and tell them this story. After you have told it, see if the two of you can identify an impossible situation in which the Lord needs you to trust and obey Him to provide a solution. Memory Verse for Week 5 -- Romans 12:5 "In Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."

CLOSING

No. 28 Teachings on Faith & Works John 6:28-40

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Let's begin by reviewing our last session story? How did Jesus provide a role model of service to others? Accountability: Did you meet with another Christian since we last met? Did you share the story of Jesus Feeding the 5,000? Did you both identify a situation that seems to be impossible for you to accomplish? What has happened with that situation so far? (Be sure to follow-up on this in future sessions.) Pre-story dialogue: You have heard before our story for today. Today's story happens immediately following the Feeding of the 5,000 men. As I tell the story today, listen to the explanation of salvation. Which is the way to salvation in Jesus? Is it by faith or by works? Here is the story, "Teachings on Faith and Works."

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Obeying Jesus means you listen to His Word, His Word lives in you, you do what He says and you live in His Word.

Gap -- New-A "works" mentality; no eternal security

Teachings on Faith & Works

John 6:22-68

And when evening came, His disciples went down by the lake, and by the boat they went, and they went to the other side of the lake. But the next day, the other people had come around on the shore and had actually followed Jesus. They actually went all the way to the other side of the lake, realizing that Jesus and His disciples had gone. Now when they got to the other side of the lake, the crowd once more gathered around Jesus. And when they found Him, they said, "Teacher, rabbi, when did you get here?" And Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you're looking for me because of all these miraculous things that I keep doing, and you ate that bread and you had food. But don't just work for the food that will rot and spoil, but instead work for the food that endures, that gives eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. And on Him, God our Father has placed the seal of approval." Well, when they heard him say this, they said, "What must we do? How can we do the works that God requires?" But Jesus said, "Well the work of God is to do this, to believe in the one whom He has sent." So they asked Him, "What miraculous sign can You give us so that we may see it and believe You?" They were still remembering the sign of the feeding of the 5,000 men. And they knew that the forefathers had eaten manna in the desert and they wanted to do that as well. And Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it's not Moses who has given you bread from Heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from Heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from Heaven and gives life to the world." "Sir," they said, you can imagine who they were saying, they wanted that eternal bread that would give them eternal life. And Jesus made a statement to them, He said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." Now, that is our story from God's Word. *[If time allows and it is appropriate to do so, continue with the story through to where many grumble and leave Jesus except for the Twelve.]*

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Let's review this story. This story happened right after Jesus fed 5,000 people. When the people asked Jesus what works they must perform in order to be saved, how did Jesus respond? Would there ever be any actions that you could do to be saved? Could you just go to church? Could you make sacrifices? Could you ever be pure enough to enter God's presence? Why did Jesus say that the only way to be saved is by every person believing on his own that Jesus was the one that God has sent? Do you remember the story of Joseph and the way that he was used of God to help his brothers have food during a famine? Did the sinful brothers do anything that warranted their being saved? Do you remember Joseph saying that God was merciful and provided him so that their brothers could be saved? Do you see the connection between trusting God to provide a way of salvation for us in Jesus Christ? Now consider why you are a Christian. Why do you believe in Jesus? Many people were following Jesus in this story because they thought He would continue to do miracles like feeding the 5,000. Do you follow Jesus because you believe He was God's Son or because you hope that He will continue to miraculously take care of you? Why did Jesus say that He was the Bread of Life? Who draws people to Jesus? If

God draws all people to have faith in Jesus, should Christians worry that they will somehow lose their salvation? If Jesus will not drive them away, then can you believe that once you were saved, then you will be saved for all of eternity? Please tell this story as often as you can. Keep in mind that Jesus always did the will of His Heavenly Father and we can rejoice that our salvation is secure by our faith in Him. Application: Here is an assignment for you to accomplish before our next session. Have a bread party. Invite everyone that you know—believers and unbelievers. Instead of serving a lavish feast or celebration, encourage everyone to bring different kinds of bread to the party. There are two reasons for having the bread party. Collect money saved by bringing bread as alms for the poor who have no food. If the Holy Spirit provides an opportunity, then tell everyone who attends the story of Jesus Feeding the 5,000 and today's story of Faith and Works (Jesus is the Bread of Life). One fun game to try is to brainstorm all the things that bread provides. Bringing your friends, family and other believers together will deepen relationships that will allow a Bible storying session to start in your home. Now, have you memorized our Memory Verse for Week 6? It is Galatians 5:22-23: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." Who can recite this Bible verse? To help you memorize the verse, let's review it section by section. "But the fruit of the Spirit" means that the Spirit of God enables the characteristics you exhibit as a Christian. Our story today emphasized faith in God's Son, Jesus, rather than trying to accomplish a list of works. The result of our faith is having the Holy Spirit produce fruit, just like a tree. The list of fruit includes "love, joy, peace, patience and kindness." Since becoming a Christian have you noticed that you are more loving, filled with joy, have peace and patience despite stressful situations or have expressed your faith in acts of kindness? The last part of the verse lists "goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." Who can give me an example in your life where you chose goodness rather than being hateful toward someone? Are you loyal and keep your commitments to be faithful? Who is able to be gentle and have self-control when you are pressured to be harsh or out of control? Now, have fun with your bread party until our next session.

CLOSING

No. 29 Jesus & Woman Caught in Adultery John 8:3-11

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Accountability: Who can repeat our memory verse on the fruit of the Spirit? Who can tell the story of Faith and Works? Did you have a bread party? Share with the group all of the uses of bread. Now, let me ask how those characteristics fit a description of Jesus? Let's stop right now and pray a prayer of thanksgiving that Jesus is the Bread of Life. Pre-story dialogue: Have you ever been in a debate? Why do you think the art of debate is so important to Persians? How do you think Jesus would have done in a debate over an issue like adultery? Our lesson today is about a group of religious leaders who tried to trick Jesus and engaged Him in a debate. Listen for clues on how Jesus handled the situation. You have heard this story, but keep the perspective focused on handling debate and still having integrity as a Christian. Here is the story of "Jesus & the Woman Caught in Adultery."

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Jesus was tempted, yet He never sinned.

Truth: Jesus is the role model for His disciples.

Barrier -- Review-(new WV issue) Debate is a treasured communications form

Jesus & Woman Caught in Adultery

John 8:3-11

In the evening Jesus went up to the Mount of Olives. The next morning at dawn he was again in the temple courts. When he sat down, the people gathered around him and began to listen to his teaching. Jesus was a wonderful teacher and people would come from various quarters of the city or various quarters of the community to listen to him. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees wanted to trap Jesus by means of trickery. To do this they brought to Jesus a woman caught in the very act of adultery and made her stand in front of the group. This was very embarrassing for this woman. They pulled her from her home and dragged her through the streets in plain view of the public. And now she was standing in the courts accused of committing adultery. The accusers said, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law of Moses, Moses commanded us to stone such a woman. Now what do you say?" The teachers of the law and Pharisees really wanted to trap Jesus so they could accuse him. But Jesus just bent down low to the ground and started writing with his finger in the dirt. These men just kept asking him the same question over and over and over. "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. The Law of Moses commanded us to stone such a woman. Now what do you say?" Picture Jesus again, continuing to write in the dirt. Finally, Jesus straightened up and looked at these men and this is what he said, "If any of you are without sin, throw the first stone." Jesus stooped back down and continued writing in the dirt. All who heard the words of Jesus began to leave. It was really quite odd. The oldest men left first until finally all of the accusers were gone. And then Jesus stood again and looked at the woman face to face and this is what Jesus said, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" This woman caught in the very act of adultery said, "No one." Jesus then said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin." And that is our story.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

This story was told previously, but let's visit it again. Who can tell it? Last time, the story was told to make a point that men and women both sin and need forgiveness. This time, let's review it to understand how Jesus was capable of handling heated religious debates by the religious leaders. Would you have liked to debate Jesus in person? What did Jesus do to provide a model for us when people try to trick or debate with us about the truth of Jesus? Now, let's talk about this story from a Christian perspective. What sin had the woman been caught doing and what was the typical punishment? Did Jesus stay true to His own teachings? For instance, let's think about the Sermon on the Mount for a moment. Did Jesus turn the other cheek? Did He lash out at the men who were trying to trap Him? Why did Jesus stop to write on the ground? Do you think that helped Him gather His thoughts and carefully choose His words? Do you think it is possible to turn the other cheek and still bring a godly answer to an argument? As Christians, are we to be

verbally abusive or should we seek a better way? Should believers expect rejection and treachery from mullahs and other religious leaders? Do you believe that God's Holy Spirit can give you the right words to say in the face of trouble? If Jesus was capable of thwarting the debate of sinful men while He was here on earth, do you believe that He can help you? Do you remember our Bible verse for this week? Who can say it? Which of the fruit of the Spirit did Jesus exhibit as He handled the confrontation in today's story? Accountability: Please tell this story again to those whom you know. As you tell it, focus on the love that Jesus had for the woman because it is the love that Jesus had for all people -- including sinners -- that kept Him focused on setting a godly example for believers to follow. Memory Verse for Week 6 -- Galatians 5:22-23 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." Preparation: To prepare for our next story, I would like you to observe people who have physical handicaps. What needs do they have? This will help us prepare for our next story about a man born blind.

CLOSING

No. 30 Healing the Man Born Blind John 9

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can tell the story of the Woman Caught in Adultery? Accountability: Who would like to share how they showed love to someone since our last time together? Did you tell them the story of the Woman Caught in Adultery? Did you observe people who have physical handicaps? What are their needs? Pre-story dialogue: Our Bible story today is about a man who was born blind. Listen for the way that Jesus used this an opportunity to help His disciples learn how to help others. Also listen for the response of the Pharisees. Who can explain this religious sect? Here is the story “Healing the Man Born Blind.”

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Followers of Jesus put Jesus above all other priorities

Barrier -- Handicapped people are shunned as cursed by God.

New--Healing the Man Born Blind

John 9:1-41

Jesus and his disciples were in Jerusalem. They had been coming from the temple where Jesus had been teaching and, as they were walking along, they saw a beggar. The beggar was blind and he was known for having been blind for a very, very long time. In fact, he was blind since birth. The disciples noticed the man and were concerned about him and his condition. They asked Jesus, “Is this man blind because of his own sin or perhaps the sin of his parents?” Well, Jesus said, “No. No. This man is not blind because of his sin or anything that he’s done or the sin of his parents or anything that they’ve done. But instead, that God might work in him.” And then Jesus told the disciples, and I’m sure the blind man could hear it as well, and he said, “Work while it is light because when darkness comes nobody can work.” He said, “I am the light of the world while I’m on the earth.” And then Jesus stopped teaching and he reached down and he grabbed some of the dirt, kind of like clay there. And he spit on that clay in His hand and He softened it up and he took that clay and he put it on the blind man’s eyes. And then he told the blind man to go and to wash in the pool of Siloam. Siloam means, “sent.” The man went as Jesus told him. He went to that pool. And when he washed off the clay from his eyes, he could see again. Well, he began telling everyone about being able to see and pretty soon people that he knew or family members, others, his neighbors were able to see that this man who had been born blind could now see. And they all began to say to themselves, “Isn’t this the beggar? Isn’t this the man that was blind?” And the man would go, “Yes! Yes! It’s me! I can see! I can see!” And they would begin to ask him, “Well, how can this be? How can you see?” And he said, “Well, a man named Jesus took some clay, he put it on my eyes and he told me to go wash at the pool of Siloam.” And the people said, “Where is he? We want to see him.” And of course the man didn’t have any idea. He didn’t know where Jesus was. The people brought the man to the Pharisees. Now it was the Sabbath day. The Pharisees asked the man what had happened. And so the man explained how he had regained his sight. The Pharisees immediately said, “This miracle cannot be of God. Jesus is a sinner for working to make the clay spittle on the Sabbath.” The people were divided and they said, “How can a sinner do something like this?” And so the Pharisees asked the blind man, “What do you say about Jesus since he’s the one that opened your eyes?” And the man said, “Certainly he is a prophet.” Some people in the crowd began to doubt still. They went and found the blind man’s parents and the parents said, “We know this is our son. Yes, he was blind from birth, but yes, we also agree that, yeah, he sees but we don’t know how this happened.” In fact they said, “He’s old enough, let him speak for himself.” The parents actually feared the Jews and a decree that they had made. Because the decree said that if anyone confessed faith in Christ, that he would be put out of the synagogue. So the Pharisees called the blind man a second time. They called him into the synagogue and they said, “Give God the praise for opening your eyes. We know that Jesus is a sinner.” And the man told the Pharisees, “Well, whether Jesus is a sinner or not, I don’t really know. All I know is once I was blind, but now I can see.” Again the Pharisees asked the man, “How did he do it?” And they wanted to know, “What did he do to open your eyes?” And the man said, “I told you again and again. Why should I have to keep on telling it? Do you want to be his disciples too?” The Pharisees became very bitter and they said, “You are his disciple. We follow Moses. We don’t

know where this man came from.” The man then said, “Well, that’s an amazing thing to me. You don’t know where he comes from. Yet he opened my eyes. We know that God doesn’t listen to sinners, but if anyone worships God and does His will, God pays attention to him. Never before in any place, any time, anywhere has anyone healed the blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” They answered the man, “You were born in total sin and you try to teach us?” And they cast the man out of the synagogue. Well, some time passed and Jesus heard that the man had been cast out. He looked for the man until he found him. Jesus asked the man, “Do you believe in the son of man?” The man said to Jesus, “Oh! Tell me who he is so that I might believe in him.” And Jesus said, “You have seen him and you are talking to him right now.” The man said, “Lord, I believe!” and worshipped Jesus. Jesus turned to those who were watching nearby, and some of those who had seen Jesus talking to the man like this were some of the Pharisees. Jesus told everyone there, “I came into this world for judging so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.” Well, the Pharisees standing nearby heard this and they said, “Are you saying that we’re blind?” And Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin. But since you are claiming to see, then you still remain guilty.” That is our story for today.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Who can tell this story? Let’s review this story from the Christian perspective. Why did Jesus heal the man born blind? Why did the disciples ask about the sin of his parents causing the man to be blind? What does that say about our own accountability for our sins? Why were the Pharisees upset? Now, think about the second encounter of the man with Jesus. What truth about Jesus can we learn from this story? How should we treat people who are handicapped? Do you think they have a place in the Kingdom of God? Application: Think back to other Bible stories you have heard. Did Jesus cure people of diseases, illnesses, evil spirits, blindness, lameness, and deafness? Do you think Jesus established a model for Christians to follow? As a Christian, how can you minister to people in need? Until the next session, please identify people that need your help or who are handicapped in some way and need some good news. Will you help them? If they ask why you want to help them, please tell this story as the reason why you want to live like Jesus. Memory Verse for Week 6 -- Galatians 5:22-23 “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”

CLOSING

No. 31 The Parables of the Lost Sheep, Coin and Son Luke 15:1-32

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can tell the story of the Man Born Blind? Have you thought about this story since we last met? Are there any new insights that you want to share with the group? What does the phrase mean, “One thing I do know was that I was blind and now I can see.” (v. 25)? What does the phrase mean when Jesus told the Pharisees, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin, but now that you claim that you can see, your guilt remains”? Spiritual sight is very important in today’s lesson. Believers can have insights that guide them in knowing the truth about Jesus. However, before we begin today’s story, I want to ask you about the assignment given to you. **Accountability:** Did you notice anyone that needed your help? Did you share this story with them? What can we do as a group to help handicapped people? (*Your brainstorming might include: Christians often sponsor orphanages, conduct eye clinics to give people glasses, construct ramps so that wheelchairs can easily enter buildings, learn and teach sign language for the deaf, tell stories to the blind, take meals to invalids or others who have become injured, offer to help young parents raise a child with Down’s syndrome, establish a health clinic in your community, prepare for earthquake relief response, build a home for elderly people to live, administer AIDS screening tests, begin praying on a regular basis for those with physical needs, etc.*) **Pre-story dialogue:** Before we tell our story today, I would like to have someone tell the story “Man’s Predicament”. (Story #14 above) What was the predicament that faced mankind? Now, let’s move into today’s story. Have you ever lost something that you took for granted, but when you lost it you suddenly became aware of how important it was to you? Our story today is a review of three stories – “The Lost Sheep, Coin and Son.” As I tell these stories that Jesus told, I would like you to listen for not only the things that were lost, but also the difference it made to those who found that which was lost. Here is the story from God’s Word.

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Those without faith in Jesus are lost without Him.

Gap -- Review--Forgiveness is virtually unknown

The Parables of the Lost Sheep, Coin and Son

Luke 15:1-32

As Jesus was teaching, notorious sinners such as tax collectors and others who were known to violate the ways of God gathered around to hear Jesus teaching. They enjoyed hearing Him teach. But there were religious leaders who were scrupulous in keeping the rules of God who were critical and they muttered, “This man welcomes these sinners and even eats with them.” And so Jesus told him this story. The story about a shepherd who lost one sheep out a hundred but went and found it and rejoiced and He told them the other story about the woman who had ten silver coins and lost one and searched diligently until she found it and then she rejoiced. And then He told a parable of a man who had two sons. Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, father, give me my share of the estate. And so the father did. He divided his property between the two sons and gave the younger one his share. Not long after that the younger son got all that he had and he took off for a distant city and there he squandered his inheritance with wild living. After he had spent everything that he had a severe famine came into that country and he began to be in big trouble. So he went out and he hired himself to a man who lived in the country working for him and the man sent him to the field to feed the pigs. And the son was so hungry he wished he could have eaten the food that he was giving to the pigs. But no one gave that son anything to eat. But when he came to his senses, he said my father’s hired men live far better than I do and have food to spare and here I am starving to death. I am going to go back and speak to my father and say father I have sinned against heaven and against you, I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me one of your hired men. So with this resolution in mind the son got up and went to his father. While he was still a long way away his father saw him and his father’s heart was filled with compassion. And so he ran to his son and threw his arms around him and he kissed him as a way of welcoming him home and the soon began his speech and he said, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you, I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” But the father said to his servants, “Quick bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger, put sandals on his feet,

bring the fattened calf because we are going to eat it. Let us have a feast and celebrate because this son of mine was dead and now he is alive again. He was lost, but now he is found.” And they really began to celebrate. Well when all of this was going on the other son, the older brother was out in the field. When he came near the house he heard the music and the sound of dancing. So he called over one of the servants and he said, “What is going on inside?” “Oh,” the servant replied, “Your brother has come and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.” He heard this and the older brother became angry. He refused to go in. So the father left the party and went out to where the older brother was outside. He pleaded with him, please come on in, celebrate, but the older brother was angry still. He said, “Look, all these years I have been slaving for you and I have never disobeyed your orders. You never even gave me even a young goat to celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who squandered your property with prostitutes comes home you kill a fattened calf for him.” The father answered him, “My son, you are always with me, everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again. He was lost, but now he is found.” Thus Jesus ended the parable of the two sons.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Let's review this story. What three things were lost and then found? When the Prodigal Son was told previously, the emphasis was given to the father forgiving his wayward son. Hopefully, it gave you a good insight into the way that God wants to seek and save those who are lost. Christians who have been a believer in Jesus for a long time might forget what it was like to be lost, so let's examine the story this time from the perspective of the prodigal. When the prodigal son received his portion of the inheritance, why do you think he left his father's household and everything in it? What made the son finally realize that he could no longer live a life of sin? Think about the prodigal's food, where he worked and how miserable that he was. Why do you think that he was even willing to be a servant in his father's household? Application: Now, please stop for a second and think about the people around you that do not have faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. What are their lives like? Is your life different from theirs? Do you remember the story about Christians becoming heirs of God's riches and glory? What are some of God's riches that he shares with you? Do the lost around you experience hope, or peace or love? As you went to a village looking for a person of peace, you were helping share the riches of God's household. This is good news to a very lost world. Would you tell the story that we heard today to a person that does not know Jesus? Maybe they are a family member, a neighbor or a work associate. Maybe someone is handicapped that needs good news. As you tell the story from today's lesson—especially the part of the Prodigal Son--keep in mind that they are like the son in the story; they're in a hopeless situation. Be sure to emphasize that God is waiting just like the father in the story to receive them and restore them through faith in Jesus to the position that he intended. Memory Verse for Week 7 -- Ephesians 5:18 “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.”

CLOSING

**No. 32 More teachings on prayer: Widow & Judge and The Pharisee & the Tax Collector
Luke 18:1-14**

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Would someone please tell the story of the Lost Sheep, Coin and Son? What was the relationship of the owner to the lost coin? What was the relationship of the shepherd to the lost sheep? What was the relationship of the father with his son? How important do you think the relationship that Jesus wants to have with you? *(Lead a prayer of confession that we fall far short of the relationship that Jesus wants to have with each one of us. Pray that the story today will provide ways to improve the relationship.)* Accountability: Was anyone able to share the story with someone who needs good news? As for helping the handicapped, have we decided on a project we can do as a group? *(Allow time for finalizing plans for a ministry project.)* Pre-story dialogue: In today's story, you will actually hear two parables that Jesus taught. The first one is about a judge and a widow who has a request. The second parable is about a religious leader called a Pharisee and a sinful man. Listen for how Jesus used these stories to help us learn more about prayer. How should we pray? How often should we pray? For what should we ask in our prayers to God? Here is the story "More Teachings on Prayer."

