



**GROWING TOGETHER**  
SDA Church Curriculum

A FAMILY-ALIGNED CURRICULUM FOR EVERY GENERATION

# DISCIPLER

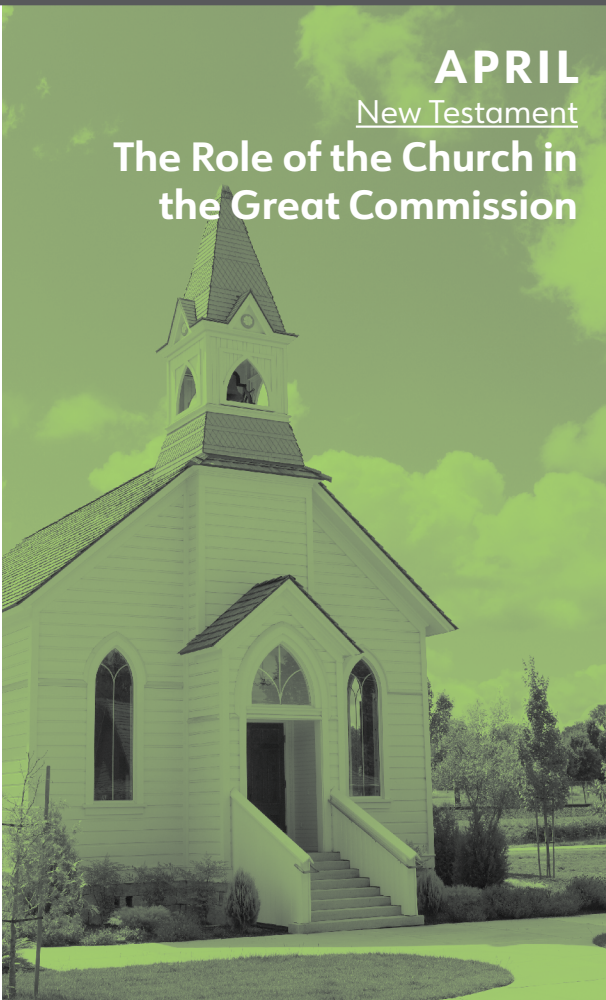
## TEACHING MATERIALS

### 2<sup>ND</sup> QUARTER 2024

**APRIL**

New Testament

**The Role of the Church in  
the Great Commission**



**MAY**

Special Topic

**Family By Design**



**JUNE**

Old Testament

**God's Big Plan for  
Redemption**



**FOR ADULTS**

# DISCIPLER TEACHING MATERIALS

Welcome to April, 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2024!

## The Role of the Church in the Great Commission (New Testament)

What if the gospel message were to "go viral?" That would be good news, wouldn't it? When some video or meme goes viral online, it means it has somehow engaged and connected with a whole bunch of people, and the message spreads. What causes things to go viral? How does that even happen? How does that start? Where would we start? Can you even control what goes viral?

Perhaps a good first step in trying to understand how this could happen with the gospel would be to look at the lives of the first Christians, whose message spread rapidly in their time and place. As we read together in Acts about those early days in the life of the church, let's notice the people and the message they embodied, which made such a powerful impact on their world.

## Table of Contents

<b>WEEK 1</b> .....	<b>2</b>	<b>WEEK 3</b> .....	<b>39</b>
April 6-12, 2024		April 20-26, 2024	
<b>Filled With Power</b>		<b>All Are Welcome</b>	
Teaching Guide—page 2		Teaching Guide—page 39	
Resources (Outlines, Handouts)—page 11		Resources (Outlines, Handouts)—page 48	
April Unit Poster—page 13		April Unit Poster—page 51	
April Application Verse Poster—page 14		April Application Verse Poster—page 52	
Take Home—page 18		Take Home—page 57	
<b>WEEK 2</b> .....	<b>20</b>	<b>WEEK 4</b> .....	<b>59</b>
April 13-19, 2024		April 27-May 3, 2024	
<b>No Easy Road</b>		<b>When Things Get Ugly</b>	
Teaching Guide—page 20		Teaching Guide—page 59	
Resources (Outlines, Handouts)—page 29		Resources (Outlines, Handouts)—page 68	
April Unit Poster—page 32		April Unit Poster—page 71	
April Application Verse Poster—page 33		April Application Verse Poster—page 72	
Take Home—page 37		Take Home—page 75	

# DISCIPLER

APRIL 6-12, 2024

## WEEK 1

## Filled With Power

### Family Theme:

The Church is Born

### Study Text:

Acts 2:1-47

### Lesson Objectives:

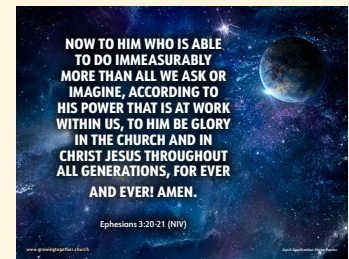
- Know:** With the coming of the Spirit, the young church began to experience in community the transforming reality of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.
- Think:** The church is to be a community of believers that continues and extends the mission and message of Jesus to the world. The Holy Spirit works within the church to form a community of different and diverse people into the body of Christ for the world.
- Do:** Be a part of the body of Christ, that community of people who minister to the world in Jesus' name.

New Testament Unit: The Role of the Church in the Great Commission, Lesson 1

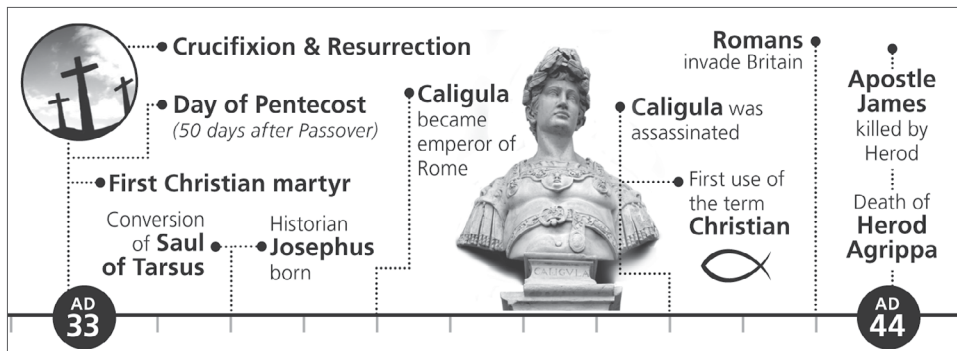
**APPLICATION VERSE:** Ephesians 3:20-21 (NIV)

### Checklist:

- Discipler Resource Week 1.1
- April Unit Poster
- April Application Verse Poster
- Discipler Resource Week 1.2
- Discipler Resource Week 1.3
- Discipler Resource Week 1.4
- Discipler Take Home Week 1



Display the **APRIL UNIT POSTER** and **APRIL APPLICATION VERSE POSTER** to help reinforce the theme and application verse throughout this unit.



# CONNECT

Items Needed:

- **RESOURCE WEEK 1.1**

Use the *Teaching Outline* (**RESOURCE WEEK 1.1**) as a guide for teaching this lesson.

## OPTION 1:

Bring a few pictures or video clips of each of your children (or assign someone in the group to do this). As you share the pictures, invite the group to talk about how each child reflects something distinct about their parents. Perhaps those who provided the pictures or videos can share a few stories about how their kids reflect something about them. You might be guided by the following questions:

- *Which parent does each child seem to resemble the most?*
- *What features of each child remind you the most of the parent(s)?*
- *Which mannerisms, temperament, intellect, ways of interacting with people, etc., reflect one or both parents?*

## OPTION 2:

Ask your group members to list what they feel are the important tasks or activities the church should be focused on or involved in. In addition to things that sound overtly religious in nature, consider and discuss things like service, community involvement, social issues, etc. What are those areas of involvement in which the church is most likely to have a genuinely meaningful impact in the lives of people?

## TRANSITION:

**In this week's study, we will reflect on the early days of the church—what it looked like, and what characterized and energized early Christians as they shared Jesus with others. As we reflect on what this looked like in their time and place, can we gain insights into what it might look like in ours?**

# LEARN

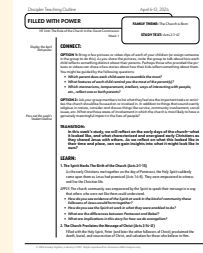
Items Needed:

- **RESOURCE WEEK 1.2**

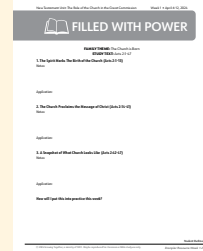
Give everyone in your group a copy of the *Student Outline* (**RESOURCE WEEK 1.2**) and something to write with. This outline provides the major points of the lesson and space for taking notes.

Choose one of these options to capture attention. Then use the transition statement to move into the *Learn* section.

### Resource Week 1.1



### Resource Week 1.2



## EXPLORE

In the opening verses of both the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, the author Luke explains his purpose in writing. First, in part one (the Gospel), he wants to give an account of the life and ministry of Jesus. Then in part two (Acts) he wants to discuss the church—those who had been so profoundly changed by Jesus that they became a community of people who would embody and share the good news of Jesus with the world.

Can you even imagine what those weeks following the death and resurrection of Jesus must have been like? Talk about an emotional roller coaster! Over the course of a handful of days, the disciples watched as Jesus was betrayed, brutally beaten and crucified, buried, and then raised again to life! The crushing of their hopes turning swiftly into an amazing resurrection of Jesus from the dead must have left them reeling, with not nearly enough time to process it all before they found themselves watching as Jesus was taken up from them into heaven.