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Followers of Jesus worship in fresh sincerity, not from mindless rituals.

Bridge -- Review-Cultural Christians live vulgar lives

More Teachings on Prayer: The Widow & Judge and The Pharisee and the Tax Collector
Luke 18:1-14

There was a certain town where there a judge that didn't fear God and he really didn't care about the people either. In that town was a widow who kept coming to him with the same plea, grant me justice against my adversary. While for some time he refused but finally he said to himself even though I don't fear God or care about people, because this widow keeps coming and bothering me and bothering me and bothering me, I am going to give her justice so she won't wear me out with her constant coming. And Jesus said to those disciples who heard this story listen to what this unjust judge said. If he will give justice because of the persistent plea how much more will our just God give justice to those who cry out to Him day and night? Will not the true God who does love people and is just see that they get justice and get it quickly? But the question is, when the Son of Man comes will He find faith on the earth? Now, some who were listening to Jesus were very self-righteous. The Pharisees were very strict in their observance of all the laws given to the people by Moses. Their pride caused them to look down on others who weren't that religious as they themselves were. To them Jesus told this parable. He said that there were two men who went up to the temple to pray, one was a Pharisee, a religious leader, the other was a notorious sinner, a tax collector. Well the Pharisee stood up and he prayed about himself, oh, God, I thank you that I am not like the other men, robbers, evildoers, adulterers or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get, but the tax collector stood off at a distance, he wouldn't even look up to heaven. But he beat his breast and he said, "God have mercy on me, I am a sinner." And Jesus said, "I tell you that this second man, not the first man, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled. Whoever humbles himself will be exalted." And that is the story from God's Word.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

What do these stories teach us about acting like Christians? Who does the unjust judge represent? Does he represent God? If he doesn't represent God, what is the teaching that we are to get about the prayer of the widow? Is God ready to answer sincere prayers that are offered? How did the Pharisee act in the second story? Was he not trying to be a godly man? He was fasting twice a week and tithing his income! What was Jesus trying to say about our attitudes as His disciples? Can you make a distinction between being a true disciple of Jesus and what has become known as a "cultural Christian"? When you think of the West as "Christian," what type of lifestyle comes to mind? Think about our story this time and previous stories that we have told. Do you think that genuine disciples of Jesus live with humility before

God and their fellow man? Is it possible to be a cultural Christian and not be saved from your sins? What does it mean that the sinful tax collector who repented went home "justified before God"? How does this story relate to the Disciples' Cross that we learned earlier? Application: As you tell this story to someone before our next session, try to see why Jesus taught that genuine Christians exhibit humility in our vertical relationship with God and our horizontal relationship with other people. Memory Verse for Week 7 -- Ephesians 5:18 "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." Have you memorized the Bible verse? Let's break it down to learn it together. The first part instructs us to "not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery." In our lesson today, we discussed cultural Christianity. It seems that many believe that they are free to do anything they want if they do not follow Islamic laws. Yet, here is a very strong command that Paul wrote to the Christians at Ephesus, a town in Turkey. They were not to get drunk on anything that would inhibit their ability to think clearly. You could add to that group such things as illegal drugs, gluttony, or mystical meditation. The second part of the verse provides the answer to the question of how to live a lifestyle that is God-centered. The last half of the verse states, "instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit." When a person becomes a true Christian, they receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit may be present without being filled. On a daily basis, believers need to get rid of the evil things in our lives so that we can be filled with God's Spirit. Being filled is a blessing for which we can praise God! Let's say the verse together, Ephesians 5:18 "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." Prepare: To help you prepare for our next session, I want you to think about people who have died who were close to you. It might have been a friend, a coworker or a family member. In our next story, a friend of Jesus dies. What do you think Jesus will do for him?

CLOSING

No. 33 New-Pt 1-Raising of Lazarus; When God is silent John 11:1-16

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can tell the two parables of Jesus that I told in our last lesson? What did you learn about prayer? Should we change anything that we do in our prayer time? Accountability: Did you think about the humility involved in your vertical relationship with God and your horizontal relationships with each other? How can you live with humility? Pre-story Dialogue: Did you think about the death of someone with whom you had a relationship? How did the death make you feel? Our story today is the first of two parts. As I tell the story, think about the death of a man named Lazarus who was a friend of Jesus. How did Jesus feel about it? What relationship did Jesus have with Lazarus' sisters? How do you think that they will handle the death? Here is our story which could be titled, "When God is Silent."

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Jesus has the power to care for His followers.

Barrier -- New-God is distant and harsh

New-Pt 1-Raising of Lazarus; When God is silent

John 11:1-16

There was a man named Lazarus who was sick, and he was the brother of Mary and Martha, and they lived in the city of Bethany. One day the sisters sent word to Jesus that Lazarus was sick. They called him the "one you love" is sick. And Jesus said, well, this sickness is not going to cause death. It's just for God's glory so that "God's Son can be glorified" in it. So, although He loved Lazarus and Mary and Martha, He stayed two more days where He was. Then He said to disciples..., "Let us go back to Judea." But they protested, "Rabbi, a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and you're going back there?" And Jesus said, "A man who walks by the day won't stumble for he sees by this world's light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light." And then He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I'm going to wake him up." The disciples said, "Well, if he sleeps, that means he will get better." But Jesus said, "No, Lazarus is dead, and for your sake, I'm glad that I was not there so that you may believe. Now, let's go to him." Thomas said, well, "If you're going to die, we'll go die with you."

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

This is a new story, which will continue in our next lesson. Let's review this story. Who wants to tell it for our group? Who did Jesus and his disciples hear that was sick and very near death? Did Jesus love Lazarus? What did Jesus say would be the result of Lazarus' illness? (*Optional: What was the importance of Thomas' comment about going to Jerusalem to die with Jesus.*) Have you ever brought a concern to God in prayer? Have you ever prayed, but it seemed like God did not respond to your request? Why did Jesus say that Lazarus' illness would result in God's glory and that God's Son would be glorified through it? When you cannot see God answering your prayers can you trust that God is still at work? After Jesus had stayed two more days after hearing that Lazarus was sick, why did Jesus' disciples warn Him not to go to the place where Lazarus lived? How do you think that Jesus knew that Lazarus had died? What did Jesus want His disciples to believe? There is more to tell in this story, so please return to hear how it ends. Application: Before our session next time, find a quiet time of the day and meditate on this portion of the story. Think about the importance of doing God's will and waiting for His will to be done. Do you think Jesus will raise Lazarus from the dead? Memory Verse for Week 7 -- Ephesians 5:18 "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit."

CLOSING

No. 34 New-Pt 2-Raising of Lazarus; Jesus conquers death John 11:17-45

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Please remember that our last story was the first of two parts. Who would like to tell the first part? Why did Jesus wait before going to Bethany? (*Optional: Why did Thomas say what he did?*) Accountability: Did you have a prayer time where you could think about the importance of doing God's will and waiting for His will to be done? Is there something that you want God to do for you right away, but it keeps being delayed? Pre-story Dialogue: In the first part of our story about Lazarus, we talked about the genuine grief that Jesus had over the loss of his friend. Do you think Jesus knows and cares about you, too? Listen to see if God hears and answers prayers. How do you think the two sisters will treat Jesus? What do you think that they hope will happen? Here is the story, "The Raising of Lazarus."

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Jesus has the power to care for His followers.

Bridge -- New-God hears and answers prayers

New-Pt 2-Raising of Lazarus; Jesus conquers death

John 11:17-45 (This story could go through verse 53.)

When Jesus got to Bethany, He found out that Lazarus was already dead and, in fact, had been buried in the tomb for four days. When He came, Martha came out to Him and met him at the edge of the city and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died, and I know that even now, God will give you whatever you ask." Jesus said, "Your brother's going to rise again." Martha said, "Oh, I know he's going to rise in the last day at the resurrection of the last day." Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord, I believe," she said. "You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come to the world." And then after she had said this, she called her sister Mary aside and said, "The Teacher's here and asking about you." And so Mary left to go out to see Jesus. The Jews saw her going and thought that she was going to the tomb, so they followed her out to Jesus. When Mary got to the place where Jesus was, she said, "Lord, if you had been here my brother wouldn't have died." Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her were also weeping. And He was deeply moved, and He said, "Where have you laid him?" "Come and see," they said, and Jesus wept. When the Jews saw that, they said, "See how He loved him?" But some of them said, well, "Could not this man who opened the eyes of the blind have kept this man from dying?" Jesus was moved again when He came to the tomb. And then He said, "Take away the stone." Martha said, "But Lord, he's been dead four days, and there's a bad odor." Jesus said, "Did I not tell you to believe, and you would see the glory of God?" So the people took away the stone, and then Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Father, I thank you that you've heard Me. I know that you always hear Me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here that they may believe that you sent Me." And when He had said this, Jesus called with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forward." And the dead man came out of the tomb with his hands wrapped in strips of linen as they had buried him. Jesus said, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go." Now, when the Jews saw this, they were very unhappy about this, and they said, "The whole world will go after him. How can we stop this man?" The high priest said in a discussion with them, "You know nothing at all. Don't you realize that it's better for you that one man die for the people and let the whole nation not perish?" And He didn't really say this on His own, this was a prophecy that was given about the death that Jesus was going to die. So Jesus had to move in other circles and not among the Jews because they were intent on killing Him.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Our story today was a continuation of our last session's story. Who can tell the story of "The Raising of Lazarus"? Another title for this lesson could be, "Jesus Conquers Death." Were Mary and Martha's requests to Jesus answered? Were their prayers answered in the way that they thought they should be answered or as God needed them to be answered? When Mary first met Jesus in this story, why did she point out that Jesus was late and could have prevented Lazarus' death? After Jesus was deeply moved and had wept, what did Jesus say in return? What does it

mean that Jesus is "the resurrection"? Does it give you hope to know that Jesus is more powerful than death? When Jesus arrived at the tomb of Lazarus, what did He pray to God? Do you ever thank God for hearing your prayers? We know from previous stories that Jesus wanted His disciples to pray intimately with God on a regular basis. However, why did Jesus decide to pray in public this time? Does it help you to believe? *[Option: If you took the story through verse 53, ask questions about the rejection of Jesus by the religious leaders. What were their plans? What is the significance of the high priest's prophetic statement that one many should die for the sins of the people? (v. 50)]* Application: Tell this story to someone today. After you tell it, also tell the person how God has answered one of your prayers. Remind the person that Jesus conquers death! Memory Verse for Week 7 -- Ephesians 5:18 "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit."

CLOSING

No. 35 Triumphant entry/Cleansing Temple Matthew 21:1-17

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can tell the whole story of Lazarus' Death and Resurrection? What was the most meaningful part of the story to you? Did Mary and Martha believe in Jesus? Do you believe that Jesus has the power to bring the dead back to life? Accountability: Did you tell the story to someone and then tell him or her about a prayer that the Lord answered for you? What are some prayers that have been answered in your life? Pre-story Dialogue: The raising of Lazarus was big news and word soon spread from Bethany to Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, a meeting was conducted among the religious sects including the Pharisees and the Saducees. The council that met was called the Sanhedrin. The religious leaders were furious that Jesus was creating such a clamor that it would arouse the anger of the Roman Empire. The Sanhedrin feared that the people would follow Jesus in such numbers that the Romans would remove the Sanhedrin's authority and that they would be without jobs. They also feared that the disruption in their religious system would cause the nation to fall even further under authority to Rome. So, at that council the religious leaders began to plot the death of Jesus. (John 11:46-53) Our next story happened one week prior to the crucifixion of Jesus. In today's story, please pay attention to the obedience of the disciples of Jesus to follow His orders. What were they to do? Then pay attention to the crowds and what they were shouting in praise of Jesus. And, finally, what did the children say to Jesus? Here is the story of the Triumphant Entry and the Cleansing of the Temple.

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Following Jesus means you live for God more than any other purpose.

Barrier -- New-Religion is imposed rather than free to believe

Triumphant entry/Cleansing Temple

Matthew 21:1-17

Story: This is the Bible story of the "Triumphant Entry and Cleansing the Temple." Jesus and his twelve disciples were walking on the road to Jerusalem. Jesus stopped walking on the Mount of Olives which overlooks Jerusalem. It was near the village called Bethpage. Jesus sent two of his disciples on a special errand. He told them, "Go into the village just ahead of us. Just as soon as you get there, you will find a donkey tied there with a her colt beside her. Untie them and bring them to me. If you are asked what you are doing, tell them that the Lord needs them, and the person will send them right away." This all took place to fulfill the prophecy that said, "Say to the Daughter of Zion: See, your king comes to you gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." Now, the disciples went and did as Jesus told them. They brought the donkey and the colt to Jesus. The disciples placed their coats on the donkey and Jesus sat on them. A very large crowd soon gathered. They put their coats on the ground and cut palm branches from the trees and put those on the ground, too. The people who were in front of Jesus and those that followed behind shouted out, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" They shouted like this all the way from the Mount of Olives to the gates of Jerusalem. So, when Jesus entered the city everyone was excited and asked each other, "Who is this man?" The crowd all answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee." Jesus entered the temple grounds. He looked at everything being done there and drove out all who were buying and selling there. Jesus flipped over the tables where the people were changing their money and the places where they were selling doves for sacrifices. Jesus said to the people who were there, "God's Word says, 'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a den of thieves." Then the blind and those that were crippled came to Jesus while He was still in the temple. And Jesus healed them. He healed all of them. But the chief priests and the Law teachers saw all these wonderful things that Jesus did. And they heard the children shouting in the temple grounds saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David." This made the leaders very angry against Jesus. They confronted Jesus and said, "Do you hear what the children are shouting?" Jesus turned to them and said, "Yes, have you never read, 'From the lips of children and babies you have brought praise?'" Then Jesus and His disciples left and went out to a nearby city where they spent the night. And that is the story from God's Word.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Who can tell this story? Let's review together some of the events and the peoples' reaction. What did Jesus ask His disciples to get for Him? Do you think they were trusting Jesus and obeying Him without hesitation now that they had been with Jesus for three years? When Jesus triumphantly rode the donkey into Jerusalem, what did the people of the city do? Why did Jesus go to the Temple? Did He find people worshipping and praying or did He find people conducting business? What does this say to Christians about the purpose of the places where they worship and pray together? After the cleansing of the Temple, why do you think that the blind and lame felt free to come to Jesus to be healed? What did the children begin to sing to Jesus? What was the response of the religious leaders? Should worship and prayer be conducted in freedom or should religious leaders impose it? Do you think Jesus wants to force everyone to follow Him or do you think He gives us a free will; a choice? Application: Please tell this story to a friend. Note that Jesus wants us to worship God and it was Jesus that made it possible for His followers -- from the lowliest to the highest -- to freely worship God. Let's all say in unison the Memory Verse for Week 7 -- Ephesians 5:18 "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." Prepare #1: *The leader or volunteers should bring the elements of the Lord's Supper to the next storying session.* Prepare #2: *In two storying sessions, four people could act out the story of Peter's denials. Enlist roles for Peter, a maidservant and two men. Enlist a narrator or have someone to crow like a rooster at the appropriate time. It is not necessary to have someone play the part of Jesus. Just have Peter look away and begin crying. Pull the group aside and help them learn the story prior to the telling / acting out of the story.*

CLOSING

No. 36 New-Ordinance of The Last Supper Luke 22:7-23

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can tell the story of the Triumphant Entry and the Cleansing of the Temple? When did these events happen? How did the religious leaders react to this attention being placed upon Jesus? How do you think the disciples felt about Jesus? Accountability: Did you tell the story and discuss the freedom that worshipping Jesus brings? Pre-story Dialogue: Do you remember the story of the Upper Room and the Last Supper that Jesus celebrated with His disciples? What event were Jesus and His disciples observing? What was the significance of this event? Listen to this story as a way to remember what Jesus taught us. (*Bring out the elements of the Lord's Supper.*) Here is the fruit of the vine and here is the unleavened bread. Listen to this story. After I have told the story, we will observe the Lord's Supper as He commanded us. Here is the story, "The Last Supper."

BIBLE STORY

Truth: A church remembers their Savior.

Gap -- Review--Ordinance--Lord's Supper

New-Ordinance of The Last Supper

Luke 22:1-23

The Festival of Unleavened Bread, which begins with the Passover Celebration, was drawing near. The leading priests and teachers of religious law were busy plotting the murder of Jesus, but they wanted to kill Him without starting a riot, for this was a possibility they greatly feared. Well then Satan entered into Judas Iscariot, who was one of the 12 disciples, and he went over to the leading priests and captains of the temple guard to discuss the best way to betray Jesus to them. They were delighted that he was ready to help them, and they promised him a reward. So he began looking for a chance to betray Jesus so they could arrest Him quietly while He was away from the crowds. Now it was time for the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lambs were sacrificed. Jesus sent Peter and John ahead, and said, "Go and get the Passover meal ready so we can eat it together." And they asked Him, "Where do you want us to go?" Jesus replied, "As soon as you enter Jerusalem, a man carrying a pitcher of water will meet you. Follow him. At the house he enters, say to the owner, 'The Teacher asks, Where is the guest room where I can eat the Passover meal with My disciples?' He will take you upstairs to a large room that is already set up. This is the place. Go ahead and prepare our supper there." Well, they went off to the city and found everything just as Jesus had said, and they prepared the Passover supper there. Then at the proper time, Jesus and the 12 apostles sat down together at the table. Jesus said, "I have looked forward to this hour with deep longing, anxious to eat this Passover meal with you before My suffering begins. For I tell you now that I won't eat it again until it comes to fulfillment in the Kingdom of God. Then He took a cup of wine, and when He had given thanks for it, He said, "Take this and share it among yourselves for I will not drink wine again until the Kingdom of God has come." Then He took a loaf of bread, and when He had thanked God for it, He broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, "This is My body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me." And after supper, He took another cup of wine and said, "This wine is the token of God's new covenant to save you. It's an agreement sealed with the blood I will pour out for you. But here at this table, sitting among us as a friend is the man who will betray me. For I, the Son of Man, must die since it is a part of God's plan, but oh how terrible it will be for the one who betrays me."

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Do you remember this story from the last time we told it? Our focus was on Jesus' observance of the traditional Passover meal and it becoming a way to celebrate Jesus death until He returns. This is one of two special events or ordinances that all Christians should observe. Do you remember the other one? Think back to the baptism of Jesus. Jesus said that believers should be baptized and that they should conduct the Lord's Supper. Now that you have heard how Jesus was crucified, do you see how Jesus related the bread and the fruit of the vine as symbols of His death? Let's observe the Lord's Supper right now. Here is the bread. What does it represent? (*Please break off a small bite of bread and pass it to those in your group. Say a*

prayer to the Lord thanking Him for the food and that you can observe it together. Take the cup and pour out a sip or two for each participant., Say a prayer of thanksgiving for the drink and that it represents the shed blood of Jesus. Sing a fellowship song as they did in the Upper Room.) Application: Our observance of the Lord's Supper is something that you could do before our next session: Please gather a group of believers together and celebrate the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is something to be observed by a group of believers. Be sure to give thanks to God for the food you are about to receive. Then eat bread and drink grape juice--it does not matter what kind. As you do so, tell this story from the Upper Room. Discuss what Jesus' death and resurrection mean to each of you. Also remind each other that Jesus said that He is coming back. Observe the Lord's Supper frequently, but do not do it so much that it loses its meaning or becomes less than special. Some Christian churches observe the Lord's Supper every time they get together. Others observe it every other month. Every Christian church tries to make it a very special time. You are free to decide! Just be sure to do observe the Lord's Supper as a way to remember what Jesus did for you. Memory Verse for Week 8 -- Philippians 2:9-11 "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Prepare: *Have you enlisted people to act out the Denials of Peter story? Do they need to practice prior to the story session?*

CLOSING

No. 37 Peter's denial Luke 22:21-34, 54-62

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can tell the story of the Last Supper? What are the two ordinances of a Christian church? Accountability: Did anyone conduct the Lord's Supper with a group of believers? How did it go? Did you tell the story of the Last Supper the disciples had with Jesus in the Upper Room? Pre-story dialogue: The Last Supper occurred on the same night that Jesus was arrested at the Garden of Gethsemane. Do you remember that Jesus prayed that God's will would be accomplished? Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus' twelve disciples led a group of soldiers who arrested Jesus during the night. Remember that the Sanhedrin was composed of different religious sects including Pharisees and Saducees. They wanted to see Jesus killed. Our story today is about Peter and his denials. Have you ever been shy about sharing your faith? You have heard this story before, so it will be a review for you. However, we want to look at the story from a Christian perspective. Why was Peter shy about his faith? Compare this story of Peter with the story of Peter preaching at Pentecost. How does Peter act differently? Here is the story from God's Word.