Even at Jesus' ascension, the disciples' understanding of the nature of the kingdom was a bit blurry. As they spent days waiting in Jerusalem before Pentecost, they prayed and reflected on the events of the Crucifixion and Resurrection weekend. Their understanding was growing and expanding. God's character had now been revealed with a clarity like never before, and the coming of the Holy Spirit would mark the launch of this new community of believers as the church. While God's Spirit had clearly been at work in the world since its beginning, because of who Jesus was and what He had done, the Spirit would now be known in a particular way among the followers of Jesus. The coming of the Holy Spirit, whose role was to keep the followers of Jesus focused on Jesus (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-15) would mark the beginning of the church.

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### The Spirit Marks The Birth of the Church

(Acts 2:1-13)

After being instructed by Jesus to remain in Jerusalem and wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit, Jesus' disciples and other followers gathered together in one place on the day of Pentecost (verse 1). They numbered about 120 people (Acts 1:14-15).

## EXPLORE

Pentecost, commonly called the Feast of Weeks, was a celebration with roots in the Old Testament (Exodus 34:22-23 and Deuteronomy 16:10). It was held fifty days after Passover, and it marked the anniversary of the Law being given to Moses on Mount Sinai. Its purpose was to celebrate the blessings of God, particularly the harvest, and all Hebrew men were to appear before the Lord at this festival. On this particular occasion in Acts, it marked the birth of the church.

As they processed the death and resurrection of Jesus and the amazing good news that had been entrusted to them, they gathered together to study, reflect, and pray. Luke describes the sense of unity they experienced in Acts 1:6, 1:14, 2:1, 2:44, and 2:46. They were together “with one accord” (Acts 2:1). This unity in prayer and reflection was foundational to the community that God was forming them to be.

The description of what happened as they were together on the day of Pentecost recalls earlier imagery from Scripture. At other times when something new was being created, the Spirit of God shows up as wind. In Genesis 1:2 the Spirit of God is depicted as hovering or blowing over the waters at Creation. In Genesis 2:7, God breathes life into Adam. In Ezekiel 37, Ezekiel prophesies to the dry bones and the wind or breath of God blows on them and brings them to life. In His conversation with Nicodemus (John 3), Jesus describes the work of the Spirit in the lives of believers as being like the wind. And as He meets with His disciples after His resurrection, Jesus breathes on them and invites them to receive the Spirit (John 20:22). So it is interesting that when we see this new church being born, it is with the wind of the Spirit blowing upon these followers of Jesus in a mighty way.

It is also interesting that as they were filled with the Spirit they began to speak in other languages. While we tend to get fascinated by the phenomenon itself, what may even be more significant is what this actually meant for the church. This message was not only to be proclaimed, it was to be proclaimed in a way that others who were not like them could understand. People from “every nation under heaven” (verse 5) heard what they were saying in their own language. Significantly, the question asked in verse 12 is not, “How are they doing that?” but rather, “What does this mean?”

Genesis tells the story of humanity's attempt to save themselves by creating a tower that would reach to the heavens. The tower of Babel provided the first expression of what would come to be known as Babylon, both in a literal and metaphorical sense. That early movement was brought to a halt when they could no longer understand each other's languages. But here in Acts 2, another movement began that sought to proclaim the good news of salvation to the world—but this time as Babel in reverse. Instead of being confused by different languages, the people at Pentecost were enabled to speak in ways that others could hear and understand. Just as Babel had become the symbol of confusion and false religion, Pentecost now became the symbol of clarity and the revelation of God's character—Babylon turned upside down!

## EXPLORE

While there are many interpretations and practices that stem from the phenomenon of speaking in tongues in the New Testament, the “other tongues” mentioned in Acts 2:4 clearly refers to human languages that were apparently unknown to those who received the gift. Both the content of the story and the word “language” in verses 6 and 8 signify specific, actual dialects or languages.

The power of the Spirit is manifested in the ability to speak and be understood across language and cultural differences. That is the central feature of the founding of the church. In Acts 2, the power of the Spirit and the mir-

acle of the tongues allowed the early believers and a broad scope of visitors to understand each other. Jews and proselytes from all over the known world, with many different languages and dialects, were gathered in Jerusalem for the celebration of Pentecost (verse 5). While the passage does not seem to indicate that the crowds themselves heard the rushing wind or saw the tongues of fire, they certainly were impacted by the power of hearing someone speaking their own language (verse 6). Interestingly, Luke uses an assortment of words to describe the reaction from the people: bewildered (2:6), amazed (2:7), astonished (2:7), and even perplexed (2:12). This miracle of understanding certainly made an impact. While some took the occasion as an opportunity for ridicule, saying the speakers must be drunk, for many it was profoundly moving experience of communication and understanding across difference.

## APP<sup>LY</sup>

**The church community was empowered by the Spirit to speak their message in a way that others who were not like them could understand.**

This first community of believers was given the privilege of sharing the good news of the gospel, not only among themselves or people like them, but with those from all around the region who were not like them. The work of the Spirit is manifested in the speaking and understanding across different languages and cultures. This had huge implications for their mission that they began to discern as Jesus' words of the Great Commission!

Ask this:

- *How do you see evidence of the Spirit at work in the kind of community these followers of Jesus would form together?*
- *How do you see the Spirit at work in what they were enabled to do?*
- *What are the differences between Pentecost and Babel?*
- *What are implications in this story for how we do evangelism?*

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### **The Church Proclaims the Message of Christ**

(Acts 2:14-41)

As members of this new community were energized and led by the Holy Spirit, Luke tells how they continued the process of proclaiming the good news about Jesus in ways that others could understand. First, Peter addresses the crowd at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-41). Using the accusation that they were drunk as a springboard for further teaching, he puts this moment into the context of the story of Jesus. Although Peter's sermon at Pentecost took place nearly 2,000 years ago, the message he proclaimed still speaks powerfully today!

Peter references an Old Testament passage from Joel 2:28-32 that describes what it will be like in the "last days," which have arrived. The people gathered at Pentecost are experiencing that which Joel foresaw. According to Joel, God would pour out the Spirit on all people in the last days. Never before had there been such an outpouring on the people of God, says Peter.

This is what the prophet Joel was talking about, he tells his Jewish listeners. We are now living in the last days!

For Peter, the sign of the last days was not wonders in the heavens but the pouring out of the Spirit on all people and the salvation that would be given to those who call upon the name of the Lord (verse 21). Jesus was the main character and the central part of Peter's message. He proclaimed that the Lord spoken of by Joel and the Lord spoken of by David (verses 25-28), was none other than Jesus (verses 22-24, 36). While Jesus was known by the signs, wonders, and miracles that characterized His ministry (verse 22), the primary revelation was witnessed in the events of the Crucifixion weekend. Many of these listeners would have witnessed those events, and many others would have heard about them.

The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus comprised the theme of Peter's message. These were the events that had so transformed Peter's understanding of who Jesus was and what He had done for them. Jesus was the one whose life made sense out of everything Peter had known before. In his address to the crowds, Peter showed how this story was anticipated in the Hebrew Scriptures, and now a fuller understanding was coming into view. Christ was the embodiment of the hopes and longings of God's people and evidence of God's enduring faithfulness. In reference to Jesus' resurrection, Peter turns to the Psalms. David was not the one spoken about in Psalm 16 because his body is still in a tomb. Instead, David was speaking about Jesus (verses 29-31), the eyewitnesses (verse 32), and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at this very moment (verse 33). Peter tells them about what he had seen and experienced, joyfully proclaiming what he knows to be true.

Peter helped his hearers understand the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection and showed how his listeners were also part of that story. He wanted them to know that it was a story that they could embrace as their own. He invited them to repent (turn around and move in a new direction) and be baptized (identify their story with the story of Jesus) and experience the transforming power that the Spirit would bring about in their lives as they chose to follow Jesus. The scripture passage indicates that many were indeed listening, as 3,000 were added to their number that day (verse 41).

## EXPLORE

As previously mentioned, Peter quotes Psalm 16:8-11 in his sermon at Pentecost. No doubt the crowd gathered that day was accustomed to applying that Psalm to David; however, Peter creatively suggests that its meaning exceeded David. It was a Messianic Psalm. The role of Messianic Psalms in the preaching of the early church was important in that it helped them connect who Jesus was with the stories in Hebrew Scriptures that explained what God was up to in the life of Jesus. Such expansive interpretation is part of what it means to speak in a language that people can understand. Jesus, Peter showed his listeners, was the most important part of the story of God's people that had been developing for generations.



# APP<sup>LY</sup>

## The message of the church focuses on Jesus and the grace God extends to us.

Even with the dramatic experience of the Spirit at Pentecost, their message continued to be all about Jesus. Salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ is both simple and complicated at the same time. On the one hand, it is simple because it only requires childlike faith in the finished work of Christ, plus or minus nothing. On the other hand, it is complicated because the human heart that has been impacted by sin still finds reasons to resist what it actually longs for. There are many other voices within and without us that resist the notion of grace and insist that we must somehow earn God's favor and standing, rather than simply receive it as gift. Those voices also try to make us forget that God's grace is gift that is available to everyone, even those who are not like us or who do not speak our language. Yet, the good news is that the message of God's faithfulness and grace persists. People continue to proclaim it, and others continue to respond.

Ask this:

- *How would you describe the heart of the message that Peter proclaimed, which is a message we are invited also to proclaim?*
- *What part of the message that Peter shared speaks to you the most? Why?*

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### A Snapshot of What Church Looks Like

(Acts 2:42-47)

In these verses, Luke sums up life in this new church community. They shared everything together. The apostles' teaching, communion, and prayer were a part of their regular rhythms of life (verse 42). They experienced what it meant to abide in Jesus not just as individuals but as a community as well. As they stayed focused on Jesus, their individual lives transformed as a result of their shared life together. Embracing grace does not happen simply in isolation but by extending and receiving grace in community. The early church looked out for one another and went to great lengths to provide care when needed. Wonder, joy, and praise were their prevailing expressions (verses 43, 47). This was how the Holy Spirit's presence was made evident in the early Church community. Not surprisingly, this was the kind of community that people were drawn to, and their numbers increased on a daily basis (verse 47). As people lived out their love for God and for one another in community, the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

# APPLY

**The church is the growing community of joyous believers loving God and loving people.**

What we see reflected in the book of Acts is that this early church was not defined by the building in which they met but by the kind of community they had become. Church is not a place we go; it is who we are. A community of people who gather in order to stay focused on Jesus, who embrace the love of God and allow that love to overflow in the way they care for each other. A community that others are attracted to because they see the kind of people that followers of Jesus are becoming. A community centered on sharing the love and grace of Jesus, within and without. Who would not be drawn to a community like this?

Ask this:

- **How would you describe the distinguishing features of the early church community?**
- **To what extent do our own church communities reflect the kind of life described here?**
- **What would it take for us to more fully experience what is described in Acts? What are the ways we resist doing this? Why?**
- **Describe some places where you have seen glimpses of this kind of community flourishing.**

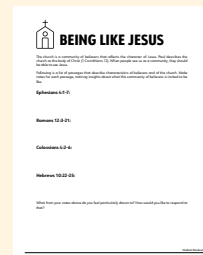
Use the *Talk Sheet* (**RESOURCE WEEK 1.3**) to spark discussion. Give a copy to parents to use as a discussion starter at home.

## Resource Week 1.3



Use one or more of these options to help your group members put this lesson into practice.

## Resource Week 1.4



# RESPOND

## OPTION 1:

Items Needed:

- **RESOURCE WEEK 1.4**

Distribute copies of *Being Like Jesus* (**RESOURCE WEEK 1.4**). On this worksheet, group members will look up a number of verses that show characteristics of the church and followers of Christ, then summarize insights they glean. As a group, talk about what they are discovering. Take note of places and ways they see these dynamics at work and where they find them being resisted. Talk about ways we can work together to more fully reflect the kind of church community envisioned in Scripture.

## OPTION 2:

Conclude today's session by writing the following words on a whiteboard, or in a PowerPoint presentation: **fellowship, discipleship, worship, ministry, and evangelism**. At the top of the presentation, write the title, **"The Purposes of Church."** To begin with, have the members find examples of each purpose in

Acts 2:42-47. Once they have been located, talk about how these dynamics are, or could be, a richer part of our church experience. As a group, think of ways your church reflects each of these.

### OPTION 3:

As a group, brainstorm ways you can serve your community and show the love of Christ. This might include things like serving meals at a homeless shelter, helping clean desks at a local school, getting involved in Meals on Wheels, etc. But even more importantly, talk about how the kind of people we are together is vital to the way that we reach out to others. Just doing outreach as an activity is not the same as being a community that loves people so much that they want to connect with others and serve as a reflection of this communal love. People can be helped by being the recipient of a service project, and they can also be helped by being drawn to a community that embodies love for God and love for people as a way of life. Talk about how being the people of God together and doing the work of God feed into each other. Brainstorm together what this might look like as you plan outreach that is an overflow of a rich community life.

Encourage the parents in your group to try **HOME CONNECTION**, a simple, downloadable page that gives parents:

- A weekly Bible passage to **READ** together as a family
- Suggestions to help them **PRAY** together as a family
- Suggested activities to **DO** to put their faith in action

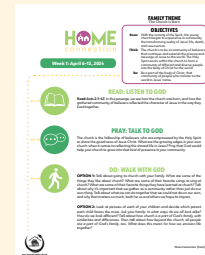
**HOME CONNECTION** also provides the theme, application verse, and the “takeaway” from each age level in GT Curriculum. This way parents know what each family member is experiencing in his or her Sabbath School class.

**HOME CONNECTION** is available for FREE download at [www.growingtogether.church](http://www.growingtogether.church)

Encourage your group members to complete the daily devotions in the **DISCIPLER DEVOTIONAL GUIDE** this week to help them apply and respond to this lesson.

Also encourage the parents in your group to use the **HOME CONNECTION** for this week.

#### Take Home Week 1



**FILLED WITH POWER****FAMILY THEME:** The Church is BornNT Unit: The Role of the Church in the Great Commission  
Week 1**STUDY TEXT:** Acts 2:1-47Display the April  
Unit poster**CONNECT:**

**OPTION 1:** Bring a few pictures or video clips of each of your children (or assign someone in the group to do this). As you share the pictures, invite the group to talk about how each child reflects something distinct about their parents. Perhaps those who provided the pictures or videos can share a few stories about how their kids reflect something about them. You might be guided by the following questions:

- *Which parent does each child seem to resemble the most?*
- *What features of each child remind you the most of the parent(s)?*
- *Which mannerisms, temperament, intellect, ways of interacting with people, etc., reflect one or both parents?*

**OPTION 2:** Ask your group members to list what they feel are the important tasks or activities the church should be focused on or involved in. In addition to things that sound overtly religious in nature, consider and discuss things like service, community involvement, social issues, etc. What are those areas of involvement in which the church is most likely to have a genuinely meaningful impact in the lives of people?

Pass out this week's  
Student Outline**TRANSITION:**

**In this week's study, we will reflect on the early days of the church—what it looked like, and what characterized and energized early Christians as they shared Jesus with others. As we reflect on what this looked like in their time and place, can we gain insights into what it might look like in ours?**

**LEARN:****1. The Spirit Marks The Birth of the Church (Acts 2:1-13)**

As the early Christians met together on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit suddenly came upon them as Jesus had promised (Acts 1:4-8). They were empowered to witness and live the Christian life.

**APPLY:** The church community was empowered by the Spirit to speak their message in a way that others who were not like them could understand.

- *How do you see evidence of the Spirit at work in the kind of community these followers of Jesus would form together?*
- *How do you see the Spirit at work in what they were enabled to do?*
- *What are the differences between Pentecost and Babel?*
- *What are implications in this story for how we do evangelism?*

**2. The Church Proclaims the Message of Christ (Acts 2:14-41)**

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter (and later the other followers of Christ) proclaimed the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and salvation for those who believe in Him.

APPLY: The message of the church focuses on Jesus and the grace God extends to us.

- *How would you describe the heart of the message that Peter proclaimed, which is a message we are invited also to proclaim?*
- *What part of the message that Peter shared speaks to you the most? Why?*

### 3. A Snapshot of What Church Looks Like (Acts 2:42-47)

These verses reveal the important activities of the newborn church. The apostles' teaching, communion, and prayer were how the people focused on God. Fellowship, sharing, and sacrificing to meet the needs of their group members was how they loved each other.

APPLY: The church is the growing community of joyous believers loving God and loving people.

- *How would you describe the distinguishing features of the early church community?*
- *To what extent do our own church communities reflect the kind of life described here?*
- *What would it take for us to more fully experience what is described in Acts? What are the ways we resist doing this? Why?*
- *Describe some places where you have seen glimpses of this kind of community flourishing.*

## RESPOND:

**OPTION 1:** Distribute copies of *Being Like Jesus* (RESOURCE WEEK 1.4). On this worksheet, group members will look up a number of verses that show characteristics of the church and followers of Christ, then summarize insights they glean. As a group, talk about what they are discovering. Take note of places and ways they see these dynamics at work and where they find them being resisted. Talk about ways we can work together to more fully reflect the kind of church community envisioned in Scripture.

**OPTION 2:** Conclude today's session by writing the following words on a whiteboard, or in a PowerPoint presentation: *fellowship, discipleship, worship, ministry, and evangelism*. At the top of the presentation, write the title, "*The Purposes of Church*." To begin with, have the members find examples of each purpose in Acts 2:42-47. Once they have been located, talk about how these dynamics are, or could be, a richer part of our church experience. As a group, think of ways your church reflects each of these.

**OPTION 3:** As a group, brainstorm ways you can serve your community and show the love of Christ. This might include things like serving meals at a homeless shelter, helping clean desks at a local school, getting involved in Meals on Wheels, etc. But even more importantly, talk about how the kind of people we are together is vital to the way that we reach out to others. Just doing outreach as an activity is not the same as being a community that loves people so much that they want to connect with others and serve as a reflection of this communal love. People can be helped by being the recipient of a service project, and they can also be helped by being drawn to a community that embodies love for God and love for people as a way of life. Talk about how being the people of God together and doing the work of God feed into each other. Brainstorm together what this might look like as you plan outreach that is an overflow of a rich community life.