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Jesus told God's story to all kinds of people and expects us to do the same.

Bridge -- Review-Many Persian Christians are shy about sharing their faith

Peter's denial

Luke 22:24-34, 54-62

Drama Option: Rather than tell the story, four people could act out the story of Peter's denials. If you enlisted roles for Peter, a maidservant and two men, then have them prepare to begin the drama. If you have enlisted a narrator, have the actors follow his story line. If not, then someone will need to crow like a rooster. It is not necessary to have someone play the part of Jesus. Just have Peter look away and begin crying.

Story Option: Now during the Last Supper in the Upper Room, there arose a great dispute amongst the disciples about who among them was to be the greatest. And as Jesus talked to them about servanthood and who was greater and who as lesser, he said to Simon, "Simon, I pray for you that your faith may not fail. And that when it does fail, I pray that you will turn again and strengthen your brothers." And Simon said to Jesus, "Lord, with you I am ready to go both to prison and even to death." And Jesus said to Simon, "I say to you Peter. The cock will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know me." Well after Jesus was arrested and they led him away, they brought him to the house of the high priest. But Peter was following at a distance and after they had lit a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter was sitting among them. And a certain servant girl seeing Peter as he sat in the firelight, looked at him intently and said, "This man was with him. This man was with Jesus, too." But Peter denied it saying, "Woman, I don't know him." A little later, another saw him and said, "You are one of them, too." But Peter said, "Man, I'm not." And after about a half an hour had passed, another man began to insist saying, "Certainly, this man also was with him. For he is a Galilean, too." But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you're talking about." And immediately, while Peter was still speaking, a cock crowed and the Lord turned and looked at Peter and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had told him before a cock crows today, you will deny me three times. And so Peter went out and he wept bitterly.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Let's review this story from a genuine Christian's perspective. Are you ever shy in saying that you know Jesus and are identified as one of His followers? What should Peter have done? Did he love Jesus? Why did he deny knowing Jesus? Do you remember another story about Peter when he took a stand for Jesus? Did the story of Peter preaching on Pentecost come to mind? Do you remember that more than 3,000 expressed faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior that day? Now, think about how Jesus must have felt after Peter's denial? Did Jesus give up on Peter or did Jesus continue to relate to Jesus and help him to become a maturing follower of Jesus? What about

your fellow Christians? Should you give up on them? What do you think that Jesus would have done? Can you follow Jesus' model? Will you be a witness even if it means your arrest?

Application: Tell this story to a fellow believer as a way to encourage him or her in their faith. Let them know that you love them and pray for the Holy Spirit to help you to become bold witnesses!

Memory Verse for Week 8 -- Philippians 2:9-11 "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

CLOSING

No. 38 Jesus on the cross Luke 23:33-47

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Accountability: Were you a witness for Jesus this past week? What happened, as you were bold about your faith? Who can tell the story of Peter's Denials? (*Be sure to compliment the drama group for their performance. Ask them if they would like to do another drama. Story #46 on Ananias and Sapphira and Story #48 Saul's Conversion would work well as dramas. Just bring the volunteers aside and tell the stories to them in a separate meeting. Have them work through the logistics of acting out the stories.*) Pre-story Dialogue: Today's story is about the crucifixion of Jesus. You may or may not have been a believer when you heard about the crucifixion the first time. Listen to the story as a believer in Jesus. The first time you heard it, you might not have thought about the implications. What did it mean for Jesus to be willing to suffer and die for you and me? How could Jesus forgive those who were persecuting Him? Here is the story of "Jesus on the Cross."

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Jesus loved people so much He was willing to suffer and die for them.

Gap -- Review-Forgiveness is virtually unknown

Jesus on the cross

Luke 23:33-47

The soldiers who had come from the religious leaders to the garden of Gethsemane took Jesus to the high priest and the other chief priests and religious leaders. There they accused him of many things. The accusations were false and none of them agreed so that Jesus did not answer of these. Finally the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Sent One, the Son of the Blessed One?" "I am," Jesus said, "and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." When he heard this, the high priest tore his clothes in dismay, "We don't need any more witnesses", he said. "We have heard this from his own mouth." They all condemned him as worthy of death. They began to spit at him. Then they blindfolded him. They hit him with their fists and said prophecy and their guards took Jesus and they beat him. They took Jesus to the Roman ruler of that region. The man was named Pilate and so they brought him and they said, "We have brought here the one claiming to be the King of the Jews." They accused him of leading a rebellion against the Roman government. "Are you the King of the Jews?" This is what Pilate asked. "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. And so the Jewish religious leaders made many of the same accusations they had made previously, false ones and they accused Jesus of being against Rome. But Jesus made no answer to all of these accusations, and this amazed Pilate. Now it was custom at that time that during the feast of the Passover that the Roman ruler would release a prisoner of the Jews. Now there was a man in prison at that time and he was Barabbas. He had been involved in the insurrection against Rome and he had actually committed murder in the uprising. The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do what he normally did in this custom. "Ah, do you want to me to release to you the King of the Jews?" He said that because he knew that it was out of envy that the chief priest had handed Jesus over to him. But the chief priest stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead. Well then, "What shall I do with Jesus who is called the Christ?" Pilate said. "Crucify him!" the crowd shouted out. And Pilate said, "Why? What evil has he done?" And they shouted all the more loudly "Crucify him!" And so Pilate had water brought. He washed his hands, and he said, "I am innocent of the blood of this innocent man." The people said, "His blood be on us and our children." And so wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas and had Jesus beaten and he handed him over to soldiers to crucify Jesus. And that is our story.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Who can tell this story? Would more than one person be willing to tell this story? You are now familiar with this story. How should a Christian view Jesus' crucifixion? When we discussed this story last time, we focused on forgiveness and salvation. It is my prayer that you have asked Jesus to forgive you of your sins and that you have trusted Him to be your Lord and Savior. Now is a great time to recommit yourself to loving Jesus for what He did for you at Calvary. Why was Jesus willing to suffer for doing God's will? Does God ever ask you to do something for Him?

Has the Holy Spirit been urging you to become a bold messenger about the Good News of Jesus as Savior for all Persians? Would you follow Jesus' example of self-sacrifice? Would you be willing to die so that others may have the chance to hear about eternal life? What is holding you back? What door(s) of opportunity is God opening to you? Will you be willing to take up your own cross and follow Jesus? Will you do it every day of your life until Jesus returns? In this story, Jesus assured one of those crucified next to Him that He would be in paradise with Jesus that very day because He believed in Jesus. Application: Do you know of someone near death? Would you go to that person and share this story with them? Would you help them know that they can be in paradise with Jesus this very day? Do you know of someone else in need who could benefit from this story? Go tell them right now. Memory Verse for Week 8 -- Philippians 2:9-11 "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

CLOSING

No. 39 Jesus is Alive Luke 24:1-13

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can tell the story of Jesus on the Cross? Why was it necessary for Jesus to die? If someone were to tell you that Jesus was substituted on the cross, what would you tell them? How did Jesus serve as a substitute for you and me? Accountability: How is God working in your life? Do you have new opportunities to witness? Are you bolder in your faith? Pre-story Dialogue: It is very difficult to tell the story of Jesus' crucifixion and not include the story of the Risen Lord. How do you celebrate good news in your family? How can we celebrate a risen Lord today? What did the disciples do to celebrate Jesus' resurrection? Listen carefully to the news that Jesus is alive! Here is the story from God's Word.

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Following Jesus lasts all your life and through eternity.

Bridge -- Review-The Risen Lord is unknown

Jesus is alive

Luke 24:1-13

One the day following Jesus' burial some of the religious leaders of the Jews remembered that Jesus had said that on the third day that He would rise from the dead. And so they went to Pilate and they said, "This man claimed that on the third day He will rise from the dead and we are afraid His disciples will come along and steal His body and then claim that He is resurrected." They said that they didn't want that to happen [and requested that Pilate] post a guard to keep that from happening. And Pilate said, "Take a guard. Make the tomb as secure as you can make it." The Jewish leaders did post [the] guards to make the tomb secure. They even sealed [it] with a seal. But on the third day very early there was an earthquake. The angels of God came and rolled away the stone from the tomb. And on that morning, very early some of the women went out early taking spices they had prepared but when they got there the guards had run away and they found the stone rolled away from the tomb and didn't see Jesus' body was there they were confused. They were wondering about this and they looked and there were two men in clothes that shown brightly almost like lightening and in their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground and the men said to them. "Why are you looking for the living among the dead? He is not here. He is risen. Remember how He told you while He was still with you in Galilee? He said that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of the sinful men and be crucified and then on the third day be raised again." And when the angels told them of this they thought oh, that is right. They remembered that this is what He had said. So they left the tomb and they went back where the twelve were gathered and they told them what they had seen. The women included Mary, Magdalene and Joanna and Mary, the mother of Jane and some of the others, but when they told this to the men that had gathered there, they didn't believe the women. They thought the women were saying nonsense. But Peter got up and went with the disciple whom Jesus loved and ran to the tomb and peered in. And when the other disciples saw he believed but Peter didn't understand.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Jesus is alive! Praise God! You have heard this story before, so let's discuss it from a disciples' perspective. Since Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday, the first day of the week (Sunday), do you understand why Christians wanted to meet together on that day each week? Have you as a follower of Jesus come to appreciate the unique distinction of Jesus being raised from the dead? Think of other stories when Jesus raised someone from the dead. Do you remember the story of Lazarus? Do you remember when Jesus told Mary, Lazarus' sister, that He was the resurrection and the life? Have you told the story of Jesus' resurrection to anyone that you know?

Application: Please tell the story very soon to someone who is fearful of death. As you tell it, see if this story gives the person a renewed sense of hope. Be sure to ask that person if they would like to become a believer in Jesus and receive the gift of eternal life! Also, let's examine our meeting time. Should we move it to Sunday? Before we go, let's spend some time learning the Memory Verse for Week 8 -- Philippians 2:9-11 "Therefore God exalted him to the highest

place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” What does this passage mean? Why did “God exalt him (Jesus) to the highest place and give him the name that is above every name?” Was there special status that God recognized in Jesus? The next phrase gives the answer, “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.” The “name of Jesus” phrase contains the essence of Jesus. The final part says that “every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” What happens when we profess before men that Jesus is the highest priority in our lives? Is the Father glorified? Praise God that we can bring glory to God through our faith in Jesus Christ! Does praising God lead you to express it in a song or a poem? How can you express your appreciation to God for Jesus? Think about that during the coming week! Let’s say the verse as a praise to God: Philippians 2:9-11 “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

CLOSING

No. 40 Doubting Thomas John 20:24-32 / Peter is forgiven John 21:1-25

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can recount the stories of both Jesus' crucifixion and the resurrection? Why was it necessary for Jesus to die? Why was it necessary for Jesus to be raised from the dead? What if Jesus had not been resurrected from the dead? How do we have assurance that Jesus is alive today? How many days did Jesus stay in the tomb? What day was He resurrected? How did the disciples learn of His resurrection? Accountability: Did the group decide to meet on Sunday? Did anyone tell our last story to someone else? How have you experienced the resurrection of Jesus in a new way this past week? Would you please continue to think of ways to celebrate Jesus' resurrection? How can we express appreciation to Jesus for saving us through His death, burial and resurrection? Pre-story dialog: Today's story is about Jesus restoring relationships with two of His disciples – one called Thomas and another disciple, Peter. Jesus was alive and wanted to care for two of his disciples who were confronting important issues. Jesus had met with his disciples already at least once. This story is in two parts. In the first story is about Thomas and the second story about Peter, listen carefully for the way Jesus helped them be restored with their relationship with Jesus. And this is the first story that we will have in our session today.

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Following Jesus is based on a personal relationship (not on a set of rules or guidelines).
Gap -- New-Islam doubts that Jesus is alive / Forgiveness is virtually unknown

First story in session: Doubting Thomas
John 20:24-32

Now Thomas, who was called Didymus, was one of the twelve and he was not with the disciples when Jesus had appeared to them after He was resurrected from the dead the first time. So the other disciples were very, very excited. They were telling Thomas, "We've seen the Lord. We've been with him!" But Thomas said to the disciples that had seen Jesus, "Unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my finger where the nails were and put my hand in His side, I'm not going to believe it." A week later, Jesus' disciples were in the house again and this time Thomas was with them and even though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger right here. See my hands. Touch them right here in the nail holes. Now, reach out your hand and touch my side. Oh Thomas, stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to Jesus, "My Lord and my God." Then Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed." And that's the first story that we have in our session today.

FIRST POST STORY DIALOG:

Thomas: These were new stories for you. Who was Thomas? Why did he doubt that God had raised Jesus from the dead? How did Thomas come to believe in Jesus as his lord and his God? What did Jesus say to Thomas that would help all believers of Jesus? Do you think that Jesus wants you to believe in Him as God? Do you have to be like Thomas and touch Jesus to believe in Him? Application: Do you know anyone who has heard the Gospel story, yet still does not believe in Jesus as their Savior? Share this story with him and see if it helps them to believe.

SECOND BIBLE STORY:

PRE-STORY DIALOG: Do you remember the story about Peter denying Jesus three times? How did Peter feel after betraying Jesus? How do you think Peter felt toward Jesus? How do you think Jesus felt toward Peter?

Bible story: Peter is Forgiven -- John 21:1-25

Now here is the second story about Peter. Afterward, Jesus appeared again to His disciples by the sea of Tiberius and it happened this way. Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathaniel from Canaan in Galilee, James and John, the sons of Zebedee and two other disciples were all

together. Simon Peter looked around at them and he says, "You know, I think I'm going to go out and fish." And they all said, "Well, we'll go with you." So they went out and they got in the boat and they fished and fished all night. But they didn't catch anything. Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus and He shouted out to them, "Hey friends! Have you caught any fish?" Well, they had to tell him no that they hadn't caught any fish. So He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you'll find some." And you know what? When the disciples did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. Then ... John looked at Peter and said, "It's the Lord." As soon as Simon Peter heard John say that, he wrapped his outer garment around him, because he had taken it off while he was fishing, and he jumped in the water. The other disciples followed in the boat because they were towing that net full of fish, for they were not very far from shore, only about one hundred yards, or so. When they landed they saw a fire burning coals and there were fish on it and some bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have caught." Simon Peter climbed back on the boat and helped all those disciples drag the net ashore. It was full of very large fish, 153 fish in fact. But even with so many, the net they caught them in was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Why don't you come over here and have some breakfast?" Now none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew that it was Jesus. Jesus came and He took some bread and He gave it to them and He did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to His disciples after He was raised from the dead and when they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said. "You know that I love you." So Jesus told Peter, "Feed my lambs." And then a second time Jesus said, "Simon, son of John, do you truly love me?" Well, Peter answered, "Yes Lord, you know that I love you." So Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." The third time, Jesus said to Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Well, Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him a third time and so he said, "Lord you know all things. You know that I love you." Well Jesus just said very simply, "Feed my sheep. I tell you Peter, and I tell you the truth, that when you were younger, you dressed yourself and you went out and went everywhere you wanted. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death that Peter would have, by which he would also glorify God. Then He looked at Peter and He just said, "Follow me." And that is our second story for today.

SECOND STORY POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

(Peter) This was a new story for you. Who was fishing out on the water? Who was preparing something for the disciples to eat on the shore? Why did Jesus have a special conversation with Simon Peter? Why did Jesus keep asking Peter if he loved the Lord? What was Peter's response? Do you think that this encounter helped Peter know that he was forgiven? How do you know that Jesus was not through with Peter? Why did Jesus then say that Peter should feed Jesus' sheep and take care of the flock? What can we as Persian Christians learn about forgiveness from this story? What are other stories that we have learned where forgiveness of sins was very important? As Christians are we to forgive others? What did Jesus teach in the Lord's Prayer as a model? Application: Have you been praying to forgive others as God forgives you? Do you know someone that you need to forgive? Will you go tell them this story and give them your forgiveness? Does someone need to forgive you? Will you go tell them this story and ask their forgiveness? Philippians 2:9-11 "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

CLOSING

No. 41 Jesus Will Return and the Promise of the Holy Spirit. Acts 1:3-12

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Let's begin our worship today by praising God that He wants to have a right relationship with us. Who can tell last week's double stories of Doubting Thomas and Peter's Restoration? How did Jesus take the initiative to bring the two disciples to Himself? Accountability: Did you forgive anyone this week? Did you tell them the story of Peter's Restoration? Pre-story Dialog: Today's story is a review of a story that you have heard previously. However, it is very important for a Christian to remember and think about whenever you think about Jesus coming back and the role of the Holy Spirit. In today's story, Jesus is preparing to return to the Father and is instructing His disciples. What did Jesus promise His followers? Do you believe that Jesus is coming back? Here is the story, "Jesus will give power and return one day."

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Followers of Jesus receive the Holy Spirit upon conversion who guides, convicts of sin, empowers to witness and comforts.

Barrier -- Review-God is at work and invites you to join Him; involves a crisis of belief
Jesus Will Return and the Promise of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:3-12

After Jesus was raised from the dead He appeared to women and men alike on many occasions. Sometimes even to large groups as many as 500 at one time and He gave them many convincing proofs that He was indeed alive. These appearances took place over a period of about 40 days and during this time He spoke often of the Kingdom of God. On one occasion while He was eating with them He gave them a command, He said to His disciples, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait here, for the gift my Father has promised, which you have heard me talk about. John baptized with water but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." So when they met together they asked Him, "Lord are you at this time going to restore the Kingdom of Israel?" And He said, "It is not for you to know the exact times or dates that the Father has set. These are His own decisions. But you will receive power of the Holy Spirit comes on you and you are my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and all Samaria and to the ends of the earth." After He said this He was lifted up. Right before their very eyes! And a cloud hid Him from their sight. And they stood there staring up at the sky. Then suddenly there were two men dressed in white who stood along with them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "Why are you standing here looking into the sky? This same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven will come back in the same way you seen Him go into heaven." And so they returned to Jerusalem to wait as Jesus had told them for the gift of the spirit. And that is the story from God's Word.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

You have heard this story previously as instructions for the disciples to wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Let's discuss this story as Christians who have already received the Holy Spirit when we received Jesus as our Lord and Savior. When Jesus was resurrected and instructed His disciples, what role did the Holy Spirit of God play? What is the Holy Spirit? Why were the disciples supposed to wait on the Holy Spirit after Jesus had ascended back to Heaven? Let's stop and think about the story where Jesus sent out his disciples on a mission trip to local villages. Did you make a similar trip to share a story about Jesus? Did you find a person of peace to facilitate your visit or were you rejected? Now consider today's story. What does the Holy Spirit help Jesus' followers to do? Did you notice the progression moving outward from Jerusalem in this story? What was after Jerusalem? What was after Judea and Samaria? What do you think it means to be witnesses for Jesus "to the ends of the earth?" What is your Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria? Where can you be a witness? Is God calling you to go to the ends of the earth? As you go to different places sharing these stories of Jesus, can you rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to help you? Application: Tell this story and as you tell it, don't forget to say that Jesus is planning to return just like He ascended into Heaven. Point out that only the Father in Heaven knows when Jesus is supposed to return. See if that adds urgency to the need to go and tell everyone that Jesus is Lord! (new) Memory Verse for Week 9 -- Philippians 2:13 "For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."

CLOSING

No. 42 The Holy Spirit is received, giving boldness (Pentecost) Acts 2:1-18, 36-41

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Would someone please tell the story from our last session? Be sure to name Jesus' promises. What did He instruct the disciples to do prior to the coming of the Holy Spirit? What is the Holy Spirit and how is He a part of God and Jesus? Accountability: Who was able to tell the story to someone? What was their response? Were you bold or timid? What does it take to be a bold witness for Jesus? Pre-story dialog: Do you remember the story of Jesus' baptism when we discussed that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the Trinity? Our story today tells of the mighty power of God in the form of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit is received, listen for the response of the disciples. How do the people in Jerusalem respond to the disciples? And, finally, please listen to the sermon that Peter preached to the people. Is this a model sermon that will help you share the good news of Jesus? Here is the story, "The Holy Spirit is Received, Giving Boldness."

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Followers of Jesus are to be witnesses to the world.