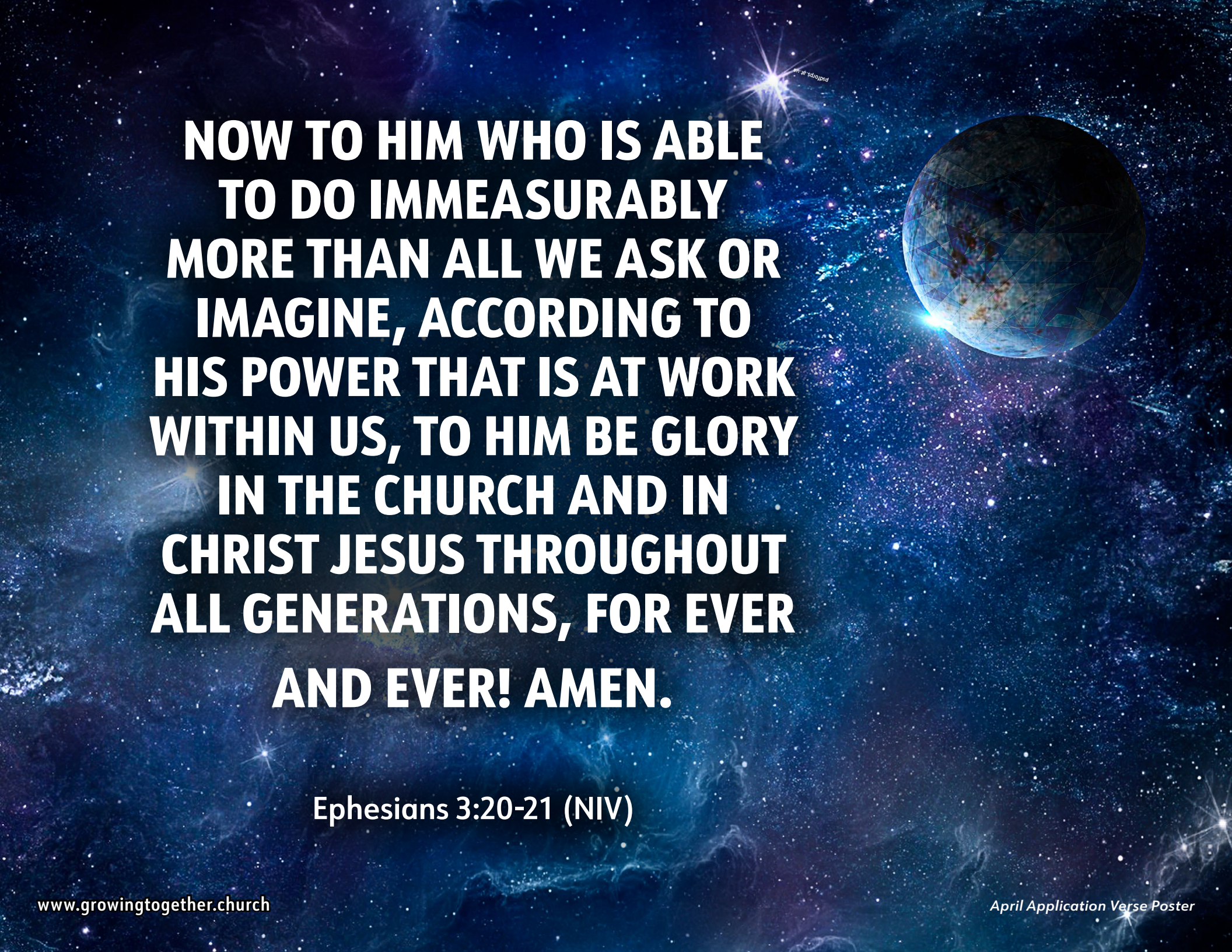
Use this week's  
Talk Sheet for  
discussion

Encourage the  
parents in your  
group to review  
this week's Home  
Connection

Encourage your  
group members to  
complete this week's  
devotions in the  
Discipler Devotional  
Guide



# **THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN THE GREAT COMMISSION**



**NOW TO HIM WHO IS ABLE  
TO DO IMMEASURABLY  
MORE THAN ALL WE ASK OR  
IMAGINE, ACCORDING TO  
HIS POWER THAT IS AT WORK  
WITHIN US, TO HIM BE GLORY  
IN THE CHURCH AND IN  
CHRIST JESUS THROUGHOUT  
ALL GENERATIONS, FOR EVER  
AND EVER! AMEN.**

Ephesians 3:20-21 (NIV)



# FILLED WITH POWER

**FAMILY THEME:** The Church is Born

**STUDY TEXT:** Acts 2:1-47

## 1. The Spirit Marks The Birth of the Church (Acts 2:1-13)

Notes:

Application:

## 2. The Church Proclaims the Message of Christ (Acts 2:14-41)

Notes:

Application:

## 3. A Snapshot of What Church Looks Like (Acts 2:42-47)

Notes:

Application:

**How will I put this into practice this week?**



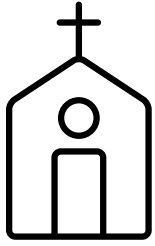


# LET'S TALK ABOUT THE CHURCH IS BORN

**STUDY TEXT:** Acts 2:1-47

**DISCUSSION LEADER:** Use some or all of these questions in class or in an out-of-class discussion group. This page can also be copied and given to parents to use as a discussion starter at home.

- How did the early Christians go from fearfully meeting behind closed doors to joyfully witnessing for Christ?
- What does it look like when the Holy Spirit works in our lives in ways that empower us to serve others?
- What was so significant about the church at Pentecost being empowered to speak in other languages? What difference does it make to you when you sense someone is speaking in a way you can understand?
- How was this outpouring of the Spirit connected with stories and hopes recorded in Hebrew Scriptures?
- What does it mean to be "filled with the Spirit?"
- What were the important activities that the Spirit-filled Christians of the early church engaged in?
- What was it about the church that resulted in more and more people wanting to be a part of it? Explain.
- What are some ways that you can more fully reflect the church described in Acts 2?



# BEING LIKE JESUS

The church is a community of believers that reflects the character of Jesus. Paul describes the church as the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12). When people see us as a community, they should be able to see Jesus.

Below is a list of passages that describe characteristics of believers and of the church. Make notes for each passage, noticing insights about what this community of believers is invited to be like.

**Ephesians 4:1-7:**

**Romans 12:3-21:**

**Colossians 4:2-6:**

**Hebrews 10:22-25:**

What from your notes above do you feel particularly drawn to? How would you like to respond to that?

## FAMILY THEME

The Church is Born



Week 1: April 6-12, 2024

### OBJECTIVES

- Know:** With the coming of the Spirit, the young church began to experience in community the transforming reality of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.
- Think:** The church is to be a community of believers that continues and extends the mission and message of Jesus to the world. The Holy Spirit works within the church to form a community of different and diverse people into the body of Christ for the world.
- Do:** Be a part of the body of Christ, that community of people who minister to the world in Jesus' name.



### READ: LISTEN TO GOD

**Read Acts 2:1-47.** In this passage, we see how the church was born, and how the gathered community of believers reflected the character of Jesus in the way they lived together.



### PRAY: TALK TO GOD

The church is the fellowship of believers who are empowered by the Holy Spirit to share the good news of Jesus Christ. What are the growing edges in your own church when it comes to reflecting this shared life in Jesus? Pray that God would help your church to grow into that kind of presence in your community.



### DO: WALK WITH GOD

**OPTION 1:** Talk about going to church with your family. What are some of the things they like about church? What are some of their favorite songs to sing at church? What are some of their favorite things they have learned at church? Talk about why it's important that we gather as a community rather than just do our own thing. Talk about what we can do together that we could not do on our own, and why that matters so much, both for us and others we hope to impact.

**OPTION 2:** Look at pictures of each of your children and decide which parent each child favors the most. Ask your family: *In what ways do we all look alike? How do we look different? Talk about how church is a part of God's family, with similarities and differences. Then talk about how beyond the church, all people are a part of God's family, too. What does this mean for how we envision life together?*



**The Role of the Church in the Great Commission**  
(New Testament)

**THIS WEEK IN  
GROWING TOGETHER:**

**PreK**

Today children learned that Jesus met two fishermen, Peter and Andrew. Jesus told them to come follow Him and they would fish for people. Jesus wanted them to tell others to follow Jesus too. Peter and Andrew followed Jesus. **I Can Follow Jesus** too.

**Kindergarten**

**Heartprint: I Can Follow Jesus**

**Primary**

Today children learned that after Jesus' resurrection and before His ascension, He appeared to the disciples. He gave them the mission to share with everyone the truth that Jesus died for them. The followers of Jesus came together to form the early church. Together with the disciples, they worshiped, prayed, shared meals, shared their belongings, and praised God.

**Juniors**

**Junior High**

Teens learned the importance of being active in the local church and fellowshiping with and encouraging other believers. Remind your teen that he or she has the awesome responsibility and opportunity to be involved in your local church and a part of the universal church.

**Youth**

**DISCIPLER**

Adults learned that God sent the Spirit to empower the early church, and that the same Spirit enables us to become a similar kind of community. As we love God and love each other, we also are empowered to love people around us in the way Jesus did.

# DISCIPLER

APRIL 13-19, 2024

## WEEK 2

## No Easy Road

### Family Theme:

The Church Perseveres

### Study Text:

Acts 4:1-31

### Lesson Objectives:

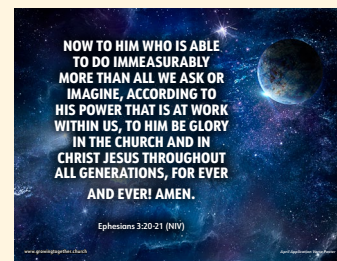
- Know:** Peter and John continued to stay faithful to God and to who they were called to be even in the face of opposition.
- Think:** Understand that in a world that has been impacted by sin, Jesus' love, grace, healing, and empowerment will often result in opposition. This is the nature of living in a fallen world.
- Do:** Be resilient when experiencing opposition or resistance to Jesus' way. Trust God's faithfulness and desires for you to experience abundant life through commitment to love and show grace—especially to the "least of these."

New Testament Unit: The Role of the Church in the Great Commission, Lesson 2

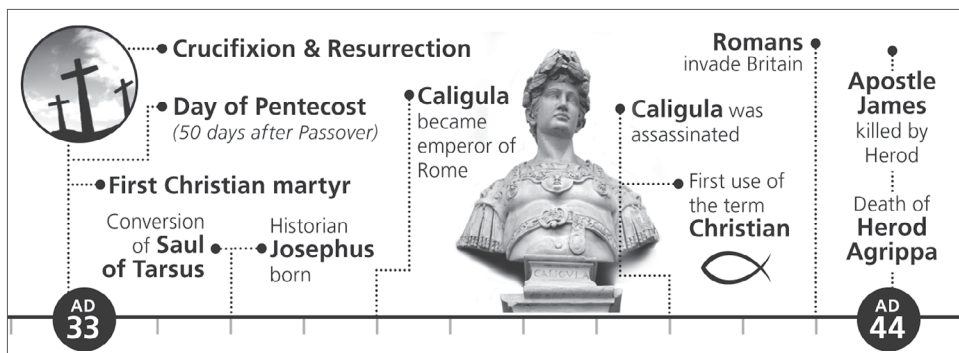
**APPLICATION VERSE:** Ephesians 3:20-21 (NIV)

### Checklist:

- Discipler Resource Week 2.1
- April Unit Poster
- April Application Verse Poster
- Discipler Resource Week 2.2
- Discipler Resource Week 2.3
- Discipler Resource Week 2.4
- Discipler Take Home Week 2



Display the **APRIL UNIT POSTER** and **APRIL APPLICATION VERSE POSTER** to help reinforce the theme and application verse throughout this unit.



# CONNECT

Items Needed:

- **RESOURCE WEEK 2.1**

Use the *Teaching Outline* (**RESOURCE WEEK 2.1**) as a guide for teaching this lesson.

## OPTION 1:

Using whatever visual media you have available, list the following kinds of big accomplishments: running a marathon, building the Panama Canal, living faithfully, being happily married, standing up for a cause that you believe in, etc.—feel free to add your own examples to the list. Once listed, open a conversation with your class with questions like these:

- *How important is perseverance in doing these things well?*
- *In your own words, how would you define perseverance?*
- *What role does perseverance play in our spiritual lives?*

## OPTION 2:

Find some stories of people who embody perseverance and share them with your class. Invite your group to share the ways they can or cannot identify with the experiences of those in the stories. Invite them to share their own stories or stories of other people's lives that demonstrate what perseverance is all about.

## TRANSITION:

**Perseverance is a quality at the heart of many inspiring stories. In this lesson we will be looking at what we can learn from stories in Scripture of those who have embodied this quality as they followed Jesus in the face of resistance and opposition.**

# LEARN

Items Needed:

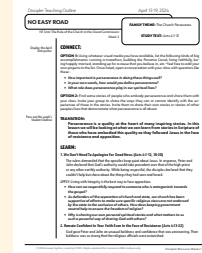
- **RESOURCE WEEK 2.2**

Give everyone in your group a copy of the *Student Outline* (**RESOURCE WEEK 2.2**) and something to write with. This outline gives the major points of the lesson and space for taking notes.

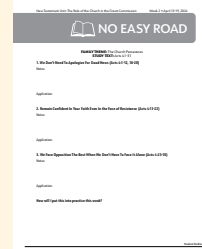
In Acts 3, God works through Peter to heal a disabled man. Because everyone knew this person who had been disabled since birth (Acts 3:2), many people rush to see the healed man. With so many gathered, Peter takes the opportunity to deliver his second public address and share the good news about Jesus. The healing of the disabled man provides an opportunity to talk about the kind of healing available through Jesus, but it also stirs up opposition from those who opposed the good news that they were sharing. Acts 4 tells the story of how Peter and John handled this opposition.

Choose one of these options to capture attention. Then use the transition statement to move into the *Learn* section.

## Resource Week 2.1



## Resource Week 2.2



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## We Don't Need To Apologize For Good News

(Acts 4:1-12, 18-20)

Many of those in leadership positions, including some priests and Sadducees, were deeply disturbed by Peter's public discourse (3:3-26), and they were determined to put an end to it before things got out of hand. Even though they were eyewitnesses to the healing of the disabled man, their greater concern seemed to be that Peter and John were teaching in the name of Jesus and claiming that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead. (In addition to going against the story religious leaders had planted about Jesus' body being stolen, this was a problem for the Sadducees because they did not believe in resurrection from the dead. See Acts 23:8). The leaders managed to have Peter and John arrested and held in custody throughout the night (verses 1-3). And still, Acts recounts, many people were coming to faith in Jesus as a result of Peter and John's messages—a number of around 5,000 (verse 4)!

The next day, the leaders convened and questioned Peter and John (verses 5-6). They intended to intimidate the disciples and force them to stop talking about Jesus. It is worth noting that among these leaders were some of the same people who had been instrumental in the trial and execution of Jesus. It must have been unsettling that this movement that they had tried to kill persisted and kept on growing. Peter and John would have known all this. They had seen this movie before; they knew how the storyline tended to unfold.

## EXPLORE

In Acts 3:22, Peter identified Jesus as the Prophet like Moses, promised in Deuteronomy 18:18. Luke stated that the rulers, elders, and scribes gathered together to cross-examine Peter and John. These three groups formed the Sanhedrin, which was the ruling assembly of the day. In addition, Luke mentions Annas, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander. The latter two men are unknown to New Testament scholars, other than the fact that they "were of the high priestly family;" however, much is known about Annas and Caiaphas. They were instrumental in the crucifixion of Jesus (John 18:12-14), and, based on the context of Acts 4, they were ready to destroy His followers if necessary. Caiaphas, who was Annas's son-in-law, was the official high priest at the time, Annas having served in that position earlier. By all accounts, Caiaphas performed his duties still at the behest of Annas. With this in mind, Luke refers to Annas by his former title as the high priest, implying that he still controlled the Sanhedrin.

When they summoned Peter and John, the leaders demanded to know who had given them the power and authority to heal the disabled man (verse 7). Peter, motivated by the Spirit, answered their question straightforwardly. He told them that it was in the name of Jesus that the man had been restored. And so they did not misunderstand, Peter made it clear that it was the same Jesus whom they had crucified and whom God had raised from the dead (verses 8-11). Peter went on to draw on the familiar language of Psalm 118:22 to describe what his hearers had done to Jesus (verse 11)—and then he told them it was only through this Jesus that they could be saved (verse 12).

Unmoved by both the witness of Peter and John and the healing of the man—at least outwardly—they withdrew to confer together (verse 15). You can read about their deliberations in verses 16 and 17. There must have been a lot at stake for them to have persisted in their denial of the implications of what Peter and John were sharing, but persist they did. Their verdict was a command that Peter and John not speak or teach in the name of Jesus.

This, however, was not a command these two disciples were willing to obey. How could they stop doing what they had been doing? Responding to the authorities, they said they could not obey their command and live with integrity in their relationship with God (verses 19-20). While being respectful of those in authority, the disciples declared that it was impossible for them not to speak about the things they had seen and heard. While the authorities continued to threaten them, they could not decide on a way to punish them, and they were wary of public opinion (verses 21-22).

The resistance Peter and John experienced was real, but so was the power of their living with integrity. Even in the face of opposition, the message was still heard, and though resisted, still made its impact on those who were watching. In fact, Luke says that the people took note that Peter and John had been with Jesus (verse 13). Jesus had told them that they could expect opposition (John 15:18-25) and here His words were certainly ringing true.

## APPLY

### **Living with integrity is the best way to face opposition.**

As followers of Jesus, our commitment to Jesus and the principles of His kingdom supercede all others. Verses 19-20 are good verses to hold on to when we find ourselves facing opposition to our commitment to live out the values of God's kingdom. Peter and John's words remind us that we are simply trying to live what we have seen and heard and know to be true. There are certainly times when we need to work with others graciously and with understanding. And continue to honor the other people's freedom to see things differently than we do and to live with integrity. We can remain faithful ourselves to the God we serve, and the character of God we are called to reflect.

We also want to be cautious of history's reminder that it is easy for those of us who believe we are living with integrity to in fact be the ones creating resistance or even persecution for others who are themselves trying to live from a place of conviction and integrity.

Peter and John's story demonstrates the importance of maintaining integrity in our relationship with God and sharing the good news of Jesus. It may seem strange that the message of love and grace and a risen Lord would create the resistance it sometimes does—but even so, we need only to remain faithful to being like Jesus in how we respond.