Gap -- Review-Understanding the Holy Spirit/New-A "Day of Power" expecting God to work

The Holy Spirit is received, giving boldness (Pentecost)

Acts 2:1-18, 36-41

The disciples met together and prayed until the day of Pentecost. Suddenly they were surrounded by a loud noise. It sounded like a strong wind. Something like fire entered the room and rested upon each of the believers. As they were filled with the Holy Spirit, they began to speak in different languages. The power of the Holy Spirit enabled them to leave the room and begin speaking to all the people of Jerusalem—even those who had traveled there from many different nations. Each person heard them speaking their own language and they were amazed! They said, "These are men from around here, yet how are they speaking our own tongue?" The foreigners were Parthians, Medes and Elamites. There were also people from Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Asia, Greece, Egypt and Libya and Rome. There were also Cretans and Arabs present. These were all Jews who had converted from other religions to Judaism. The people demanded an explanation, but some of them thought that maybe the believers were drunk on wine. After the various people experienced the miracle of hearing the gospel in their own tongue, Peter stood up in the midst of them on this day speaking to a large assembly of Jews and proselyte Jews. He spoke in a very loud voice and during his message he said this to them. "Whoever among you will ask the Lord, you will be saved. Listen to me you men of Israel, Jesus of Nazareth, a man authenticated by God in your midst by miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did through him right before your eyes, as you already know, He, being delivered by the determinate counsel in prior knowledge of God, you took and by your wicked hands crucified and killed, whom God raised up loosing from him the pains of death. For it was not possible for death to hold him. Now, David told us about him when he said, "I saw the Lord always before my face, therefore did my heart rejoice and my tongue was glad, and more than that, my body will rest in hope because you will not leave my soul in Sheol. Neither will you allow your Holy One to rot in the grave. You made known to me the ways of life and you will fill me with joy by seeing your face." After this Peter said, "All of you who are listening, let me openly say to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried and his sepulcher is with us even to this day. Therefore, being a prophet and knowing that God swore by an oath to David that out of his family according to his flesh, he would raise up Christ Messiah to sit on his throne. David seeing this before was speaking of the resurrection of Christ that Christ's soul was not left in Sheol and would not rot in the grave. This Jesus, God raised up and we're all witnesses of this fact. Therefore, he is exalted and he is now seeing and hearing this. It was not David that ascended up into the heavens, but He himself the Lord said unto my Lord, "You sit on my right hand until I make your enemies my footstool." Therefore, I will tell all of the house of Israel very clearly that God has made this same Jesus the one you crucified both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard that, they were pierced in their heart. They then said to Peter and to the rest of the apostles, "Men and brothers, what shall we do?" Peter then said to them, "Repent, be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sin and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

For the promise is given to you also and to your children and to all that are afar off, even all who our Lord shall invite. And with many other words Peter testified and exhorted saying, "Save yourselves from this evil generation." Now after all of these words, all of those who gladly received his word were baptized and that very day there were added to them the congregation about three thousand souls. These individuals continued faithfully in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship and in the breaking of bread and in prayers. And fear came over every soul. And many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all who believed were together. They commonly shared what they had. They sold their possessions and goods and shared them with all men as every man had a need. And they daily continued to gather in unity in the temple and in the breaking of bread from house to house, eating their meat in joy and single-mindedness. They were praising God and they were being respected by all the people. And the Lord added to that church daily such as should be saved."

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Let's review this story. How does it feel to you that some of the very first Christians were Persians -- specifically Parthians, Medes and Elamites? Who was the man who spoke to the crowd? Do you believe that the Holy Spirit made Peter bold? Peter and the other disciples were called uneducated men, so where did they receive the words to say? How else did the Holy Spirit help all the followers that day? Have you seen evidence in your life that the Holy Spirit was at work? Do you think that there's a connection between how the Holy Spirit helps us and our knowledge of God's Word revealed to us in His stories? Did you notice that the people who were converted that day still remained Medes, or Romans or Arabs, but their faith changed. Do you think it is still possible for all Persians to believe that Jesus is Savior and Lord? Application: What happened after people came to faith in Christ? (*they were baptized and fellowshiped with the other believers*) Should new believers be baptized? Why should believers be baptized? (*as an example, not to ensure salvation*) Do you remember the example Jesus set for baptism from a story previously told? How should this be done? (*immersion*) Who should do the baptizing? (*believers*) When should believers be baptized? (*after conversion, not as infants*) When can we baptize new believers in our group? (*Discuss and set a time. You may want to wait until the story of Peter & Cornelius in Acts 10.*) Why did the believers begin to meet together on a regular basis? (*sharing their possessions, worshipping God and greeting new members*) Application: Tell this story to a friend or a family member who is a Christian. Will you pray together to become bold witnesses for Jesus? Should we set a time to discuss baptism and forming a church? (*You may want to wait until after the next few stories.*) Memory Verse for Week 9 -- Philippians 2:13 "For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."

CLOSING

No. 43 God's Purpose for the Church – Composite (Ex. 33:1-11, 1 Kings 6 & 8:22-66 and John 4:16-24)

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can tell the story of Pentecost? What did Peter preach to the people? Why did the people want to be baptized and start meeting together? Accountability: Did we set a time for conducting a baptism of our new members? Pre-story dialog: What are the similarities of a synagogue, a mosque and a church? How do they differ? Where did the early church meet together? In the next series of Bible stories, we will learn about the early church and how the Lord worked to expand the Gospel throughout the whole world, including where we live. As a background, our story today is in three parts. Listen for the variety of places in which a church can meet. Listen for the progression of places and times that God called the church into existence. In today's Bible stories, we will review a story from the time of Moses. Next, we will discuss a story from the time of the Kings of Israel and finally, we'll revisit the story of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman. Here is the story, "God's Purpose for the Church."

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Churches can meet in a variety of places

Gap -- Understanding the church / No knowledge of church life

God's Purpose for the Church – Exodus 33:7-11, composite 1 Kings 6 & 8:22-66 and John 4:16-24)

Story #1: God has always had a purpose for His people. He wanted them to meet together and worship Him. The first part of our story is from the time when God was worshipped in a tent—a tabernacle.

(Exodus 33:7-11): Moses took a tent and used to put it up outside the camp some distance from the camp. He called it the "tent of meeting" which can also be called the "Tabernacle of the Congregation." And at any time that someone wanted to seek counsel of the Lord, they were instructed to go to the Tabernacle of the Congregation, which was outside the camp. And every time that Moses went out and into the Tabernacle, every person in the camp rose up and every one of them stood at his tent door and watched Moses until he was gone inside the Tabernacle. And every time Moses entered the Tabernacle, the pillar of clouds descended and hovered at the door of the Tabernacle while the Lord was talking with Moses. Now when all the people saw the cloudy pillar hovering at the Tabernacle door, every person rose up and worshiped, bowing down low, every man in his tent door. Now inside the Tabernacle of the Congregation, the Lord would speak to Moses face to face in the very same way that a man speaks to a friend. After these meetings with the Lord, Moses would come out of the Tabernacle of the Congregation, re-enter the camp, but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, would not come out of the Tabernacle of the Congregation. And that is the story of the Tabernacle.

Story #2: Now in the next story about God's purpose for the church, the story is taken from the times when there were kings in Israel. King David had united the twelve tribes into a mighty nation, but God prevented David from replacing the mobile tabernacle with a stationary temple in Jerusalem. David's son, Solomon was given the honor. In this story, we're going to see just how much this is a model of the church today.

(1 Kings 6 & 8:22-66): This is our story. Now Solomon gave orders to build a temple for the Name of the Lord and a royal palace for himself. He conscripted something like 70,000 men as carriers and 80,000 as stonecutters in the hills, and 3,600 men as foremen over them all. Just an amazing number of people came together to build this temple. The temple, Solomon said, was going to be built because it was going to be tremendous because it was going to be to God. And he said that our God is greater than all other gods. But something really troubled Solomon. He said, "But who is able to build a temple for Him since the Heavens, even the highest Heavens cannot contain Him. Who then am I to build the temple for Him except as a place to burn sacrifices before Him?" Now when all the work that Solomon had done for the Temple of the Lord

was finished, he brought in all the things that his father, David, had dedicated. He had the things that were set apart like silver and gold and the furnishings that had been set aside. Then he not only did that, but he also summoned all of the elders of Israel, the people of Jerusalem, all the heads of the tribes and the chiefs of the Israelite families to bring up the Ark of the Lord's Covenant, along with the Tent of Meeting or the Tabernacle of the Congregation, and all of the sacred furnishings that were a part of that. And the priests who were the Levites carried them up, and King Solomon and the entire assembly of Israel that had gathered about him were before the Ark. And all the people, all of the priests sacrificed so many sheep and cattle that they could not be recorded or counted. The priests brought in the Ark of the Lord's Covenant to its place in the inner sanctuary of the temple, into the very most holy place of the temple. And they put it beneath the wings of cherubim, like angels. And the poles that were on the Ark actually were so long they extended out from the inner sanctuary, where they could be seen beyond the holy place. There was nothing in the Ark except for the two tablets that Moses had actually put in the Ark when they were at Mt. Horeb, when they received the law of God. They began to do these sacrifices and Solomon stood up before the people and began to pray. And part of that prayer talked about arising to the Lord God. He said, "Now arise oh Lord and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might. May your priests oh Lord God be clothed with your salvation. May your saints rejoice in your goodness. Oh Lord God do not reject your anointed one. Remember the great love promised to David your servant." And then when Solomon finished praying, fire came down from Heaven and consumed the burnt offerings and the sacrifices, and the Glory of the Lord filled the temple. The priests could not even enter the Temple of the Lord because the Glory of the Lord totally filled it. When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the Glory of the Lord above the temple, they knelt right there on the ground, right on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped God and they gave thanks to Him saying He is good and His love endures forever. Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the Lord. And that is the story of the Temple.

Story #3: In the last two stories, we've talked about the Tabernacle of the Congregation as a place where the people came to worship God. And we've also talked about the Temple that was built by Solomon, which was also a place that the people came and worshipped God. The importance in both of these is on the people and their relationship with God more than on the place. And so we see that Jesus also did this very same thing. When Jesus came, He further explained the purpose of the church. It is found in a portion of story of the Samaritan Woman at the well.

John 4:16-24: Jesus told the woman to go call her husband, but she said, "I don't have a husband." And He said, "You're right. You've had five husbands, and the man you're living with now is not your husband." And she tried to change the subject and said, "Sir, I can see you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claimed that the place where we must worship is Jerusalem." And then Jesus said these things to her, "Believe me woman, the time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you don't know. We worship what we know. For salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and in fact has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. For they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

We have heard three stories about places where God is worshipped. Who can tell me the story of the Tabernacle of the Congregation? Who is the congregation? Who can tell me the story about Solomon's Temple? Who filled the Temple? Why did Solomon say that one building could not contain all of God? Who can tell me what Jesus told the Samaritan Woman? Why should we worship God in spirit and in truth? What are the similarities with the Tabernacle, Temple and worshipping God in spirit and in truth without a structure? How is the Tabernacle a model of what we know about the church today? Do you think that Solomon's temple was intended to be the only place that God could be worshipped? Does the place where God's people meet today have the same purpose as the Tabernacle and the Temple? Why did Jesus say that the place to

worship was not as important as how the worship was done? How should Christians worship God? Jesus once told His disciples, “Where two or three are gathered together there I am in the midst of them.” Is there a limit on the places where God can be worshipped? Application: Who should worship God? How are we worshipping God? Should we change anything that we are doing in our worship? Where should we worship together? Announce: For our next worship time, we will meet in a different location. (*Determine where that should be—choose a place that is only moderately safe to meet and not within the confines of your typical meeting place or at the same time preferably*). Memory Verse for Week 9 -- Philippians 2:13 “For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”

CLOSING

No. 44 Arrest of Peter & John Acts 4:1-31

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

(Note: Make sure everyone knows where this session is to be conducted—a different meeting place than usual!) Who can tell the story of God's Purpose for the Church? What is the church? Is it just a place where we meet? What is the role of the people in worship? How are we to treat a building or a place in which God is worshipped? Accountability: Has anyone been able to share our previous stories to anyone? What kind of reactions have you experienced? Why are the stories offensive to some and welcomed by others? Pre-story Dialog: Today's story will help us know how to be Christians within a context of persecution. In order to help us prepare for today's lesson, I want to do two things. First, I want us to review the definition of discipleship that we learned many sessions ago. (*Following Jesus is a personal, lifelong, obedient relationship with Jesus Christ. If I follow Jesus, He does three things in my life: He transforms my character into Christlikeness. He changes my values to Kingdom values, and He involves me in His mission in the home, and in the church, and in the world.*) Have you found it easy or hard to be a follower of Jesus? In what ways have you changed since following Jesus? Secondly, I want us to review Bible stories where God's faithful people were persecuted for following His will and His ways. What kind of resistance did each of these men or women of God face? We've already had several stories about Peter and how Christ changed his life in many ways. I'd like to review what happened to Peter. Soon after Pentecost, Peter and John met a man who was crippled from his birth. They healed the man and the people were amazed. Peter preached to the crowd about the life of Jesus. This troubled the religious leaders who had Peter and John arrested. I want you to listen in this story for what Peter said when he was on trial. And then listen to what the leaders said about how Peter and John had changed. Now here's the story from God's Word.

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Followers of Jesus experience spiritual warfare, but are victorious through faithfully persevering.

Barrier -- Review-Believers are persecuted/New-Many Persian Christians are shy about sharing their faith; Witnessing is illegal

Arrest of Peter & John

Acts 3:1-26 (optional) 4:1-31

The priests and the Sanhedrin were very unhappy with Peter because he was preaching to the people about the resurrection of Jesus and because the church was growing so much. Finally they arrested Peter and John and called them before them and they demanded that he not preach anymore in the name of Jesus. And when Peter heard that, he began to say because he was filled with the Spirit, "If you are calling me into account today about this good act, when I healed the man who was sick, and to ask how he was healed, let me tell you how he was healed. He was healed by Jesus Christ—Jesus Christ of Nazareth—the one you crucified. This man stands before you today healed because Christ is the stone that you builders rejected. He's now become the capstone or the cornerstone and salvation is found in no one else for there's no other name under heaven given by men—to men by which we must be saved." And when they saw how courageous Peter and John were, they said, "These people are ignorant. They are unlearned. They haven't been to our schools but it is obvious they have been with Jesus." And they commanded them that they not speak anymore in the name of Jesus. But Peter said, "Well you judge for yourself what's right because in God's sight we must obey God rather than man." And finally they let them go because the people were all praising God for what had happened. Immediately when they were released they found the church members and they went to them and they began to pray together with them. And they prayed, "Oh Sovereign Lord. You made heaven and earth and the sea and everything in it. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant our father David. Why do the nations rage and the people plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers together stand against the Lord and his anointed one. And indeed Herod and Pontius Pilot met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city conspired against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided before should happen. Now, Lord consider their threats. Enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness and stretch out your hand to heal and perform

miracles and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” And when they had prayed like that, the whole place was shaken again and they were all filled with the Spirit of God and they all spoke the word of God boldly. Now that’s the end of the story.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Did this story give you courage when you heard it for the first time? As a Christian, what does this story mean to you? If you are a Christian leader or believe that God is asking you to become a Christian leader, think about the leadership role model set by Peter and John. What had Peter and John been doing in public prior to being arrested? Should leaders be teaching only in private or should they look for opportunities to be "proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead"? Did Peter and John send others out to teach for them or did they do it themselves? What opportunities do you have to tell stories about what you believe? Are you anticipating that you will be questioned about your beliefs? What questions did the religious authorities ask of Peter and John? How did Peter and John respond? Who did the religious leaders blame for having had such a great influence on the lives of Peter and John? How can you spend time with Jesus as Peter and John had done? What was the response to the church? Why do you think they received boldness after they prayed? Application: Please stop right now and pray for boldness. Pray for God’s leading and opening opportunities for being public witnesses. Review this story by yourself before our next session. Weigh the eternal consequences for those who will never hear the truth about Jesus Christ. Members of the group should think about the price that leaders and their families must pay. Also think about the opportunities that God is preparing for you. Are you ready to trust the Holy Spirit to guide you to be a witness for the Lord? Pray that God would lead you to a partner with whom you can become a public witness. Who among our group will be called out as a public witness to our own people? (*Close with a prayer time in which you stop and ask if anyone has been called to this ministry.*) Our Memory Verse for Week 9 has been Philippians 2:13 “For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” Do you believe the promise in this verse? If God is at work in you, how should you respond? Whose purpose should you live to accomplish—your own or God’s? What can you do today to surrender every aspect of your life to God’s will? Please say the Bible verse one more time :“For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” Philippians 2:13 (*Note—Will you move back to your former meeting place or meet somewhere else?*)

CLOSING

No. 45 The early church; Ananias & Sapphira Acts 4:32-37, 5:1-12

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can recount the story of Peter and John's Arrest and Trial? How is this story an encouragement to you? How can you apply that story to your life? How can we apply it to our church? Accountability: Has the Lord led you to a partner with whom you can become a witness? What steps should our church take to ensure for the welfare of the families of those called to be public witnesses? How should the public witnesses be prepared for taking the gospel into the open? What opportunities has the Lord revealed in which the Gospel can be boldly proclaimed? Pre-story dialog: Has our church encountered any problems that we have addressed? Have these problems been caused by people from outside our group? Have we encountered problems from within our group? The early church not only experienced problems from those outside the church as our last Bible story covered, but listen for the internal problems that come up in today's story. It may even remind you of the sin that slithered into the Garden of Eden! However, don't just dwell on the problems and the solutions. Also, please notice everything you can about the first church that was meeting in Jerusalem. Here is the story of the early church and particularly the story of Ananias and Sapphira.

BIBLE STORY

Truth: The local church is a part of the body of Christ.

Truth: The local church maintains doctrinal purity.

Barrier -- New--Church organization and unity/Dishonesty okay if not caught

The early church; Ananias & Sapphira

Acts 4:32-37, 5:1-12

The church was growing very quickly at that time. All the believers were agreed. They were agreed in mind and what they thought and they were agreed in what they did. The Bible says they were of one mind and one heart. They didn't claim that what they had belonged to them, each one. Rather they shared them with each other. And in the midst of this the apostles were continuing to share what Jesus had done and talk about the resurrection of Him, and God was just moving in a mighty way. There were no needy people among them for when there was a need, somebody would take some property he had, some land he had, and would sell it and then they would bring the income, whatever they sold it for, they would bring it all and put it down before the apostles' feet for them to distribute. There was a man among the believers whose name was Joseph. He was from an island called Cyprus. But also, he had another name. He was called Barnabas by the apostles. And Barnabas in their language meant "Son of Encouragement." Well, one day he sold a field that he owned and he brought all of the money and put it down at the apostles' feet. But something happened that was different in this story. Another man named Ananias also sold some property. He sold this property and his wife, Sapphira, knew about it that he kept some of the money for himself but brought the rest of it and put it at the apostles' feet. And Peter said, "Ananias, how could you have let Satan fill your heart in such a way that you would lie to the Holy Spirit and keep part of the money that you received from the sale of the land? That property belonged to you. You could have sold it and kept all of the money. What made you think of doing such a thing? Ananias, you haven't just lied to men. You have lied to God." And when Ananias heard that, he fell down and died. And a great fear came upon everybody that heard about this. And then some of the young men of the church came; they covered the body, picked it up, and buried it. About three hours later, his wife Sapphira came in. She didn't know what had happened to her husband. So Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the money? Is this all the money for which Ananias sold the land?" And she said, "Yes, this is the price." And then Peter said to her, "How could you agree with him to test the Spirit of the Lord. Look there come the feet of the men who buried your husband and they'll carry you out to bury you too." And that very moment she fell down and died. And the young men came in, they found her, they covered her, and took her and buried her beside her husband. And a great fear seized the whole church and everybody, even outside the church, that heard this. The apostles continued performing astonishing miracles and wonders among the people. And the people, the believers, continued to gather in the same place where that crippled man had been healed. But no one dared to join with them because there was a great fear, even though

they had a great appreciation for them. But more and more people came and believed in the Lord and were added to the number of the believers. And as a result of these great things, people kept bringing the sick and even bring them into the street because they thought that maybe if even Peter's shadow falls on them, they'll be healed. And many people came from all the towns around Jerusalem. And they'd bring their sick and they'd bring those tormented by demons, and all of them were healed. And that's the end of the story.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

This is a new story that tells what a church should do. Did the church in Jerusalem worship God? How does generosity result in fellowship with other believers? How did the apostles disciple the members of the church? How did the church minister to those in need? Do you believe that the church group was a witness for the Lord through their lifestyle? How did Barnabas bless the church? Was everything perfect all the time in the church? What did Ananias and Sapphira do that resulted in sin? What was a consequence of their sin? Should Christian leaders confront other believers when they have sinned? How did God bless the church in Jerusalem?

Application: Ask the church if they do the things that the church in Jerusalem did. What does it take for our church to worship, have fellowship, disciple members, minister to the needy and witness? How can our church do all of those things? In our next lesson, we will look at some organizational needs that came up in the growing church. Our Memory Verse for this week has been Philippians 2:13 "For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."