Ask this:

- *How can we respectfully respond to someone who is antagonistic towards the gospel?*
  - *As defenders of the separation of church and state, our church has been supportive of efforts to make sure specific religious views are not endorsed by the state to the exclusion of others. How does this help to ensure the freedom of religion?*
  - *Why is sharing our own personal spiritual stories and what matters to us such a powerful way of sharing God with others?*
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## **Remain Confident In Your Faith Even In the Face of Resistance**

(Acts 4:13-22)

Being called to account for what we believe or what we have done by those with authority can feel quite intimidating. In many ways, because authorities do have the power to impact our lives in significant ways, it would be quite unusual not to feel intimidated or fearful when who we are or what we have done is being questioned—even when we have done nothing wrong. It is not hard to understand why someone might look for a way to avoid such losses. This underscores the importance of feeling secure and assured in your place with God. Note the confidence and assurance the disciples showed in the midst of their experience. As intimidating as that situation was intended to be, they remained confident in who they were and in whom they trusted. This allowed them not simply to react to the situation, but rather to act with integrity and honesty. No matter what happened, they knew they were ultimately secure in the hands of God.

The confidence that they rested in did not come from any formal rabbinical training or any official religious credentials. Rather it came from having been with Jesus (verse 13). The disciples knew what they had seen and heard, and they knew the one in whom they placed their trust. For us, too, Jesus can be the one in whom our confidence and assurance is rooted.

Even though Peter and John were called before the authorities to be questioned about what they were doing, they also knew that they ultimately did not have to prove anything to anyone in order to be secure in God's love. They were not defiant of authority, but they were confident in being under God's authority. They were not trying to be rebels; they were choosing to be faithful. And it was that sense of security that allowed them to stand with honesty and confidence. They were not motivated by fear of what might happen to them but by the love of God. A disobedience rooted in integrity looks very different from one rooted in rebellion. (See Daniel 1:1-21; 3:1-30; and 6:1-28 for case studies of this kind of conflict).

# APP<sub>Y</sub>

## Being secure in our standing with God gives us the ability to face opposition from others.

Jesus was clear that those who followed Him would face opposition (John 15:18-25). Sadly, demonstrating God's love and grace through acts of healing of marginalized bodies and showing support for the powerless can very often unsettle authorities and provoke opposition. It is important to note that there is a difference between this kind of opposition and other kinds. The story in Acts is not one in which disciples face opposition because they were harming or demeaning others under the cover of their faith. Because they were acting like Jesus, they could expect to experience the same resistance that Jesus did, and for the same reason Jesus did. Sometimes Christian religious groups face resistance because we are not acting with the same love, grace and consideration of others that Jesus embodied. While it is tempting to attribute that resistance to the persecution Jesus said to expect, we should be clear that the kind of resistance Peter and John experienced was a result of actually being like Jesus—healing through love and grace.

Because Peter and John both knew and had a clear sense of the healing ministry of Jesus and their own standing as loved completely by God, they did not have to be afraid of what their standing might be with the authorities who opposed them and resisted their message of healing and good news. Though the resistance they experienced was real, they were free to live and share the message of Jesus with integrity.

Ask this:

- *How would you describe the courage and boldness we can have when facing opposition?*
- *How is facing resistance and opposition experienced differently depending on whether we have put our faith in the grace of God, or whether we are fearful and unsettled about our standing with God?*
- *What are some ways that Christians sometimes experience opposition for acting with religious motives, but in a way that does not reflect the character of God?*
- *What are some examples of people you have seen standing for their faith in a way that reflects the character of God?*

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### We Face Opposition The Best When We Don't Have To Face It Alone

(Acts 4:23-35)

It is significant that when the disciples are released from custody, they immediately reconnected with their faith community (verse 23). It was a place where they could share and process their experience, and they recounted again the healing of the disabled man and the ensuing backlash from the chief priests and elders. It was a place where their story could be heard and where they could experience the rest of the church community surrounding them in prayer (verse 24). Gathered in community, they also looked to Scripture as a rich resource for remembering who God is and the way God

was with them even in the midst of the challenges. They found in the Psalms encouraging words that spoke to them in their current situation, and they drew courage and strength from these scriptural reflections. In King David's words they found language for the suffering of Jesus many of them had witnessed, which in some smaller way they too were experiencing.

We also get some important insights from the way they prayed (verse 29). Instead of asking for protection or removal from the resistance they were experiencing, they simply asked God to give them strength and boldness in the midst of it. They prayed that they would remain committed to living in the name of Jesus. Their prayer was not for relief or ease but for resilience and courage as they continued to live out their faith with the integrity and grace of Jesus. Luke reports that God responded to their prayer in a rich and meaningful way, and they spoke even more confidently and boldly about their faith in Jesus (verse 31).

## APPLY

**Remember that when facing opposition, we don't have to go it alone but are a part of a faith community.**

The early Christian church was truly a community of believers in every sense of the word. They were not individual believers going it alone but part of a family that supported each other. They truly shared life together in significant and profound ways (verses 32-35). For them, following Jesus was not just something they believed; it was something they lived in how they cared for each other and made sure no one went without. We too need other believers who listen to and share our experiences, point us to Jesus, and stand by us through whatever comes our way.

Ask this:

- *Why is being part of a community of faith so important to living the life of faith?*
- *What are the forces in our culture or society that resist the importance and significance of being a genuine community?*
- *What are some of the ways that you have observed or experienced this kind of community of faith in action?*

Use the *Talk Sheet* (**RESOURCE WEEK 2.3**) to spark discussion. Give a copy to parents to use as a discussion starter at home.

## RESPOND

### OPTION 1:

Read 1 Peter 3:15 together and talk about what it looks like for us to live out what this verse suggests. In what ways do we see the Church living out this

### Resource Week 2.3



Use one or more of these options to help your group members put this lesson into practice.

principle? In what ways do Christian groups fail to live out this principle? Talk together about how the lesson might give direction to or have insights for:

- Someone who lives with ridicule and perhaps even scorn for their faith.
- Someone who has a tendency to ridicule and perhaps even scorn others who are not of their faith.
- Someone who would like to more effectively share their faith with those around them who may be either neutral or resistant to spiritual things.
- Someone who does not live around others who are supportive of their faith and feels like they are going it alone in their spiritual lives.

## OPTION 2:

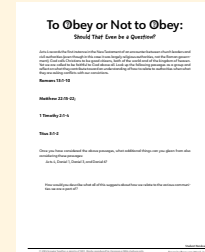
Items Needed:

- **RESOURCE WEEK 2.4**

Adventists have traditionally been strong believers in the separation of church and state. As a church we have advocated for people to have the freedom to worship according to the dictates of their own conscience and have supported efforts to keep government entities from seeking to establish, promote, or favor some religious practices over others. Things like "Sunday Blue Laws," which seek to prevent others from doing business for religious reasons have also been things that we have discouraged and withheld support from. Given the rise of Christian Nationalism and shifting attitudes in many Christian church communities, how does what we read about resistance and opposition in Acts 4 relate to how we think about church-state relations today? Distribute *To Obey or Not to Obey: Should That Even be a Question?* (**RESOURCE WEEK 2.4**). Encourage your group members to use the handout to initiate discussion. Consider these questions as well:

- ***Does the commitment of government or authorities not to promote a particular religious view or seek to remain neutral toward it, constitute resistance or opposition? Why or why not?***
- ***Should Christians be as willing to protect the rights of others to believe according to the honest dictates of their consciences as they wish others to be protective and tolerant of their own? Why or why not?***
- ***What does it look like to live what we believe with integrity and grace?***
- ***Can you think of instances when Christians are actually resisted or opposed for being too loving or gracious as they seek to reflect the character of Jesus? What was going on in those cases?***
- ***Can you think of instances when Christians have faced resistance or opposition because of their lack of graciousness and failures to reflect the character of Jesus? What was going on in those cases?***
- ***Can you think of ways in which seeking Jesus' healing for marginalized bodies and empowerment for the poor resulted in opposition and resistance, especially from the privileged and powerful?***

## Resource Week 2.4



- *How would you describe the most significant areas of resistance and opposition to living like Jesus that you encounter? How would a genuinely supportive Christian community be helpful in those cases?*

### OPTION 3:

There are places in the world where Christians are genuinely persecuted for their faith, even to the point of it costing their lives. Take some time to research what it is like in some of those places, perhaps sharing some descriptions and stories. Think about ways that we, as a part of the larger Christian community, could communicate our support of them in their struggles. Consider and/or discuss some of the following:

- *What role does providing asylum to people facing persecution play in the life of a supportive Christian community? What conflicts might Christians face in this, and how should those conflicts be sorted out?*
- *Reflect on this conversation with Ron Boyd MacMillan who is talking about what persecution looks like in China, and how the church there is dealing with it. Have the group share their reactions. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5iGbnGTrvRw>.*
- *How should Christians relate to issues of human rights and religious freedom? Here is an interview that is about 10 years old, which touches on problems of religious freedom around the world. How can the Christian community as a whole be supportive of people experiencing a diversity of religious persecution all around the world? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3btUW3Mc2s>.*

Encourage the parents in your group to try **HOME CONNECTION**, a simple, downloadable page that gives parents:

- A weekly Bible passage to **READ** together as a family
- Suggestions to help them **PRAY** together as a family
- Suggested activities to **DO** to put their faith in action

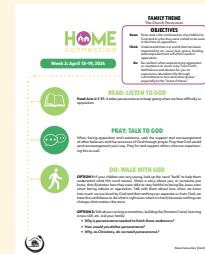
**HOME CONNECTION** also provides the theme, application verse, and the “takeaway” from each age level in GT Curriculum. This way parents know what each family member is experiencing in his or her Sabbath School class.