CLOSING

No. 46 Choosing seven helpers at the church in Jerusalem Acts 5:41-6:10

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can tell the story of the early church including Ananias and Sapphira? Have you thought how the first church was like our own church? How are they different? Accountability: Have you been thinking what it would take for our church to worship, have fellowship, disciple members, minister to the needy and witness? Pre-story dialog: This story is about the church when it faced another problem, which resulted in a way in which they gained some leaders. As I tell the story, keep in mind that some of the Christians had a racial heritage that was not Jewish. The non-Jews had first converted to Judaism and then they had converted to Christianity. First, I want you to identify what was the problem that arose in the church? How significant was it? The second listening task is, how did the spiritual leaders of this church suggest that the problem be solved and why did they suggest it be solved this way? The final listening task I am giving you is, did the solution work? Now the story, "Choosing Seven Helpers at the Church in Jerusalem."

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Churches are organized to minister to the needy

Gap -- Church organization and unity

Choosing Seven Helpers at the Church in Jerusalem

Acts 5:41-6:10

In those days of the growth of this early church in Jerusalem, when the church's membership was multiplied, murmuring began to occur within the Greek members. It was a murmuring of the Greeks against the Hebrews. The Greeks were saying that their widows were neglected during the daily feedings. The twelve apostles, the spiritual leaders of this Jerusalem church, called the group together. Now, we're not told where they met. But upon gathering, the spiritual leaders said that in solving the problem it is not right or appropriate that they should serve tables and leave the word of God untended. So the leaders asked the members to come together and choose from among themselves seven men. Those seven men were to have a good reputation. They were to be full of the Holy Spirit and be wise and the kind of people that these spiritual leaders could appoint to handle the business of serving tables. Now the apostles, the spiritual leaders, said they could continue in prayer and continue with the various ministries of the word. Now, this saying pleased the whole congregation and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit. They chose Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. These are the men, the seven, that they chose. Now after they chose the seven men, these church members took the ones they chose and put them before their spiritual leaders. The leaders prayed, laid their hands on them, and these became those that would handle this ministry. As a result, the word of God increased and the number of disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly. And a great company of priests were obedient to the faith. Stephen was filled with God's power and through that power performed many miracles. This brought opposition from some of the Jews who had once been slaves. These were not Christians, but were members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen. They argued with Stephen, but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke. And that is our story for today.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Let's go back to our listening tasks and let me ask you those questions again now that you've heard the story. First, what was the problem the church had at this point in its growth? Who were the widows and why did they suffer? Now, who did the twelve original disciples of Jesus (sometimes called apostles) give the responsibility to do the choosing? What were the qualifications of the helpers? What was the process by which these seven men were elected? (Optional: Was the number seven arbitrary or specific? Some estimate the church had grown to about 10,000 members by this time.) What resulted from this solution? Application: Now, do you think our church should do things this way? Who among our group has needs that should be addressed? Our new Memory Verse for Week 10 is Hebrews 10:24-25 "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Please begin memorizing it as it relates to your own church. Let's take it

section by section in order to help you learn it. “Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds” was written to help Christians think about the needs of others. Our deeds should be encouraging and loving with the best interest of other believers at heart. The second part is “let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing.” Embers in a fireplace stay warmest when they are together. If you remove one from the fireplace, it soon turns dark and cold. The warmth of the fellowship is kept alive when meeting together. The purpose of the church is to honor God as a congregation! The last part of the verse is a reminder of the Second Coming of Jesus. It states, “but let us encourage one another—all the more as you see the day approaching.” What can you do to be encouraging to those in your church? Let’s put the verse together: “Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” Hebrews 10:24-25 If the Lord tarries, we’ll meet again soon!

CLOSING

No. 47 Stephen's & martyrdom Acts 6:12-7:41; 7:55-60

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Please review the story, "Choosing Seven Helpers at the Church in Jerusalem." Accountability: Have we addressed the needs in our church? What changes do we still need to make? Pre-story Dialog: We've tried to learn about the church from those first days after Jesus ascended up to Heaven and the Holy Spirit descended on the people and they began to worship Him. They began to care for their members. They began to solve problems. God began to raise up leaders out of their group. They faced many opportunities, but they also faced much persecution. And that's what we'd like to address today is the church addressing and facing persecution. Our story today, A Church Faces Persecution, is one of my favorite stories. It's actually about Stephen, whom we learned about in our last story. If we remember, Stephen was one of the seven elected by the congregation to work with the problems and to do part of the daily work of the church. And our story today really picks up right after that story. And this is the story from God's Word.

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Followers of Jesus are witnesses to the world.

Truth: The Holy Spirit gives a believer words to say to defend their faith.

Gap -- Review-Believers use Scriptures to defend their faith

Stephen's & martyrdom

Acts 6:12-7:41; 7:55-60

Now Stephen was full of grace and full of the power of God. And he performed many great miracles, performed many signs among the people. But there were some men from a certain synagogue, the synagogue of the freed men. And these men were from various nations around that region. And they rose up against Stephen and what he was saying. They argued with Stephen or at least they tried to, but they were really unable to cope with his wisdom and they were unable to deal with the power of the Holy Spirit that Stephen spoke with. So secretly they convinced some of the people to become false witnesses against Stephen. They convinced them to say, "We've heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses. We've heard him speak blasphemous words against God." And so they stirred up the people and they seized Stephen and they dragged him before the counsel. And they brought these false witnesses forward and they said, "This man speaks against this holy place. He speaks against the law. We've heard him say that this Jesus, the Nazarene will destroy this place, and He'll destroy the traditions that we have of Moses." And all on the council looked upon Stephen and they looked intently into his face and it was as if they were looking upon the face of an angel. And the high priest said to Stephen, "Are these things true?" And Stephen responded to the high priest, and he said, "Listen brothers and fathers," and he began to tell the story of God's activity among His people. Stephen said, "God appeared to Abraham before he was in Haran, and God said, 'Leave your country and leave your family.' So Abraham left and he settled in Haran. And after his father died, God moved Abraham again. Abraham had nothing. He had no inheritance. He didn't have a child, but God had promised him a land that his descendants would inherit. But God also said that Abraham's descendants would be as aliens in a foreign land, that they would also be enslaved. And God gave to Abraham a covenant, the covenant of circumcision." And Stephen continued talking about Abraham and said, "Abraham became the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of the twelve patriarchs. And these patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and they sold him into slavery and he went into Egypt. Yet God was with Joseph and rescued him, and Joseph gained favor in the sight of Pharaoh, King of Egypt. And Pharaoh made Joseph governor over all of Egypt and put him over his own household, the household of Pharaoh. Now there was a great famine in the land, an affliction over all the land. No food could be found. And when Jacob heard that there was food in Egypt, he sent his family to Egypt. And then on their second visit to Egypt, Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and he invited his father and his brothers and his entire family to live there with him in Egypt. And they went there and they died there. And just as God promised, the descendants of Abraham increased and multiplied there in Egypt. But there came a time when there was a Pharaoh, a king of Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And this Pharaoh enslaved our fathers and he

mistreated our people. At that time, Moses was born. There came a time when Pharaoh, when the king of Egypt knew nothing of Joseph, and he enslaved our fathers and he mistreated our people. And at that time, Moses was born, and Moses was favorable in the sight of God. And when Moses was three months old, he was taken into Pharaoh's home and raised as Pharaoh's own son. But at the age of 40, he was visiting his own people in the land, the Hebrews, now slaves, and saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian. So Moses defended him and killed the Egyptian. And the next day when Moses tried to settle the dispute amongst the Hebrews, one said to Moses, "Who made you ruler over us? Are you going to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" And Moses became afraid and he fled Egypt and settled in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons. And after 40 years, an angel appeared to Moses in the wilderness, in the wilderness of Mt. Sinai, and a voice of God came to Moses out of a burning bush and said to him, "I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob." And Moses shook with fear, and God said to Moses, "Remove your sandals for you are on holy ground. I have seen the oppression of my people in Egypt," God said. "I have heard their groanings and I have come to deliver them. Come now and I will send you to Egypt." And Moses became both a deliver and a ruler of God's chosen people, and he led them out of Egypt, performing signs and wonders. And they crossed the Red Sea and they wandered 40 years in the wilderness. And Moses said to the sons of Israel, "God shall raise up a prophet like me from among you." And Moses recognized and told the living oracles of God and told his people to pass them on. But our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to this oracle of God, and they turned their hearts back to Egypt. They made a golden calf and they sacrificed to this idol. But God was angry with them for this, and in the wilderness our fathers had the tabernacle, which Moses constructed or instructed them how to build. And they brought it into the Promised Land. With Joshua they took that land, they possessed the land that God had promised to them. And they took nation after nation, and God gave them victory after victory, right up until the time of David. ... And Stephen continued with the story of David. "David found favor in God's sight and asked that he might find a dwelling place for God. But it was Solomon, David's son, who built the temple. However," Stephen said, "the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands, just as the prophet said." Then Stephen said to the men of the council, "You men who are stubborn and uncircumcised of the heart, you whose ears resist the Holy Spirit are doing just as your fathers did. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?" Stephen asked. "And they killed those who announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have become now. You who receive Divine Law but do not obey it." ... Now when the men of the council heard this from Stephen, they were cut to the quick and they reacted violently to him. But Stephen gazed intently into the Heavens and saw the Glory of God. And he said, "I see the Heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." ... And the men of the council cried out with a loud voice and they clasped their hands over their ears, and they rushed upon Stephen, and they seized him and they drove him out of the city where they began stoning him. And as they stoned him, they laid their robes at the feet of Saul, and Saul guarded the robes of those stoning Stephen. And they continued stoning Stephen, and Stephen called out in a loud voice, "Lord Jesus receive my spirit." And Stephen fell to his knees and he cried out, "Lord do not hold this sin against them." And Stephen died. And this man Saul was in hearty agreement with putting Stephen to death. And on that day, a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem, and the believers became scattered throughout all the region. The apostles stayed in Jerusalem, and some devout men took Stephen's body and buried it. But Saul began ravaging the church there, going from house to house, dragging men and women into prison. But those who were scattered went about preaching and proclaiming the Word of God.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Let's review this story, which you have heard previously. Who was Stephen? Why was he brought before the council? How did Stephen defend himself before the religious council? Should a Christian expect to be able to explain what he or she believes? Are the stories of God important to a Christian to defend their faith? Do you remember other stories where Jesus or his disciples used stories from God's Word to defend their faith? Did you remember that Saul had

participated in Stephen's stoning? Since you have heard about Saul's conversion, how do you think Stephen's use of Scripture affected him? Application: Tell the story of Stephen and think of the stories from God's Word to which Stephen referred. Review the stories from God's Word as often as you can so that the Holy Spirit will enable you to defend your faith. Memory Verse for Week 10 -- Hebrews 10:24-25 "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

CLOSING

No. 48 Saul's conversion Acts 8:3-4, 9:1-20

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can tell the story of Stephen's Martyrdom? What were the Bible stories that Stephen told the council who was passing judgment upon him? Why was the Bible useful in his defense? Why was it important that Stephen forgave those who were killing him? Pre-story Dialog:
Today's story is about Saul of Tarsus. This is not Saul in the Old Testament who was the king but Saul of Tarsus who was a Pharisee and who was trying to kill the Christians. What did Saul do to Christians prior to his conversion? What are the evidences that Saul was converted and changed? How did Saul try to join the church? What was the convincing proof that he should be allowed to join the church? How did they accept him? And what happened to the church as a result of Saul's conversion? Now, here is the story of "Saul's Conversion."

BIBLE STORY

Truth: When a single follower of Jesus suffers, the entire body of Christ suffers.

Gap -- Review-Even murderous religious leaders can be saved

Saul's conversion

Acts 8:3-4, 9:1-20

Meanwhile Saul was breathing murderous threats on all the Christians that were in Jerusalem, against the Lord's disciples. And so he went to the high priest and he asked him for letters to the synagogue in Damascus where he could find men or women that belonged to the way of Jesus, that he might take them as prisoners. As he neared Damascus on his journey, he suddenly saw a light from Heaven. It flashed all around him, and he fell to the ground and heard a voice to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you Lord?", Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he heard the voice say. "Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do." And the men traveling with Saul stood there, they were speechless. They heard the sound, but they did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes, he could see nothing. So he went on and had the men lead him by the hand into Damascus. And he was there for three days and he was totally blind, and while he was there he didn't eat or drink anything. Now in Damascus, there was a disciple, a believer in Jesus named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision and said, "Ananias," and of course, he responded, "Yes, Lord." The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas, who lives on Straight Street, and there is a man I want you to meet there. His name is Saul and he's from Tarsus, and he's been praying. In a vision, he has seen a man named, Ananias, you, come and place his hands on him and restore his sight." But Ananias said, "Lord, I've heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your servants in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priest to arrest all who call on Your Name." But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go now for this man is My chosen instrument to carry My name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel, and I will show him how much he must suffer for My Name." Then Ananias went to the house and entered into Judas' house and found Saul there. And he placed his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road as you were traveling here has sent me that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately something like scales fell from Saul's eyes and he could see again. Now he got up and he was baptized, and after taking some food he regained his strength and he spent several days with the disciples right there in Damascus. But at once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus in the Son of God.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Let's review this familiar story. Who was Saul? Do you remember his role in Stephen's stoning? What did Saul do to believers in Jerusalem? Was that enough? Where was Saul headed when He encountered Jesus? Did Jesus equate persecuting believers with persecuting Him? Do you know a religious leader that persecutes believers in Jesus? Do you believe that Jesus wants to save that person, just as he did Saul? What if Jesus wanted you to do what Ananias did for Saul? Would you be brave enough to do it to someone that Christians have feared? Does Jesus care about those who are harming his followers? Does Jesus care any less for those who are

Christians? You can look forward to more stories about Saul that will help you grow as a Christian. Application: Do you know a new believer who should join your church? How can you ensure that this new believer is not an enemy? What does it take for this church to grow and welcome new members to its fellowship? What would this church do if someone came to a church member requesting fellowship with this church? Are there guidelines that church members need to follow? *Leaders, please review the story of Stephen's Martyrdom and Saul's Conversion. Pray for the Lord to lead your group in praying for your enemies and how to grow your group in wisdom, yet with boldness.* Memory Verse for Week 10 -- Hebrews 10:24-25 "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

CLOSING

No. 49 Pt. 1--Peter and His Rooftop Dreams Acts 10:1-23

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can tell the story of Saul's Conversion? What kind of faith did Ananias exhibit in going to Saul? How was Saul invited to be a part of the church? What happens if one of our church members needs to move to another city with another fellowship? How can they be accepted? Accountability: What steps has our church taken to welcome new believers into our fellowship? What are the agreed-upon requirements for membership—for our members and for becoming a member of another church? Pre-story Dialog: The next story is a story about how the church looked beyond itself at people who are not like them. We've talked about Grecian Jews, that is people who were Greeks that believed in the Jewish way and became a part of the Jewish religion. But now we're going to talk about Gentiles, who are people who had not become Jews at all. They were foreigners, outsiders and different from the early church. Yet, each of these people were included in the Great Commission to take the gospel to every people group on earth. There are several things that I would like to ask you to look for in this story. Who is the gospel for? What is God's role? Does He work among unbelievers before they believe? This story is about Peter who is confronted not only by a foreigner, but the foreigner is part of the occupational forces of the Roman army! The story is long and so it is split into two parts. Here's part one—"Peter and His Rooftop Dreams."

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Followers of Jesus make major changes to obey God

Bridge -- New-Muslims have strict dietary restrictions / God is at work and invites you to join Him; involves a crisis of belief

Pt. 1--Peter and His Rooftop Dreams

Acts 10:1-23

Peter began going all over the area preaching and healing people and even raising someone from the dead. He went to Lystra and then he went to Joppa where he stayed for a while. While he was in Joppa, there was a man who lived in Caesarea, which was about a day's journey or two day's journey depending how fast you went. This man was Cornelius who was a leader or soldier for the Roman army over 100 other soldiers. He was a very religious man. He prayed every day. He gave alms to the poor and he worshipped God. One day he was worshipping God about three o'clock in the afternoon when all of a sudden an angel appeared to him. It frightened him. And the angel said, "Cornelius, God has heard your prayers and he has seen the gifts that you have given to people. Now, you send someone to Joppa to the house of Simon the Tanner to look for a man named Simon Peter and ask him to come tell you what you should do." Well immediately Cornelius responded and asked two of his people, one a household servant and one a soldier and another household servant, and he said, "Go to Joppa and find this man, Simon Peter, and bring him here." And so they left that afternoon. The next day around noon before they got to the house where Simon the Tanner lived, Peter came in probably for lunch and it wasn't ready so he went up on top of the house, where people rested in those days, and there he began to pray. While he was praying, he fell into a trance and in a trance he saw a vision. This vision was a large—like a sheet that descended out of heaven and in this sheet were all kind of unclean animals and things that the Jewish people were told not to eat in all of the ceremonies of the law. And yet, when this large sheet-like thing came with all these animals, a voice said, "Get up Peter. Kill and eat." Immediately Peter said, "Not so, Lord. Surely not." Again the voice said, "Arise Peter. Kill and eat." Three times God said to Peter, "Arise Peter. Kill and eat." And then in the vision, the sheet was taken up. That left Peter wondering what in the world this meant. While he was still pondering what it might mean, the three men came from Cornelius and they were down at the gate. The Holy Spirit said to Peter, "Peter, there are three men waiting for you down at the gate. You go down and you go with them. Don't question or doubt what they're asking you to do because I have sent them." And so Peter went down from the top of the house to the gate and said, "I'm the man you're looking for. Why have you come." He invited them in and asked them to spend the night, which they did.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

This is the first part of a new story for you. Who was Cornelius? Why did an angel appear to Cornelius? Where was Simon Peter? What was Peter seeing in a vision? What was the significance of the unclean food in the sheet from heaven? What do the animals in the sheet have to do with different kinds of people? Why was it such a problem for Peter to accept what God said that he should rise, kill, and eat these animals? So had there been some changes then from the time when the Israelites had received those instructions from God not to eat those kinds of animals? Was there a connection for Peter between Cornelius being an enemy soldier and the unclean food? Was God asking Peter to consider something new and very different? Why was Peter experiencing a crisis of belief? What do you think will happen when Peter and his six friends visit Cornelius' household? Do not miss the rest of this story in our session next time!

Application: Think about the dietary restrictions of Islam. What differences should you make in your food and even in your lifestyle that are not Bible-based? When is it okay to observe a tradition in the culture and when does it conflict with God's ways? Tell this story to another believer this week. Be prepared to discuss changes in diet and lifestyle at the next session. Memory Verse for Week 10 -- Hebrews 10:24-25 "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching."
(Note: Contact baptismal candidates and plan for a baptism at the end of the next storying session.)

CLOSING

No. 50 Pt. 2--Cornelius' household conversion Acts 10:24-48

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can tell part one from our last story session about Peter and His Rooftop Dreams? What was the connection between unclean food and Cornelius' request? Accountability: Who has examined their diet and lifestyles for rituals that are not Bible-based? Have you determined what it will take to make changes right away? Pre-story Dialog: Today's story is the second part of our story about Peter and Cornelius. It is a wonderful story showing how a church sees beyond itself to the lost people who are around them—and also those who are interesting in seeking Christ as Savior. As you listen to this story, see how Peter resolved the claims made by Cornelius' household. Listen for how the Holy Spirit worked to make Peter see that Cornelius and his whole family were truly believers. Here is Part 2 of Peter and Cornelius we call "Cornelius' Household Conversion."

BIBLE STORY

Truth: A church sees beyond itself to the lost among other peoples

Bridge -- New-Major changes are needed to do God's will; God cares for all

Pt. 2--Cornelius' household conversion

Acts 10:24-48

The next day Peter took six men with him from the believers to go along with the three men that had come from Caesarea and they made the journey. It took them a lot longer to get there because by the time he got to the house, Cornelius welcomed him in and said, "We've been waiting four days for you to come. All the people are gathered here waiting for you and to hear what God has to say." Peter asked, "Why did you ask for me to come?" And he told him again about the vision and said, "God told me to ask you to come." Peter began to speak. He said, "You know really I'm not supposed to be in the house of unbelievers, like Gentiles, like you. And certainly not to eat here but God has shown me something. He's shown me that he doesn't respect peoples' races or their backgrounds or what they do and that I am to speak to you." And so he did. He began to speak and he said, "I realize how true it is that God does not play favorites. Now you know the message that God sent out to the people of Israel telling about the good news of peace through Jesus Christ. You've already heard of this. And you know what has happened all throughout Judea beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached and how God anointed this man, Jesus of Nazareth, with the Holy Spirit and power. And how he went around doing good ... and healing those who were under the power of the devil because God was with him. Now, we're witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews, and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree. But God raised him from the dead. And on the third day he caused him to be seen of people who believed like us, those who were witnesses. Not to everyone but those who were witnesses. ... He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he's the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. And all the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sin through his name." And while Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit came on all the people there in Cornelius' house. And they believed and they began to speak with other languages. It astonished Peter and the other people who had come with him—believers—because they heard them speaking in these other languages like they had and praising God. And Peter said, "Well, can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They've received the Holy Spirit just as we have." And so he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. They asked Peter to stay with them several days, which he did. But he went back to Jerusalem and there the other apostles and the other leaders of the church began to question why he had gone to the Gentiles and why he had preached Christ to them. And Peter rehearsed everything that had happened and he told them precisely, exactly what had happened. He told them how he took the six men with him and the whole story, which I have just told you. And when they had done that, Peter said, "I remember what the Lord said, 'John baptized with water but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us who believe in the Lord Jesus, who was I to think that I oppose God?" And when the apostles and leaders heard this, they didn't have any further objections. They praised God saying, "So then

God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.” And that was the story from God's Word.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

This is the conclusion to our two-part story. Who can the whole story from start to finish—from Peter's rooftop dreams to Peter's report to the church? What happened when Cornelius met Peter? How did Peter respond? Why do you think Peter let Cornelius know of his traditional beliefs? Were these beliefs that Jesus had taught Peter or were these just rituals that God was trying to change? What did Cornelius say to Peter to explain why he had summoned him to Caesarea from Joppa? What did Peter mean when he told Cornelius that he now understood why God accepts people from every nation? Who had responded to the message of Jesus up until that time? How do you know that God was trying to tell Peter and his six friends that the Good News of Jesus was for all people? If you are a Christian listening to this story, did you listen carefully to the way that Peter witnessed to Cornelius and his household? What did Peter say to them about why Jesus came to earth, His ministry, His death and His resurrection? What did Peter say that Christians were supposed to do as a command of Jesus? What happened when Peter reminded them that everyone that believes in the name of Jesus receives forgiveness of sins? Why were Peter and His friends astonished at what the Holy Spirit had done among the Gentile people who were not Jews? Application: When you have shared the gospel of Jesus Christ with people and they receive salvation and the Holy Spirit, what should you do right away? Is baptism required for salvation? Do you remember our story about Jesus being baptized as an example to faith in God? Do you remember the new believers at Pentecost being baptized? (*Conduct a baptismal for new believers in the group.*) Now how could you apply this story this week to your life? What if there are people from other races who are living among us? Do you have any idea of how you might share a witness with them? What if God leads you to witness to someone like this and you bring them to the church and they wouldn't receive them? Or what if God asked you to do something that's not the normal thing that is done by the members of the church, how should you introduce that to the church, or how should you ask them about that? See if you can share Peter's story in such a way that they can know the truth about Jesus. If God has been working in their life, and they are saved, encourage them to be baptized. Memory Verse for Week 10 -- Hebrews 10:24-25 "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

CLOSING

No. 51 Churches help other churches Acts 11:19-30

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Why do churches have baptismal services? Why are believers baptized? Who can retell the story "Cornelius' Household Conversion"? Do you know families who are ready to take a step of faith? Accountability: Were you able to share your faith with someone of another race? What can our church do to take the gospel to all peoples? Pre-story Dialog: This is a story called "Local Churches Relate to and Cooperate with Churches of Like Faith." The previous stories and several to come are based on a book of the Bible called, "The Acts of the Apostles" or simply titled, "Acts". During the story introduction would you please review the stories of the Jerusalem church? Who can briefly tell me about Peter preaching at Pentecost? What problems did the church encounter and how did they solve them? What happened when the Jerusalem church met with Barnabas and Saul? What happened to the church after persecution started and Stephen was martyred for his faith? What impact did the church have upon Saul's life? The church in Jerusalem knew that the gospel of Jesus was spreading throughout the world. They also knew what was happening in a city named Antioch. It has been mentioned once before that it was a large city that was actually several days journey north of Jerusalem. Antioch was an important city in the Roman Empire at that time. As you listen to this story, I would like for you to listen for the ways that the Jerusalem church helped others. Specifically, see if you can identify two or three actions taken by the Jerusalem church leaders that actually facilitated cooperation. And this is our story, "Churches Help Other Churches."

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Local churches relate to and cooperate with churches of like faith.

Gap -- New-No knowledge of church life

Churches help other churches

Acts 11:19-30

Now those who have been scattered by the persecution related to the death of Stephen traveled as far away as Phoenicia and to Cyprus and even to Antioch, but they were telling the message of Jesus Christ only to the Jews. Now some of them however, especially men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to the Jews as they had the normal thing of doing but they also began to speak to the Greeks. And they told them the good news about Jesus. The Lord's hand was upon them and after a while, a large number of people believed and turned to the Lord. Now this good news actually reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem. They got together and decided that Barnabas would be sent to Antioch. So when Barnabas arrived in Antioch he saw the evidence that was obvious of the grace of God. He was glad for what he saw. He encouraged them to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. Now Barnabas is the man that we talked about being the Son of Encouragement. When he was born his name was Joseph. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith. He also was a native of Cyprus. And a great number of people in Antioch were brought to the Lord while Barnabas was there. Then Barnabas when to Tarsus to look for Saul. And when he found him, he brought him to Antioch and so for a whole year, Barnabas and Saul met with the church and they taught a great number of the people there. The disciples in Antioch were called Christians for the very first time. During this time, some prophets came down from Jerusalem now to Antioch. One of them was named Agabus. Agabus stood up and through the Holy Spirit predicted that there would be a severe famine that would spread throughout the entire Roman world. This happened during the reign of Claudius. The disciples, each according to their ability, decided to provide help for the brothers that were living in Judea and that church in Jerusalem. And they did this. And they sent their gift to the elders of the church in Jerusalem by Barnabas and Saul. And so that is our story.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Who can repeat this story for us? This is a new story about churches and the way that they interact. Where were the churches in this story located? Why did the church in Jerusalem first become concerned about the church in Antioch? Who did they send to investigate the reports that they had been hearing? Do you remember Barnabas mentioned in another story as having sold a piece of land and placing it at the feet of the apostles? Do you also remember that

Barnabas was from the island of Cyprus? Do you think that the church in Jerusalem was trying to be kind to the church in Antioch by sending such an encouraging Christian man? What was happening in Antioch when Barnabas arrived? Who did Barnabas travel to ask him to help him in Antioch? What did Barnabas and Saul do for the church in Antioch? What happened in Antioch that made them concerned for the church in Jerusalem? Who was selected to deliver the gift to the church in Jerusalem? Do you think that churches should cooperate? What is the difference between cooperation and dependence? Why is it important to be self-supporting, relying only on God? There is a plant called Kudzu (*pronounced CUD-zoo*) in Asia that grows like a vine. It is very difficult to kill the plant because it constantly puts down roots in new places. If you kill one part of the vine, it keeps growing in other places. How is that vine like a series of churches? Finally, how did the church collect money from its members? Should financial gifts be collected regularly or whenever there is a special need? How did the church at Antioch ensure accountability for the money that was given? Application: What can you learn from this story that would help your church relate to another group of believers? If you know of a church in need, go before your church and suggest helping the other church. Be sure to avoid creating dependency upon your church. Pray about the right person or people that your church should send. When the individual or group arrives, have one person tell the other church the story of the churches in Jerusalem and Antioch. Ask them how your churches can cooperate and then respond appropriately. Report back as soon as possible. Memory Verse for Week 11 -- I John 3:1 "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

CLOSING

No. 52 A church calls out missionaries--Paul's first journey Acts 13:1-4, 13-14, 44-49 & 14:26-27

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can tell the story, “Churches Help Other Churches” from our last session? What was so different about the church at Antioch? How did the churches help each other? Did they depend so much on one another that they would collapse without each other’s assistance? What was the result of the interaction between the Antioch and Jerusalem churches? Accountability: Were you able to find and help another church? What were their needs? Stop and pray about the needs and how your church can assist the other church. (*Perhaps if the other church has in turn offered to help your church, you could study how this could be received without creating dependency.*) Pre-story Dialog: As we continue to learn about what the church is like, I’m going to tell a short story. This is a very important story because it begins to tell us how the good news goes from one country to another country. One of the men named in this story is named Barnabas. Do you remember where Barnabas was from? (*Cyprus*) Remember the names of the men and where they go. This is the story, “A Church Calls Out Missionaries.”

BIBLE STORY

Truth: The local church is missions-minded.

Bridge -- New-Curiosity of the West

A church calls out missionaries--Paul's first journey

Acts 13:1-5, 13-14, 44-49 & 14:26-27

The church in the city of Antioch had prophets and teachers. They were Barnabas, and Simeon who they called Niger or black, and Lucius from Cyrene, which is in Africa, and Manaen who grew up with King Herod, and Saul. While they were worshipping God and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set Barnabas and Saul apart for me for the work that I have called them to.” So when they had finished fasting and praying, they laid their hands on them and sent them off. Barnabas and Saul were obedient to the Holy Spirit. They traveled down to the port of Seleucia and went on a boat to the island of Cyprus. They landed at the port of Salamis and began to tell people God’s message in the Jewish places of worship. And John Mark went with them as their assistant. It was on this journey that Saul began to be called Paul. They continued north to Pamphylia, which is in modern-day Turkey. Mark left them there and returned to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas traveled until they reached Pisidian Antioch where they were invited to preach in the Jewish synagogue. Their words amazed the people! On the next Sabbath, almost everyone in Pisidian Antioch turned out to hear the word of the Lord. The Jews in that synagogue became jealous and talked abusively against what Paul was saying. Then Paul and Barnabas spoke boldly to them saying, “We had to speak the word of God to you first, but since you reject it, we’re now taking this message of eternal life to the Gentiles. This is a fulfillment of the prophets which said, ‘I made you a light to the Gentiles that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’” When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord. The Holy Spirit convicted the hearts of the Gentiles and many received eternal life. The word of the Lord spread throughout the whole region! Paul and Barnabas visited many other cities where others became Christians. They returned to Antioch now that they had completed the task to which the church had committed them to God to accomplish. When they arrived in Antioch, they gathered the whole church together and reported to them all that God had done through them. They explained how God had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And that is our story from the word of God.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

In what city did a church called out the first missionaries? Who did God set aside as the first missionaries? Why do you think that God did not call all of the church leaders at Antioch? What did the whole church do after praying and fasting? Were Barnabas and Saul faithful to the calling? Has your church ever prayed and fasted that God would send out missionaries? What are ways that your church members could support missionaries? Did you notice that Barnabas and Saul began to preach more and more among the Gentiles? In fact, did you notice that Saul began using his Greek name of Paul? Did everything go well? When Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch who did they give the credit for opening a door of faith among the Gentiles?

Does God still open doors of faith among all peoples? Application: How do you know when God is calling you to be a missionary? Think back to the way that God's people determined God's will for their lives. There are at least four ways that the Holy Spirit works to reveal the will of God. (*Joseph Sold into Slavery—circumstances; Moses at the Burning Bush—prayer; Jesus' Temptations—the Bible; and Barnabas & Saul—the church*) What are your circumstances? Is there something "right" about the timing to travel as a missionary? Pray and seek God's will for your life. Have you reviewed Bible stories about people who were given specific jobs to do for God? Is God asking your church to set you aside to be a missionary? Will your church find a way to support you and others that God has called out? Perhaps more than one church can come together to support your missionary journey through praying, fasting, sending partnering missionaries and providing financial support. Have you learned your Memory Verse for Week 11? I John 3:1 "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" Let's break it into portions in order to help you memorize the verse. The first segment is, "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us." How have you experienced God's love in your life? This verse is a great encouragement because He loves you enough to provide for your basic needs. We are living in a place where it is dangerous for a Christian to be a public witness. Yet, God chose you to suffer for His sake out of every other Christian in the world. You have God's love "lavished" upon you! Wow! Praise God. The second part of the verse continues the thought, "that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" What are the characteristics of a child? Upon whom do they depend? Upon whom do they model their lives? Children are also the heirs of their parents' inheritance. All that belongs to God—all of His vast riches with an eternal reward—belong to His children. Let's say the whole verse together, "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" I John 3:1.

CLOSING

No. 53 The Jerusalem Council Acts 15:1-30

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can tell the story of Paul and Barnabas' Missionary Journey? From now on, we will refer to Saul by his Greek name, Paul. The Bible makes the switch, so we will too. What happened when Paul and Barnabas were in Pisidian Antioch? Who were the Gentiles? Why was this an important step in the spreading of the word of the Lord? What are the four ways that the Holy Spirit reveals God's will? (*circumstances, prayer, the Bible and the church*) Application: Have any of you prayed to become missionaries? What can our church do to support you / missionaries? Do you know of another church that is sending missionaries that need our financial and prayerful support? Pre-story Dialog: Let's begin this Bible story time by remembering two stories that we learned when the church encountered problems. What happened when Ananias and Sapphira sinned? What were they guilty of doing? Who can tell me what happened when the Greek-Jewish widows were not receiving their portion of the distributed food? How did the church elect the seven helpers? In today's story, a new kind of problem came up that needed to be addressed. How did the believers at Antioch solve their problem? Here is the story of the Jerusalem Council.

BIBLE STORY

Truth: A local church confronts doctrinal errors.

Gap -- New-A local church confronts doctrinal errors

The Jerusalem Council

Acts 15:1-30

But then some men came down from Judea, from the church there, to Antioch and they began to teach the believers, "Unless you're circumcised according to the customs taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." Well, Paul and Barnabas began to debate and argue with them very sharply. It became such a dispute that the church there decided that Paul and Barnabas should go with some other believers up to Jerusalem to talk with the other spiritual leaders there about this question. So the church sent them. The church in Antioch sent them out to go and try to find a resolution to this difference. When they traveled through these different areas to go to Jerusalem, everywhere they met believers they told them what God had done on their missionary journey and all of the believers were so excited about it. When they got to Jerusalem, the church and the apostles and all the spiritual leaders there welcomed them as they told them about the great things that God had been doing on their missionary trip. But then, some of the believers who belonged to this group of the Pharisees, who had been Pharisees as Jews and now had become believers—they stood up and said, these Gentiles have to be circumcised and they have to obey the law of Moses just like we do. So then the apostles and the elders and spiritual leaders met to decide about this. There was a lot of discussion. Finally Peter stood up and he said, "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God made a choice that the Gentiles should hear the gospel through my mouth and they should believe. And God who knows the hearts, he gave them witness that they had believed because he gave them the Holy Spirit even as he did unto us. He put no difference between them and us. He purified their hearts by faith. So why now are you tempting God by putting this yoke of the law on the neck of the disciples? It's a yoke that neither our fathers, nor we could bear. We believe that it's through grace, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that we will be saved and they will be saved." And then the entire crowd was silent after Peter spoke. And they gave Barnabas and Paul the opportunity to share all the miracles and the wonders that God had done to them as they traveled among the Gentiles. And after Barnabas and Paul finished, James, the half brother of Jesus, stood up and said, "Men and brethren listen to me. Simon Peter has told us how God did visit the Gentiles to raise a people among them for His name. And this agrees with what we've read among the prophets because the prophets stated, 'God said, after this I will return and reveal David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild and I will restore it that the remnant of men may seek the Lord and all the Gentiles who bear my name,' says the Lord, 'who does these things that have been known for ages.' So my decision is that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from the food contaminated by idols, from sexual immorality, from meat of strangled animals, and from blood." Then the

apostles and the elders with the whole church decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch along with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas, who was also called Barsabbas, and Silas, two men who were leaders among the brethren. And they sent them down to Antioch along with this letter. The letter read like this: “The apostles and elders your brothers, to the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. Greetings. We’ve heard that some who went out from our church without authorization have disturbed you and troubled your minds by what they have said. So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends, Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements. You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality. You will do well if you avoid these things. Farewell.” So the men were sent off. They went down to Antioch. They gathered the church together and delivered the letter. When the people read it, they were glad because it was an encouraging message. Judas and Silas, who were prophets—they said much to the brethren to encourage them. And after spending some time they were sent off by the brothers with a blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them. After Judas and Silas stayed there a while, they returned to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas continued in Antioch teaching and preaching the word of the Lord with many others. This concludes today’s story from God’s Word.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

What was the problem that came up at the church in Antioch? Why was a delegation sent to the church leaders in Jerusalem? How did Peter's experience with Cornelius and his household influence Peter's stand? Did God make a distinction between the Jews and those who were not Jews, called Gentiles? What did Peter call the Law of Moses? Do you think his experience helped those at the council to see that Christians are saved by grace of our Lord Jesus? When Paul and Barnabas shared their story, did you think of their missionary journey? How did the Jerusalem Council rule? What message did they send to the Gentile believers at Antioch? Why was the message so encouraging? Do you believe that a local church is responsible for doctrinal purity? Did one individual make all the decisions in this story or was it done by consensus of the group? What does this say about the way that your church conducts business? Application: Is our church maintaining doctrinal purity or are we letting legends and other stories influence our beliefs and conduct? How can our church always make sure that doctrinal integrity is respected? How does our church reach a decision? What changes or improvements need to be made? Memory Verse for Week 11 -- I John 3:1 “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!”

Note: In two stories, the story of Paul, Silas and the Philippian Jailer will be told. Ask anyone in this session if they would like to act out the story. Bring the volunteers aside and tell them the story or do so at another time agreed upon by the troupe. While you tell the story, they can simply act out the story. When they are in prison singing, it is fine if you stop storying and allow the actors to sing a hymn of encouragement.

CLOSING

No. 54 Where Churches Meet -- Acts 18:1-8; 1 Corinthians 16:19, Romans 16:3, & Colossians 4:14-15 & Philemon 1:1-3

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Think back to our last story about the Jerusalem Council. What would have happened if a decision had not been made to help the church at Antioch? What if distrust or quarrelling had resulted? Accountability: Since we last met, have any of you thought about the doctrinal purity of our church? Are there areas that we need to improve? How can we remain true to God's Word?

Pre-story Dialog: We've been talking about the church in the first century and how they grew and how they expanded and we saw the churches start churches and sometimes cover whole provinces. How did the church find a place to meet? What did they do? How did they function? We are going to need to look at several scriptures to understand that today. We've heard that Paul visited many cities in his missionary journeys. Well today I'm going to share a story about Paul and some of his close friends, particularly two of them, Aquila and Priscilla. They were from the city of Rome but because of persecution were living in Corinth and this is where Paul met them. Before we get into the story, I want to ask you a question. Where did Paul live when he was in Corinth? Where did he meet and preach initially? Did he meet somewhere else? Where do we see the church functioning as you listen to the rest of the story? And the question I want to ask you right now is, we've heard that the number of churches were multiplying rapidly as the gospel was spreading throughout the New Testament time. Where were the churches meeting? Here is the story, "Where a Church Meets."

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Churches can meet in a variety of places.

Bridge, but possibly a Barrier -- New-Mosques as worship centers

Where a Church Meets

Composite Story of Acts 18:1-8; 1 Corinthians 16:19, Romans 16:3, & Colossians 4:14-15 & Philemon 1:1-3

Story: Paul went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila who had recently come to Corinth with his wife Priscilla because the emperor Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. So Paul went to see them. And because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. Now every Sabbath, he reasoned in the synagogue trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. Now when Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your heads. I am clear of any responsibility. From now on, I will go to the Gentiles." Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshipper of God. Crispus the synagogue ruler and his entire household believed in the Lord and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized. Now some time later, Paul traveled to another region. Aquila and Priscilla went with them. They ended up in a city called Ephesus. After a short while, Paul went on and returned to the church in Antioch. Then he returned to Ephesus. He lived there over two years as he preached the word and many churches were started. While he was in Ephesus, Paul wrote a letter to the believers in Corinth. The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord and so does the church that meets in their house. You remember, that's where they had come from, from Corinth. Now some time later, Paul returned to Corinth, where he wrote a letter to the believers in Rome. And listen to what he said there as he greeted them. Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also the church that meets at their house. Now Paul's life goes on and years later he has been taken to Rome as a prisoner and while he is in Rome as a prisoner, he wrote letters to several of the churches, two of them he wrote to Colossae, one to the church and another one to a dear friend named Philemon. Now let's listen to what he says as he greets first the church. Our dear friend, Luke the doctor and Demus send greetings. Give my greetings to the brothers and Laodecia and to Nympha and the church in her house. And now listen how he greeted Philemon. Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus and Timothy

our brother, to Philemon, our dear friend and fellow worker and to the church that meets in your home. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

- Where did Paul live when he first arrived in Corinth? Who did he live with?
- Now where did he preach and meet when he first arrived? Is that common for Paul?
- When he would go to a new city, he would go to the synagogue and look for those who were seeking God, but after he shook his clothes because the Jews rejected the gospel, where did he meet?
- Did the fact that they moved from the synagogue into a house, did that sort of slow down the growth of the church?
- Think of Aquila and Priscilla. Do you think they had things in common with Paul? How do we know that? Why do you say that?
- Where else was there a church in their house?

So, let me ask you, what is the church? Is it a group of believers meeting regularly? Does it have at least one leader and helpers? Do you remember the two ordinances that the church is to observe? Think about our story of the church in Jerusalem. Do you remember how their characteristics included worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry and witness? Application: As you have heard these stories today, has the Holy Spirit led you to understand that Christians consistently start new churches? Please tell this story to your church and see where God would lead each believer individually and the church collectively to start many new churches. Memory Verse for Week 11 -- I John 3:1 "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"

Note: Be sure to check on the progress being made by the drama group for the story of "Paul, Silas and the Philippian Jailer."

CLOSING

No. 55 Paul, Silas and the Philippian Jailer Acts 16:16-40

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can recount all four short Bible stories from our last session? What was the point in describing the different locations in which new churches can be started? Accountability: If our church sends out missionaries, where should they start new churches? How can we start new churches? Pre-story Dialog: If you were falsely accused, given a terrible beating and put in prison, what would you do? Would you want to sing and pray? Would you be ready to give a gospel witness at any time, even when you were suffering? Here now is the story about what happened to Paul and another believer named Silas while they were serving as missionaries in a Greek city named Philippi. Here's the Bible story.

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Followers of Jesus continue to worship the Lord even during times of crisis.

Barrier -- New-Christians are persecuted

Paul, Silas and the Philippian Jailer

Acts 16:16-40

Note: This makes a good story to act out. Use a narrator and have the characters respond as the story progresses. Allow time in the story for the actors to sing at least one song of encouragement while they are in prison.

When Paul and his companions were going to a place of prayer, a slave girl possessed by a spirit that helped her predict the future met them. The girl had followed Paul and kept saying, "These men are servants of the Most High God who are telling you the way to be saved." When the girl kept on saying this, Paul was troubled and rebuked the spirit, which then left the girl. The owners of the slave girl saw their way of making money was now gone, so they seized Paul and his companion, Silas, and charged them with disturbing the peace and teaching things that were unlawful in that place. And the crowd joined in the attack. The authorities ordered Paul and Silas to be stripped of their clothing, severely beaten, and thrown into prison, where the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. It was about midnight when Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God. And the other prisoners were listening. *[Allow time for singing a hymn of encouragement.]* Suddenly, there was a violent earthquake that shook the prison. The prison doors opened, and everybody's chains were loosened. The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, for he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted to him, "Don't harm yourself. We are all here." The jailer rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. After the jailer had brought Paul and Silas out of the prison, he asked them, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Then Paul and Silas replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved along with your household." Then Paul and Silas spoke the Word of the Lord to the jailer and all others in his house. That same night the jailer took Paul and Silas and washed their wounds, and then the jailer and all of his family were baptized. The jailer brought Paul and Silas into his own house and set a meal before them. The jailer's whole family was filled with joy because they had come to believe in God. When it was morning, the order was given to release Paul and Silas, who were told to go in peace. That's the end of the Bible story.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Who was Paul's missionary companion on this trip? Who did Paul and his friends meet in Philippi? What was the problem with the girl who was following Paul? What did Paul finally do about it? What was the response of the girl's owners? What happened after Paul and his friends were taken to the judge? What did Paul and Silas do when they were in prison? Do you think you could pray and sing hymns while in prison? What happened in the middle of the night? What happened when the jailer saw that the doors to the prison were open? What did Paul say to the jailer that made him stop from killing himself? Think back to what Paul and Silas had been doing all night. Was there something in Paul and Silas' prayers and songs that made the jailer and his whole household ready to be saved? What did the jailer want to know? What did the jailer and

his household do? What happened when it became daylight? Where did Paul and Silas meet other Christians before they left the city? Application: What would you sing if you were in prison? Can you write a song that would tell others how to know Jesus as Savior? Tell this story to several of your Christian friends as a story of encouragement. Have them work with you to present this story as a drama sometime in the future. In the drama, sing the hymn of encouragement that you wrote. Memory Verse for Week 11 -- I John 3:1 "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"

CLOSING

No. 56 Pt. 1--Sacrificial living with renewed mind/Spiritual gifts Romans 12:1-11

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

What a great story we had last time we were together! What did the story of Paul, Silas and the Philippian Jailer mean to you? What kind of faith did Paul and Silas have that let them sing while in prison? Accountability: Did anyone come up with a new hymn of encouragement? [*Allow time for singing.*] Does anyone want to share a testimony when God has helped sustain them in times of trouble? Pre-story Dialog: The next three stories are all about commitment as a follower of Jesus. The stories are all taken from a letter that Paul wrote to believers that were suffering in Rome, Italy. Do you remember how after Stephen's martyrdom that Christians fled Jerusalem? Christians traveled to Rome, which was the capital of the Roman Empire. The state religion forbid worshiping Jesus as Lord. The church was experiencing persecution so much that some Christians like Priscilla and Aquila were traveling to other cities. Paul was concerned about the believers, so he gave them this story. Today's story is called "Sacrificial Living". Listen for the ways that God helps us to have a different perspective on our suffering as Christians.

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Followers of Jesus represent Him, suffer with Him, and are crucified with Him (to die if necessary). (New concept at this point.)

Barrier – New story-Cultural Christians live vulgar lives

Pt. 1--Sacrificial living with renewed mind/Spiritual gifts

Romans 12:1-11

Let me urge you to remember that in view of God's mercy to us that you should offer your bodies as living sacrifices. These sacrifices should be holy and pleasing to God—just like an act of worship. Do not continue to conform yourselves to the lifestyle of this world, but transform your mind. Renewing yourself will enable you to test and approve the good and perfectly pleasing will of God in your life. I have been so blessed to receive God's grace, so let me tell you not to think of yourselves as being better than you ought to be. Use sober judgment to evaluate yourself by the measure of faith that you have been given by God. Just as your body parts were designed to do different things, so too, the body of Christ has many different parts, but each member belongs to all the others. We have been given different gifts by God's grace. If a man prophesizes, then he should use it in proportion to his faith. If your gift is serving, then serve. If your gift is teaching, then teach; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is encouragement, then encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, then be a generous giver; if it is leadership, then govern diligently; and if it is showing mercy, then do it cheerfully. Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil and hold tight to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor others above yourself. Never lack zeal, but sustain a spiritual fervor for serving the Lord. And that is today's Bible story.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Think about the followers of Jesus in the stories that we have learned to this point. Who lived a sacrificial life? Think about the stories that you have heard about Simon Peter and Paul. Now consider the story for today. In this portion of the letter to the Romans, what did Paul say was needed to change a Christian's heart? Do you think you should conform to the lifestyles of the people you meet each day or should you live by a different standard? What was Paul inspired to write about the church being like a body? Are all believers exactly alike? What spiritual gifts does the Holy Spirit give to us? What spiritual gift do you have? Do you use it to bring unity to the church body? What did Paul write the church about loving others? Do you consider other believers with loving respect? Application: Think about these teachings as often as possible. See if you can memorize sections of it. Get with another believer and see if you can develop a poem based on this story. As you seek to live out these teachings, don't forget the last portion of this letter when Paul said that when you live as a Christian should, you are actually serving the Lord. What a privilege! Our new Memory Verse for Week 12 is from I John 4:7-8 "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."

CLOSING

No. 57 Pt. 2--God establishes governments; Citizenship Romans 13:1-10

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can tell the story from our last storying session? What were the spiritual gifts that Paul named? Accountability: What spiritual gift do you have? How can you use it to glorify God as a spiritual sacrifice? Pre-story Dialog: This is the second part of the letter that Paul wrote to the Romans. In order to prepare for this story, I would like you to review with me two stories from the life of Moses. First, I need you to remember the story that we told about the Disobedient Midwives at Moses' birth. Who can describe what happened when the midwives disobeyed Pharaoh's orders to kill the male babies? Next, I want you to remember the story of Moses when he needed to appoint judges. Do you remember that he listened to the advice of Jethro, his father-in-law? What happened when the organization was implemented? In today's story, we need to discuss the fact that followers of Jesus must be upstanding, godly citizens and remain faithful believers when man's laws conflict with obedience to God. Listen for the instructions that Paul gave to the church at Rome. This story is part two of Paul's letter to Roman Christians and titled, "God Establishes Governments."

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Followers of Jesus must be upstanding, godly citizens and remain faithful believers when man's laws conflict with obedience to God.

Barrier -- New-Government is state religion (Sharia law)

Pt. 2--God establishes governments; Citizenship
Romans 13:1-10

Everyone must submit themselves to the governing authorities. God established the authority that is over you. Whenever you rebel against the government, you are rebelling against God. Whenever you rebel against God's authority, you are in danger of His judgment. Rulers hold no terror for those who do what is right, but for those who are doing wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the authorities? Then do what is right! They'll commend you for it. The person in authority is God's servant. It is God's intention that they do go. If you disobey laws, then you should fear reprisal. That's why they arm themselves—in order to be an agent of God's wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to authorities—not only out of fear of punishment, but also because of conscience. This is why you need to pay taxes to the authorities that are God's servants and working full-time at governing. Give everyone what you owe them. If you taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. Do not accommodate outstanding financial debt, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "do not murder," "do not steal," "do not covet," and all the other commandments are summed up in this one rule, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

This is a second story that is from Paul's letter to the Christians living in Rome, Italy. Why do you think that Paul was concerned that the Christians in Rome should behave as good citizens? What stories have you heard that would make you think that Christians were not respected in the Roman Empire? For instance, who crucified Jesus? Why did Aquila and Priscilla have to leave Rome? Who was it that threw Paul and Silas into prison? Was every Roman an evil person? What about the story of Peter and Cornelius? Do you remember that Cornelius was a Roman officer, yet he became a Christian? Who allows governments to be in authority? Do you think this is part of God's plan for Persian-speakers, too? Did you know that Persians live in many countries around the world? Should they be good citizens in each of these countries? What does our story from God's Word say? What are some of the ways that you can honor God by being a good citizen? When Paul was talking about paying taxes, he was also inspired of God to mention the matter of Christians not being in debt without paying what is owed. Did you notice that Paul quoted from the Ten Commandments that you have memorized? What should you do if one of God's laws differs from a law imposed by a government? Why is love the highest form of citizenship? Why does God want believers to obey the law out of love? Application: Tell this

story to a family member. How can you be a good citizen? What laws in our country or even in our province contradict with God's laws? How should we handle man's laws in priority with God's laws? Let's memorize our Memory Verse for Week 12 -- I John 4:7-8 "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." The first part of the verse is "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God." Do you believe that God is love? If we love each other as God loves us, then how will we treat people? The second part of the verse says, "Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God." If you have a loving relationship with God, how is that reflected in your lifestyle? The last part of the verse says, "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." Should we expect non-Christians to respond with love? How should we respond to people who do not love us? How can we reflect God's love to others? Say the verse with me: "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." I John 4:7-8.

CLOSING

No. 58 Pt. 3--Jesus is Lord of all Romans 9:1-8; 15:8-13

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Would a volunteer please tell us what it means to be a good citizen? What does the love of God have to do with obedience to the law? What should we do when man's laws and God's laws contradict each other? Application: Did you tell the Bible story to a family member or a friend? What was the response to the story? How should a Persian Christian behave when it comes to being a citizen? Pre-story Dialog: This is the third story from Paul's letter to the Romans. Even though they were experiencing cruel persecution for their faith, the gospel was prevailing. Soon the official religion of the entire Roman Empire would become Christianity. The third and final portion of the letter Paul wrote to the Romans is entitled, "Jesus is Lord of All." Keep in mind that Paul was both a Jew and a Roman citizen. Just as Persians today need to understand Israel's role in Christianity, the Romans needed to understand the changes that had been brought to Israel by Jesus Christ. Please listen for the discussion about the new Israel. As you listen to this story, listen for the phrase, "Root of Jesse". That is a title given to the Messiah who would come from Jesse's son, King David. As I tell this story, ask yourself one question, "Who are the true children of God?"

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Followers of Jesus are the true (chosen) children of God.

Barrier -- New-Israel nation hated; anti-West bias

Pt. 3--Jesus is Lord of all

Romans 9:1-8; 15:8-13

I am speaking the truth in Christ by the confirmation of the Holy Spirit when I say that I have great sorrow and anguish in my heart that will not go away. If it were possible, I wish that I could somehow be cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own race, the people of Israel. The Jews were the adopted sons, they had the divine glory, they were given the covenants of God, they received the law, they had a temple in which to worship and they had God's promises. From their ancestry came Christ, who is God over all. May He be forever praised! It is not as though God's Word failed because not all who descended from Israel are Israel. Just because they are Abraham's descendents does not mean they are his children. On the contrary, Scripture says, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." What I am saying is that it is not the natural children who are God's children. However, the children of promise are regarded as Abraham's offspring. ... For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs. This was done to glorify God as the Scripture says in three prophecies, "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name." The second prophecy says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people. Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples." Third, in the writings of Isaiah the prophet it says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him." May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. And that is today's story from God's Word.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

What did Paul mean when he said that "not all who descended from Israel are Israel"? Who are the true children of God? Can you recite the three prophecies about Jesus that helped non-Jews to become God's children? Notice the progression in the prophecies. In the first one, God's name was being praised in the midst of the Gentiles. In the second one, the Gentiles are considered intermingled with the children of God who were praising God. This is what was happening even at the day of Pentecost when Persian ancestors became among the first Christians. Did you notice what God's Word said about the final prophecy from the prophet Isaiah? The Messiah is the Root of Jesse who is lord of all the nations of the world and who the Gentiles worship directly. Did you comprehend the progression? Do you believe that God wants to save all the peoples of the world, including Persians and also including the Jews? Do you believe that our God is the God of hope, joy and peace? Do you also believe that the Holy Spirit wants to help you radiate or overflow with hope? Application: Invite a Christian of the same

gender to take a walk with you. As you walk along, notice all the people where you live. Do you see religious, racial or economic differences? Discuss with your Christian friend the need for hope in your community. What does the Holy Spirit want you to do to give hope to these people? Memory Verse for Week 12 -- I John 4:7-8 "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."

CLOSING

No. 59 Spiritual Gifts Bring Unity -- 1 Corinthians 12:1, 4-31 & 13:1-3

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can retell the last story, which was from Paul's letter to the Romans? Who is the new Israel? Why is this important to believers today? Accountability: Did you take a walk with a Christian friend and look for needs around you? What needs did you identify? What steps will you take to meet those needs? How can our church support you in this ministry? Pre-story Dialog: Do you remember what Paul wrote to the Romans about spiritual gifts? What was the purpose of the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to the body of Christ? Today's Bible story is from another one of Paul's letters. However, this letter was included in the first of two letters written to the Christians in Corinth, Greece. The believers were not experiencing persecution, but other problems within their church. Paul had visited this church on his missionary journeys and became very concerned about them. See how this story can be applied to your life and to your church today. Here is the story of "Spiritual Gifts Bring Unity".

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Spiritual gifts enable followers of Jesus to experience unity.

Gap -- New-Spiritual gifts unknown concept

Spiritual Gifts Bring Unity

1 Corinthians 12:1, 4-31 and 13:1-3

Paul wrote to the Corinthians and he said, now dear brothers and sisters. I will write about the special abilities the Holy Spirit gives to each of us. First, I must correct your misunderstandings about them. You know that when you were still pagans, you were led astray and swept along in worshipping speechless idols. So I want you to know how to discern what is truly from God. No one speaking by the spirit of God can curse Jesus. And no one is able to say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. Now there are different kinds of spiritual gifts. But it is the same Holy Spirit who is the source of all of them. There are different kinds of service in the church, but it is the same Lord that we are serving. There are different ways God works in our lives, but it is the same God who does the work through all of us. A spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church. To one person, the spirit gives the ability to give wise advice. To another, he gives the gift of special knowledge. The spirit gives special faith to another and to someone else he gives the power to heal the sick. He gives one person the power to perform miracles and to another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to know whether it is really the spirit of God or another spirit that is speaking. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown tongues in languages. And another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. It is the one and only Holy Spirit who distributes these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have. The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up only one body. So it is with the body of Christ. Some of us are Jews. Some are Gentiles. Some are slaves and some are free. But we have all been baptized into Christ's body by one spirit and we have all received the same spirit. Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part. If the foot says, I am not part of the body because I am not a hand that does not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear says, I am not part of the body because I am only an ear and not an eye, would that make it any less a part of the body? Suppose the whole body were an eye. Then how would you hear? Or if your whole body were just one big ear, how could you smell anything? But God made our bodies with many parts and he has put each part just where he wants it. What a strange thing a body would be if it only had one part. Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. The eye can never say to the hand, I don't need you. The head can't say to the feet, I don't need you. In fact, some of the parts that seem weakest and least important are really the most necessary. And the parts we regard as less honorable are those we clothe with the greatest care. So we carefully protect from the eyes of others, those parts that should not be seen, while other parts do not require this special care. So God has put the body together in such a way that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. This makes for harmony among the members so that all the members care for each other equally. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it. And if one part is honored, all the parts are glad. Now all of you together are Christ's body. And each one of you is a separate and necessary part of it. Here is a list of some of the members that God has placed in the body of

Christ. First are apostles. Second are prophets. Third are teachers. Then there are those who do miracles. Those who have the gift of healing. Those who can help others. Those who can get others to work together. Those who speak in unknown languages. Is everyone an apostle? Of course not. Is everyone a prophet? No. Are all teachers? Does everyone have the power to do miracles? Does everyone have the gift of healing? Of course not. Does God give all of us the ability to speak in unknown languages? Can everyone interpret unknown languages? No. And in any event you should desire the most helpful gifts. Now this is the message that Paul gave to the church in Corinth.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

This story is from a letter that Paul wrote to the Corinthians. In this story, what did Paul say that God had given to each of the believers? What was the purpose of those gifts? How many of the spiritual gifts can you name? What is your spiritual gift? How are Christians to use their spiritual gifts? How can you use your spiritual gift to bring unity to your local church? What happens to the body of Christ if we do not use our spiritual gifts? Now, consider this: Have you ever known a person with sight who chose to close their eyes and not use their sight? In the same way, should you use your gift to help bring unity in your church? Through this story, has the Holy Spirit helped you to see that as a Christian that you need to belong to a group of believers? Do you have a new appreciation to the way that God has gifted your church? Why did Paul say that love was so important? Do you use your spiritual gift out of love? Application: Encourage participants to determine their spiritual gift and then begin using it in love. Memory Verse for Week 12 -- I John 4:7-8 "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."

CLOSING

No. 60 Sinful Living vs. Fruit of the Spirit Galatians 5:13-25

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can tell the story of “Spiritual Gifts Bring Unity”? Why was Paul concerned about the church in Corinth? Why is love so important? Application: Would someone please share their spiritual gift with us? How can that gift be used in our church? How can everyone discover their own spiritual gifts? How can our differences contribute to the unity of our church? Pre-story Dialog: Paul wrote another letter from which our story was taken. Paul told this story to churches in Galatia, a province of what is present-day Turkey. Listen first for the way that people will act without Christ in their lives. Then listen for the many ways that the Holy Spirit was working in the lives of the Galatians. See if you can memorize this story very quickly. Here is the story of “Sinful Living versus Fruit of the Spirit”.

BIBLE STORY

Truth: The Holy Spirit works through followers of Jesus to produce spiritual fruit.

Gap -- New-Religion is imposed rather than free to believe

Sinful Living vs. Fruit of the Spirit

Galatians 5:13-25

Christians were called to freedom. Do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature of your flesh. Instead, serve one another in love. The entire law of God is summed up in a single command, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” However, if you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. Live by the Spirit of God and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. The sinful nature within you desires what is contrary to the Spirit and vice versa. They are in conflict with each other. If you live by the sinful nature, you will not live as you should as Christians. If you are led by the Spirit, then you are not under the law. The actions of a sinful nature are obvious. They include sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idol worship and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies and so on. I warn you that those who live this way will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit that the Holy Spirit produces is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified their sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

What makes you think that the Christians in Galatia needed to distinguish between right and wrong? If you as a believer in Jesus are free from the law, does that mean you can do anything that you want? What is your sinful nature? As we heard in our story to the Corinthians, why do you think love was such an important part of the Christian lifestyle? Can you identify the desires of the sinful nature? Why did Paul warn the Galatians not to live sinful lives? How then are Christians to live? What does the fruit of the Holy Spirit of God produce? Application: Can you write a song that includes all the fruits of the Spirit? Can you take each fruit of the Spirit and tell a story that will illustrate each fruit? For instance, when I think of kindness, the story of the Good Samaritan comes to mind. Think of a story for each fruit of the Spirit. Tell this story as a way to review many of God's stories. Memory Verse for Week 12 -- I John 4:7-8 “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.”

CLOSING

No. 61 Husbands & Wives 1 Corinthians 6:15 to 7:1-17, 20, & 39

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Would someone please volunteer to tell the story of the “Sinful Nature versus the Fruit of the Spirit”? Have you experienced the fruit of the Spirit in your life? What would it take for you to exhibit one or all of these? Accountability: Who took each of the fruit of the Spirit and identified a story that matched each fruit? Is that something that you can do as a group? Pre-story Dialog: Today’s story focuses on relationships between family members and ultimately their relationship to the Lord. This story came from Paul, who spoke through a letter to the believers at Corinth. Listen to hear what Paul said to believers at Corinth about family relationships. Listen very carefully for what Paul told them about how many Christian husbands and wives a person should have. This is the story from God’s Word.

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Followers of Jesus have godly homes.

Barrier, but possibly Gap -- New-Distinct Male/Female Roles--Husbands can have multiple wives
Husbands & Wives

1 Corinthians 6:15 to 7:1-17, 20, & 39

You know that your bodies are parts of the body of Christ. Shall I take a part of Christ's body and make it part of the body of a prostitute? Impossible. Or perhaps you don't know that the man who joins his body to a prostitute becomes physically one with her. The scripture says quite plainly the two will become one body, but he who joins himself to the Lord becomes spiritually one with him. Avoid immorality. Any other sin a man commits does not affect his body. But the man who is guilty of sexual immorality sins against his own body. Don't you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and who is given to you by God? You do not belong to yourselves but you belong to God, and it is he who bought you for a price, so use your bodies for God's glory. Now to deal with the matters you have told me about: a man does well not to marry, but because there is so much immorality, every man should have his own wife and every woman should have her own husband. A man should fulfill his duty as a husband and a woman should fulfill her duty as a wife and each should satisfy the other's needs. A wife is not the master of her own body, but her husband is. Now in the same way a husband is not the master of his own body, but his wife is. Do not deny yourselves to each other unless you first agree to do so for a while in order to spend your time in prayer, but then resume normal marital relations. In this way, you will be kept from giving into Satan's temptation because of your lack of self-control. For married people I have a command which is not my own but the Lord's. A wife must not leave her husband, but if she does she must remain single or else be reconciled to her husband, and a husband must not divorce his wife. To the others I say by myself, not from the Lord, that if a Christian man has a wife who is an unbeliever and she believes to go on living with him, he must not divorce her, and if a Christian woman is married to a man who is an unbeliever and he agrees to go on living with her, she must not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made acceptable to God by being united to his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made acceptable to God by being united to her Christian husband. If this were not so, their children would be like pagan children, but as it is they are both acceptable to God. However, if the one who is not a believer wishes to leave the Christian partner, let it happen. In such cases, the Christian partner whether husband or wife, is free to act. God has called you to live in peace. How can you be sure Christian wife that you will not save your husband? Or how can you be sure Christian husband that you will not save your wife? Each of you should go on living according to the Lord's gift to you and as you were when God called you. This is the rule I teach in all of the churches. Each of you should remain as you were when you accepted God's call. A married woman is committed to her husband as long as he lives, but if her husband dies, then she is free to marry any man she wishes, so long as he belongs to the Lord.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Who can recount the relationships in this story? First, what is our relationship with the Lord? Should Christians join with prostitutes? What does God say happens when a man leaves his parents and becomes united with his wife. With this in mind, should a husband have more than

one wife? How does God want husbands and wives to act toward each other? What is the impact of a husband and wife's relationship upon their children? What does the Bible say about divorce? What does the Bible say about remarriage? If the husband is to be following Christ's example, how should he treat his wife? How can husbands and wives remain unstained and unblemished in their marriage? How does this story differ from what is culturally accepted among Persians? Application: What changes do you need to make in your family? Does this change who you would expect to have as a spouse? Think for a minute about God's command not to commit adultery. If a husband and a wife love each other will they turn to prostitutes or be abusive toward each other? How can a husband show love for his wife? How can a wife show respect for her husband? Is it possible for a Christian married couple to model to others how Jesus loves and cares for the church? If you are not married, find a married couple with whom you can share this story and ask them how Jesus loving the church is like their marriage. If you are married, invite a married couple to your home and share this story with them. Renew your marriage to God to follow Jesus' model of love for the church. Memory Verse for Week 13 -- Acts 13:47 "For this is what the Lord has commanded us: 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

CLOSING

No. 62 Church leaders defined -- I Timothy 3:1-13

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Who can tell the story “Husbands and Wives”? Accountability: Who told this story to someone else and what did you discuss? What changes have you made in your family since we last met? There was one special question in the previous dialog that I want to highlight before we start today's story: Is it possible for a Christian married couple to model to others how Jesus loves and cares for the church? Christians serve as a model for others to follow. Pres-story Dialog: Churches want to know what the Bible says about the role of their leaders and how the leaders function. Today's story defines the requirements for leaders. Paul wrote a letter to a young church leader named Timothy clarifying the role of a pastor and other church leaders. Paul and Silas, accompanied by Timothy, had begun the church in Thessalonica. They had to leave quickly, but the church grew anyway. Years later Timothy led the church in Thessalonica while Paul was in prison for sharing his faith publicly. Paul wanted to encourage Timothy. There are two important listening tasks. The first is to listen for the types of leaders that the church needs. The second listening task is to identify the characteristics needed by these leaders. Here is part of what Paul wrote to Timothy called “Church Leaders Defined.” This is the story.

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Churches need godly leaders.

Bridge -- New-Religious organizations have leaders

Church leaders defined

I Timothy 3:1-13

Here is a trustworthy saying. If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer or shepherd, he desires a good work. The shepherd must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drinker, not violent, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not loving money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him respectfully. But if anyone does not know to rule his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a new convert because he might become puffed up and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. In the same way, deacons are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. First they must be tested, then elected if there nothing against them. In the same way, deacons are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. First they must be tested. Then if there is nothing against them, let them serve. In the same way, their wives are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. Deacons must be the husband of only one wife, managing their own households and children well. Those that have served well as deacons gain an excellent standing and great boldness in the faith, which is in Christ Jesus. Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to behave in God's household, which is the church of the Living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. This is the end of the story.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Timothy was a missionary with Paul and he also was a young man who needed advice from Paul. What did God inspire Paul to say were two leadership categories of a local church? What was the role of pastor, which was called shepherd, bishop or overseer? Does your church have a pastor? What are the characteristics of a man whom a church would call to be a pastor? How do you know that a believer should exhibit these characteristics before being asked to serve as a pastor? Why must a pastor not be a new believer? What does it say about the man's public reputation? What is the role of deacon? Does the story of Stephen come to mind? Do you remember why he was chosen to be one of seven helpers in the church of Jerusalem? Even though the seven who supervised the feeding of widows were not specifically called deacons, they ministered to the church members and were full of faith and the Holy Spirit. What kind of

men are deacons to be? Why do you think that deacons should be tested by the church? Why is it important that pastors and deacons manage their own affairs well before becoming a church leader? What is the blessing that Paul said that pastors and deacons would receive? Do pastors and deacons come from the church membership or from some outside source? Application: Who is God calling to be pastor of our church? Does the person have the biblical qualifications? Who should be deacons serving the needs of our church? How will we follow the biblical qualifications for deacons? Do we need to re-tell the story in order to fully understand the qualifications? Until we meet again, pray for godly leaders to be elected to serve this church—and other churches we might be starting. Memory Verse for Week 13 -- Acts 13:47 “For this is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’” Let’s take it phrase by phrase and discuss it so that we can memorize it. The first part is, “For this is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles.’” The statement from Paul is actually quoting the prophet Isaiah. The prophecy proclaimed that the coming Messiah would bring the light of God’s glory to people other than the Jews. These were the Gentiles. We are all Gentiles. Without Jesus Christ, we would be in darkness separated from a relationship with God. But notice that Paul said at the first of the verse that the Lord gives this command to all of us who are Christians! The second half of the verse continues the prophecy, “that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.” The Messiah came so that everyone in the earth can be saved from an eternal separation from God to eternal life with God in Heaven. Where are the ends of the earth to you? What would be the most difficult place in the world for you to imagine the gospel of Jesus reaching? What will it take for the gospel to travel to the ends of the earth? Let’s say that Bible verse one more time before we leave: “For this is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’” Acts 13:47

Note: Begin the process for calling a pastor and electing deacons.

CLOSING

No. 63 Spiritual warfare--full armor of God Ephesians 6:11-18

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Would someone volunteer to tell the story “Church Leaders Defined”? How are church leaders like servants for our church? How did Jesus serve His disciples as a leader? Accountability: What will it take for our church to have a godly pastor and qualified deacons? Should we set a time for making this decision? Should we conduct a special ceremony for selecting our church's leaders? Pre-story Dialog: What kind of problems did the early church encounter? How did they solve these problems? What was the source of the problems? Do you remember the story of Jesus' Temptations? Who is Satan? What does he desire should happen to a believer? Today's story is about “Spiritual Warfare.” This story comes from Paul, who was actually in a prison and probably chained to a Roman soldier. When he wrote to Christians at the city of Ephesus, he wanted to give them some directions and guidance about how they need to fight a spiritual battle. After the story, see if you can name all of the spiritual armor that the Christian is given to resist attacks from Satan. Here is the Bible story.

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Followers of Jesus use Scripture to defend their faith against evil.

Bridge -- New-Recognition of Satan and Hell / Believers use Scriptures to defend their faith

Spiritual warfare--full armor of God

Ephesians 6:11-18

Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For we don't struggle, or wrestle, or fight against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual rulers, and spiritual authorities, and the powers of the dark world and against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore we need to put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, we may be able to stand our ground, and after we've done all of this, we'll be standing victorious. So stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, and the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the teaching that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to this, you should take up the shield of faith that will extinguish all the flaming arrows that the evil one will shoot at you. And take the helmet of salvation and pick up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. And now that you have this armor on, pray in the Spirit on all occasions and with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. That's the story from God's Word.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Paul wanted Christians to stand strong in their faith. Why do you need to stand against Satan's schemes? Who is our struggle against? Why is a Christian's struggle against evil? What happens if you do not take a stand against evil? If you are to put on the full armor of God, what will you need? Let's review each element. What was the symbol of truth buckled around your waist? Why would you need a breastplate of righteous covering your heart? Why does God want our feet to be ready to spread peace? What do you think might be a flaming arrow that the evil one would send to you? What will help to shield you from those temptations? Do you remember the story about the temptations of Jesus? What did Jesus use to resist the evil one? Is that a great shield of faith? Why was salvation considered to be a helmet? What was the sword of the Holy Spirit? Again, think back to the story of Jesus using His knowledge of God's Word to not only resist temptation but to get the devil to flee! What was the final thing that someone that has the full armor of God should do? What does it mean to "pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests"? Application: Let's stop right now and pray prayers of praise and thanksgiving. Pray for healing and protection. Pray for others to know Jesus. Pray in times of trouble. Conclude the prayer session by praying for others who have special needs. Draw a picture of a man wearing the armor described in this story. Show the picture to at least one other Christian and describe how Christians can use each portion of the armor of God. Our memory verse is taken from the Bible story that we had from Paul and Barnabas' first missionary journey. Do you remember when they were in Pisidian Antioch and addressed the Jews who had rejected their message? Here is the Memory Verse -- Acts 13:47 "For this is what the Lord has

commanded us: 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

CLOSING

No. 64 Satan is Defeated -- Composite Revelation

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

What are the parts of spiritual armor available to us as a Christian? Did you notice that each part of the armor protects our front? Who or what protects us from behind? The Bible says, “the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.” (Isaiah 58:8) We are to be on the move to thwart Satan’s efforts and trust God with our overall protection. Accountability: Would anyone like to tell what happened when they drew a picture and told the story of a soldier wearing spiritual armor? Did anyone pray as we prayed in our special prayer session? Should we stop and pray for spiritual protection right now? How are you coping with spiritual battles? Pre-Story Dialog: I have good news! Satan will be defeated one day after Jesus comes again. Before I tell the story, I want to mention that John in this story is the man who was one of the twelve disciples who first followed Jesus. In fact, John was often referred to as the disciple whom Jesus loved. John lived many years and eventually left Jerusalem. He became a leader in the church in Ephesus—the same one that Paul visited several times. John was eventually imprisoned off the coast of Turkey on a little island called Patmos. While on Patmos, the Lord revealed many visions to John, which he told to the churches. The story for today is a composite of all of John’s revelations called “Satan is Defeated.”

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Judgment awaits everyone after death.

Truth: Believers go to Heaven while those who reject Jesus spend eternity in Hell.

Barrier -- Review--Muslims spend eternity in Paradise if Mohammed agrees (72 virgins)

The judgment of unbelievers

Composite—Revelation

An angel visited John in exile on the Isle of Patmos. The visit of the angel from God occurred on the Lord’s Day, Sunday, when God through that angel began showing John what would happen during the last days. God told John He would cause him to see the future events just as they would occur and that after seeing those events occur, he would write down exactly what he saw. Afterwards he was told to send what he recorded to the seven churches in Asia. In the reality of time and in a set sequence, the seventh of seven angels will sound out with a great voice from Heaven saying, “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ and He shall reign for ever and for ever.” And a loud voice was suddenly heard in Heaven saying, “Now is come salvation and strength and the kingdom of our God and the power of His Christ because the accuser of our brethren is cast down; the very one who has accused them before our God day and night. And the believers will overcome him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony and by those who do not love their lives, even to the point of their death as martyrs. Therefore rejoice you heavens and you that dwell in them. Woe to those who are alive on the earth and in the sea at this time. For the Devil has personally approached you, having great wrath because he knows that he has but a short time left and during this short time on earth, he will be allowed to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And power will be given him over all kindred and tongues and peoples. And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, but not those whose names are recorded in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Any person who can understand these things should pay careful attention to them.” After these and a number of other events, I looked and could see an angel coming down from Heaven. The angel had the key to the lock on the bottomless pit. He was also carrying in his hand a huge chain. I could see this angel taking hold of the dragon, that old serpent which is Satan and binding him with that chain for a thousand years. And the angel will cast him into the bottomless pit and lock him up, setting a seal upon him that he should in no way deceive the peoples until the thousand years are completed. But after those years pass, I saw that he would be loosed for a very short time. When a thousand years are completed, Satan will be loosed out of his prison and will go out again, as he did before to deceive the peoples, which are then living in every part of the earth known then as Gog and Magog. Satan will gather those earthly people together to battle and the number of those gathered at that time will be as many as the sand in the sea. Those people will go all over every part of the earth and will ultimately surround the camp of the saints and the beloved city and at that very moment, fire will

immediately fall from God out of Heaven and will engulf every one of them. The devil that has for a long time deceived them will then be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet already are. And every one of them will be tormented day and night forever and forever. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whomever's name was not found recorded in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. And I saw a new Heaven and a new earth. For the first Heaven and the first earth passed away and there will no longer be a sea. And I, John, could the holy city, called the New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of Heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I could hear a great voice out of Heaven that said, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is now with men and He will dwell with them and they shall be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. The Lord will wipe away all of their tears from their eyes. From that point in time, death will disappear, as will sorrow and crime. There will never be any more pain for these former experiences. They will be gone forever." God sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And the angel said to me, "Record these words for they are true and they are faithful." And that is the story of Revelation from the Bible.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

Now these are the questions that we want to ask during our dialog time. How did God get this story of the last days to us? After hearing this story, how powerful do you think Satan was during this time and is today? Is Satan equal to God? Does anyone have the power to defeat this powerful evil one? How will the Devil be ultimately defeated? What will happen to those who today and in the last days choose to follow Jesus? What does this portion of the story mean: "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ and he shall reign for ever and for ever." (*Revelation 11:15 & 17*) How do these verses relate to our memory verse for this session? Application: Tell this story to your friends and family as a message of hope. If your friends and family are not yet believers, encourage them to accept Christ as their Savior so that they can live in Heaven for all of eternity. Memory Verse for Week 13 -- Acts 13:47 "For this is what the Lord has commanded us: 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

CLOSING

No. 65 Judgment of unbelievers and the blessed state of believers -- Rev. 21:1-5, 22-27 and 22:1-10

WORSHIP AND STORY INTRODUCTION

Has anyone learned the story of Revelation and would like to tell us of Satan's defeat? What does the story of Revelation do for you? How should we live today because of the knowledge that Satan will be defeated? What did the story say about being faithful unto death? Pre-story Dialog: Revelation carries two important stories that you have heard before. I would like you to hear them and discuss them as Christians. Listen for the way Christians and unbelievers will be judged for their sins. Listen for the final reward for the believers. Our story today is "The Judgment of Unbelievers and the Blessed State of Believers."

BIBLE STORY

Truth: Followers of Jesus are guaranteed eternity in Heaven.

Barrier--Review--Muslims spend eternity in Paradise if Mohammed agrees (72 virgins)

Judgment of unbelievers and the blessed state of believers

Rev. 21:1-5, 22-27 and 22:1-10

And I, John, could see a new heaven and a new earth. The earth that we know and even heaven as it is now was replaced. There was not even a sea. I watched as the holy city, called the New Jerusalem, came down from God out of Heaven, prepared as a beautiful as a bride adorned for her husband. And I could hear a great voice out of Heaven that said, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is now with men and He will dwell with them and they shall be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. The Lord will wipe away all of their tears from their eyes. From that point in time, death will disappear, as will sorrow and crime. There will never be any more pain for these former experiences. They will be gone forever." God sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And the angel said to me, "Record these words for they are true and can be trusted." ... There was no temple in the city because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. There was no need for the sun or moon to shine because God's glory gave the city light. The Lamb was its lamp. The nations who were there walked by its light, and the kings of the earth added their splendor to it. The gates will never be shut because it will never be dark. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful. The only people admitted to Heaven are those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. ... Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life. It was crystal clear and it was flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb. The river flowed down the middle of the great street of the city. Beside the river were trees. The tree of life bore a new crop every month. Its leaves were used for healing the nations. All curses will be gone. The throne of God and the Lamb will be in the city and his servants will serve him. They will be able to look directly into his face and his name will be on their foreheads. There will no longer be any night. Lamps and the sun are no longer needed since the Lord God will give them His light. They will reign forever. Then the angel said to me, "John, these words are true and can be trusted. The Lord God of the prophets sent his angel to show his servants the things that will soon take place. Then the Lord said, "Behold, I am coming soon! You are blessed if you keep the words of the prophecy as I have given it to you." I, John, did hear and see all of this. When I fell down at the feet of the angel and tried to worship him for showing me all of this, he said, "Don't do it! I am a fellow servant along with you and other prophets and of all who keep the words given to you. Worship God!" Then the angel told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy you've recorded, because the time is near. Leave people who do wrong to continue in their wrong. Let the vile be vile. Let him who does the right thing do right. And let him who is holy be holy." And that is our story.

POST-STORY DIALOG AND APPLICATION

This story concludes are stories that have helped you to grow as a Christian. Let's review this story from the revelation experienced by the apostle John. When it was told previously, we focused on the need to have your name included in the Lamb's Book of Life or face hell as described in Jesus' parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. This time, let's discuss the story from a Christian perspective. As a believer, you are assured by the Holy Spirit's presence in your life

that you are saved and will spend eternity in Heaven with God. Are you looking forward to the new place that God is preparing for you? Why is Heaven described as the New Jerusalem? Why is it described as looking like a bride? Who do you think is the bridegroom? Why was there no need for a temple in the city? Where did the city get its light? Why was Jesus described as a Lamb? What does this story tell us about the actual presence of God? Does this glimpse of Heaven include every nationality? Why do you think it was important to point out that people will not be allowed into Heaven who are shameful and deceitful? Can anyone just act like they are Christians or do you think God will know their hearts? Next, let's discuss the significance of the Tree of Life that was in Heaven. Where have you heard of this tree before? What happened in the Garden of Eden to keep Adam and Eve from eating of this tree? What does this tree represent? Do you believe that God loves us so much that He is preparing to spend all of eternity with us? What was the curse that was removed? Do you believe that Jesus is coming back to the earth for the believers? If you believe that Jesus is coming soon, then how will you live your life? Please tell this story and all the others. Memorize them and share these stories with those that you meet. This concludes our set of discipleship stories. In this "Following Jesus" series we have introduced you to about one hundred stories from the Bible, God's Holy Word. It is our hope that you have an oral Bible to reflect upon and to share with others. Every attempt was made to keep these stories as accurate as possible. Our prayers are with you as you grow in your faith in Christ. Come, Lord Jesus!

CLOSING

PK—2002

DISCIPLESHIP TRACK Weekly Memory Verses (13) **(All English verses taken from the NIV with permission)**

Memory Verse for Week 1 -- 2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Memory Verse for Week 2 -- Matthew 11:28-30

Come unto me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Memory Verse for Week 3 -- Romans 12:5

In Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Memory Verse for Week 4 -- John 15:5

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

Memory Verse for Week 5 -- Matthew 16:24

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

Memory Verse for Week 6 -- Galatians 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Memory Verse for Week 7 -- Ephesians 5:18

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

Memory Verse for Week 8 -- Philippians 2:9-11

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Memory Verse for Week 9 -- Philippians 2:13

For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

Memory Verse for Week 10 -- Hebrews 10:24-25

Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Memory Verse for Week 11 -- I John 3:1

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

Memory Verse for Week 12 -- I John 4:7-8

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

Memory Verse for Week 13 -- Acts 13:47

For this is what the Lord has commanded us: "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."