**HOME CONNECTION** is available for FREE download at [www.growingtogether.church](http://www.growingtogether.church)

Encourage your group members to complete the daily devotions in the **DISCIPLER DEVOTIONAL GUIDE** this week to help them apply and respond to this lesson.

Also encourage the parents in your group to use the **HOME CONNECTION** for this week.

### Take Home Week 2



**NO EASY ROAD****FAMILY THEME:** The Church PerseveresNT Unit: The Role of the Church in the Great Commission  
Week 2**STUDY TEXT:** Acts 4:1-31Display the April  
Unit poster**CONNECT:**

**OPTION 1:** Using whatever visual media you have available, list the following kinds of big accomplishments: running a marathon, building the Panama Canal, living faithfully, being happily married, standing up for a cause that you believe in, etc.—feel free to add your own examples to the list. Once listed, open a conversation with your class with questions like these:

- *How important is perseverance in doing these things well?*
- *In your own words, how would you define perseverance?*
- *What role does perseverance play in our spiritual lives?*

**OPTION 2:** Find some stories of people who embody perseverance and share them with your class. Invite your group to share the ways they can or cannot identify with the experiences of those in the stories. Invite them to share their own stories or stories of other people's lives that demonstrate what perseverance is all about.

Pass out this week's  
Student Outline**TRANSITION:**

**Perseverance is a quality at the heart of many inspiring stories. In this lesson we will be looking at what we can learn from stories in Scripture of those who have embodied this quality as they followed Jesus in the face of resistance and opposition.**

**LEARN:****1. We Don't Need To Apologize For Good News (Acts 4:1-12, 18-20)**

The rulers demanded that the apostles keep quiet about Jesus. In response, Peter and John declared that God's authority would take precedent over that of the high priest or any other earthly authority. While being respectful, the disciples declared that they couldn't help but share about the things they had seen and heard.

**APPLY:** Living with integrity is the best way to face opposition.

- *How can we respectfully respond to someone who is antagonistic towards the gospel?*
- *As defenders of the separation of church and state, our church has been supportive of efforts to make sure specific religious views are not endorsed by the state to the exclusion of others. How does this help to ensure the freedom of religion?*
- *Why is sharing our own personal spiritual stories and what matters to us such a powerful way of sharing God with others?*

**2. Remain Confident In Your Faith Even In the Face of Resistance (Acts 4:13-22)**

God gave Peter and John an unusual boldness and confidence that was unwavering. Their boldness was so strong that the religious officials were astonished.

APPLY: Being secure in our standing with God gives us the ability to face opposition from others.

- *How would you describe the courage and boldness we can have when facing opposition?*
- *How is facing resistance and opposition experienced differently depending on whether we have put our faith in the grace of God, or whether we are fearful and unsettled about our standing with God?*
- *What are some ways that Christians sometimes experience opposition for acting with religious motives, but in a way that does not reflect the character of God?*
- *What are some examples of people you have seen standing for their faith in a way that reflects the character of God?*

### 3. We Face Opposition The Best When We Don't Have To Face It Alone (Acts 4:23-35)

As soon as the disciples were released by the authorities they went to their fellow believers and shared their experience with the religious leaders. Without hesitation, the believers started pouring out their hearts to God in prayer. Their prayer was not for relief or comfort, but for resilience and courage.

APPLY: Remember that when facing opposition, we don't have to go it alone but are a part of a faith community.

- *Why is being part of a community of faith so important to living the life of faith?*
- *What are the forces in our culture or society that resist the importance and significance of being a genuine community?*
- *What are some of the ways that you have observed or experienced this kind of community of faith in action?*

## RESPOND:

**OPTION 1:** Read 1 Peter 3:15 together and talk about what it looks like for us to live out what this verse suggests. In what ways do we see the Church living out this principle? In what ways do Christian groups fail to live out this principle? Talk together about how the lesson might give direction to or have insights for:

- Someone who lives with ridicule and perhaps even scorn for their faith.
- Someone who has a tendency to ridicule and perhaps even scorn others who are not of their faith.
- Someone who would like to more effectively share their faith with those around them who may be either neutral or resistant to spiritual things.
- Someone who does not live around others who are supportive of their faith and feels like they are going it alone in their spiritual lives.

**OPTION 2:** Adventists have traditionally been strong believers in the separation of church and state. As a church we have advocated for people to have the freedom to worship according to the dictates of their own conscience and have supported efforts to keep government entities from seeking to establish, promote, or favor some religious practices over

Use this week's Talk Sheet for discussion.

Encourage the parents in your group to review this week's Home Connection

Encourage your group members to complete this week's devotions in the Discipler Devotional Guide

others. Things like "Sunday Blue Laws," which seek to prevent others from doing business for religious reasons have also been things that we have discouraged and withheld support from. Given the rise of Christian Nationalism and shifting attitudes in many Christian church communities, how does what we read about resistance and opposition in Acts 4 relate to how we think about church-state relations today? Distribute *To Obey or Not to Obey: Should That Even be a Question?* (**RESOURCE WEEK 2.4**). Encourage your group members to use the handout to initiate discussion. Consider these questions as well:

- *Does the commitment of government or authorities not to promote a particular religious view or seek to remain neutral toward it, constitute resistance or opposition? Why or why not?*
- *Should Christians be as willing to protect the rights of others to believe according to the honest dictates of their consciences as they wish others to be protective and tolerant of their own? Why or why not?*
- *What does it look like to live what we believe with integrity and grace?*
- *Can you think of instances when Christians are actually resisted or opposed for being too loving or gracious as they seek to reflect the character of Jesus? What was going on in those cases?*
- *Can you think of instances when Christians have faced resistance or opposition because of their lack of graciousness and failures to reflect the character of Jesus? What was going on in those cases?*
- *Can you think of ways in which seeking Jesus' healing for marginalized bodies and empowerment for the poor resulted in opposition and resistance, especially from the privileged and powerful?*
- *How would you describe the most significant areas of resistance and opposition to living like Jesus that you encounter? How would a genuinely supportive Christian community be helpful in those cases?*

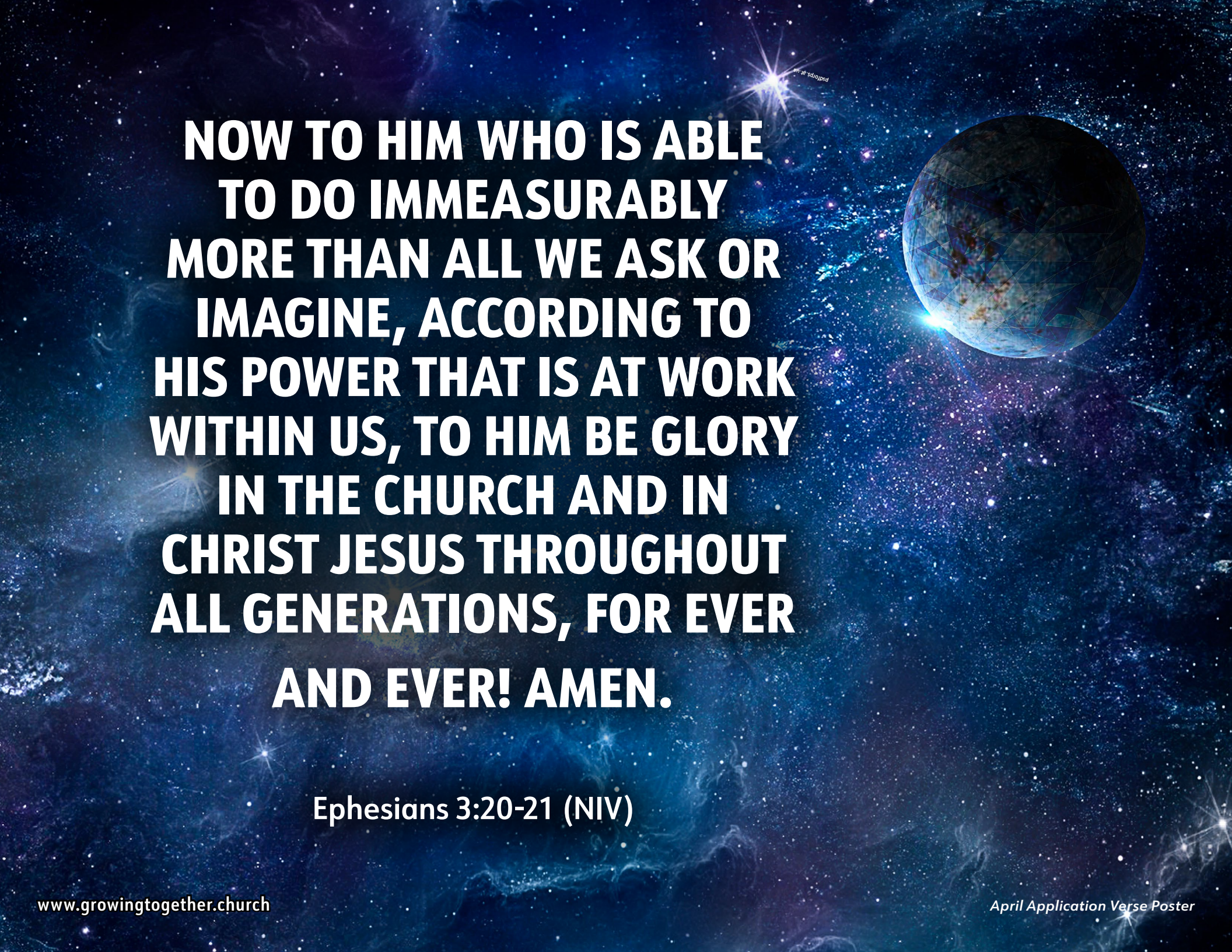
**OPTION 3:** There are places in the world where Christians are genuinely persecuted for their faith, even to the point of it costing their lives. Take some time to research what it is like in some of those places, perhaps sharing some descriptions and stories. Think about ways that we, as a part of the larger Christian community, could communicate our support of them in their struggles. Consider and/or discuss some of the following:

- *What role does providing asylum to people facing persecution play in the life of a supportive Christian community? What conflicts might Christians face in this, and how should those conflicts be sorted out?*
- *Reflect on this conversation with Ron Boyd MacMillan who is talking about what persecution looks like in China, and how the church there is dealing with it. Have the group share their reactions. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5iGbnGTrvRw>.*
- *How should Christians relate to issues of human rights and religious freedom? Here is an interview that is about 10 years old, which touches on problems of religious freedom around the world. How can the Christian community as a whole be supportive of people experiencing a diversity of religious persecution all around the world? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3btUW3Mc2s>.*





# **THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN THE GREAT COMMISSION**



**NOW TO HIM WHO IS ABLE  
TO DO IMMEASURABLY  
MORE THAN ALL WE ASK OR  
IMAGINE, ACCORDING TO  
HIS POWER THAT IS AT WORK  
WITHIN US, TO HIM BE GLORY  
IN THE CHURCH AND IN  
CHRIST JESUS THROUGHOUT  
ALL GENERATIONS, FOR EVER  
AND EVER! AMEN.**

Ephesians 3:20-21 (NIV)



# NO EASY ROAD

**FAMILY THEME:** The Church Perseveres

**STUDY TEXT:** Acts 4:1-31

## 1. We Don't Need To Apologize For Good News (Acts 4:1-12, 18-20)

Notes:

Application:

## 2. Remain Confident In Your Faith Even In the Face of Resistance (Acts 4:13-22)

Notes:

Application:

## 3. We Face Opposition The Best When We Don't Have To Face It Alone (Acts 4:23-35)

Notes:

Application:

**How will I put this into practice this week?**



## LET'S TALK ABOUT **THE CHURCH PERSEVERES**

**STUDY TEXT:** Acts 4:1-31

**DISCUSSION LEADER:** Use some or all of these questions in class or in an out-of-class discussion group. This page can also be copied and given to parents to use as a discussion starter at home.

- What does it mean to persevere?
- Through what kinds of things do Christians and church communities need to persevere?
- What kinds of opposition do Christians face in our culture?
- What kinds of opposition do Christians sometimes create when they fail to reflect the character of Jesus?
- What kinds of opposition are Christians facing in other parts of the world?
- What does the persecution of Christians in some parts of the world have in common with persecution of other religious groups?
- How can we respond to opposition in ways that glorify God?
- How does being confident in our relationship with the Lord help us persevere through difficulty or opposition?
- How can we as Christians encourage and help other people who are facing difficulty or opposition, no matter what group they belong to?

# To **?**Obey or Not to **?**Obey: *Should That Even be a Question?*

Acts 4 records the first instance in the New Testament of an encounter between church leaders and civil authorities (even though in this case it was largely religious authorities, not the Roman government). God calls Christians to be good citizens, both of the world and of the kingdom of heaven. Yet we are called to be faithful to God above all. Look up the following passages as a group and reflect on what they contribute toward an understanding of how to relate to authorities when what they are asking conflicts with our convictions.

**Romans 13:1-10**

**Matthew 22:15-22;**

**1 Timothy 2:1-4**

**Titus 3:1-2**

Once you have considered the above passages, what additional things can you glean from also considering these passages?

Acts 4, Daniel 1, Daniel 3, and Daniel 6

How would you describe what all of this suggests about how we relate to the various communities we are a part of?

## FAMILY THEME

The Church Perseveres

# HOME

connection

Week 2: April 13-19, 2024

### OBJECTIVES

- Know:** Peter and John continued to stay faithful to God and to who they were called to be even in the face of opposition.
- Think:** Understand that in a world that has been impacted by sin, Jesus' love, grace, healing, and empowerment will often result in opposition.
- Do:** Be resilient when experiencing opposition or resistance to Jesus' way. Trust God's faithfulness and desires for you to experience abundant life through commitment to love and show grace—especially to the "least of these."



### READ: LISTEN TO GOD

**Read Acts 4:1-31.** It takes perseverance to keep going when we face difficulty or opposition.



### PRAY: TALK TO GOD

When facing opposition and resistance, seek the support and encouragement of other believers and the resources of God through prayer. Pray that God would send encouragement your way. Pray for and support others who are experiencing this as well.



### DO: WALK WITH GOD

**OPTION 1:** If your children are very young, look up the word "bold" to help them understand what this word means. Share a story about you, or someone you know, that illustrates how they were able to stay faithful to being like Jesus even when facing ridicule or opposition. Talk with them about how when we know how much we are loved by God and that nothing can separate us from God, we have the confidence to do what is right even when it is hard, because nothing can change what matters the most.

**OPTION 2:** Talk about running a marathon, building the Panama Canal, learning a new skill, etc. Ask your family:

- *Why is perseverance needed to finish these endeavors?*
- *How would you define perseverance?*
- *Why, as Christians, do we need perseverance?*



**The Role of the Church in the Great Commission**  
(New Testament)

**THIS WEEK IN  
GROWING TOGETHER:**

**PreK**

**Kindergarten**

Today children learned that Peter and the other disciples were on a boat during a storm. They were afraid, but then they saw Jesus. He was walking on the water toward them. Peter tried to walk on the water to Jesus, but sank when he stopped looking at Jesus. Jesus rescued him. Peter and the others trusted Jesus when they were afraid. ***I Can Follow Jesus*** by putting my trust in Him.

**Heartprint: *I Can Follow Jesus***

**Primary**

**Juniors**

Today children learned God used Peter and John to heal a man who could not walk. The leaders who didn't like Jesus demanded they not preach about Jesus, but Peter and John refused. They continued to tell others about Jesus and many people believed. The early church grew because of Peter and John's boldness.

**Junior High**

**Youth**

Teens were reminded that, although opposition will come, they can be prepared to give an answer for their faith and not give in to discouragement. Talk to your teen about the importance of prayer when dealing with opposition.

**DISCIPLER**

Adults studied Acts 4:1-31. Group members were reminded that Peter and John continued to stay faithful to God in spite of opposition and that we can do the same, leaning on Christ and our fellow believers for strength to persevere.

# DISCIPLER

APRIL 20-26, 2024

## WEEK 3

## All Are Welcome

### Family Theme:

The Church Expands

### Study Text:

Acts 10:1-48

### Lesson Objectives:

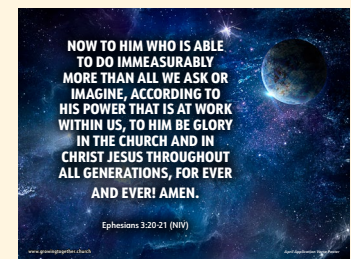
- Know:** God used Peter's encounter with Cornelius to open and expand their understanding of the gospel.
- Think:** God's love is radically inclusive and that love should be reflected by the church.
- Do:** Look for ways to be more inclusive and dismantle divisions as we live out the good news of the gospel.

New Testament Unit: The Role of the Church in the Great Commission, Lesson 3

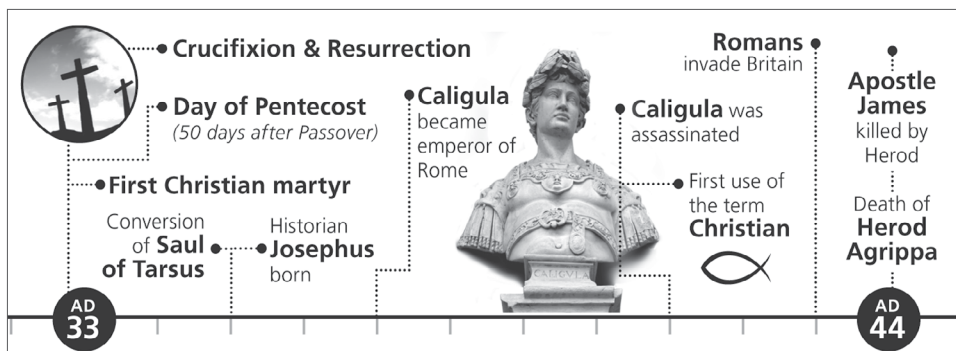
**APPLICATION VERSE:** Ephesians 3:20-21 (NIV)

### Checklist:

- Discipler Resource Week 3.1
- April Unit Poster
- April Application Verse Poster
- Discipler Resource Week 3.2
- Discipler Resource Week 3.3
- Discipler Resource Week 3.4
- Discipler Resource Week 3.5
- Discipler Take Home Week 3



Display the **APRIL UNIT POSTER** and **APRIL APPLICATION VERSE POSTER** to help reinforce the theme and application verse throughout this unit.





# CONNECT

Items Needed:

- **RESOURCE WEEK 3.1**

Use the *Teaching Outline* (**RESOURCE WEEK 3.1**) as a guide for teaching this lesson.

## OPTION 1:

To begin, share this definition of *implicit bias*: unconscious attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions. Then ask the members of your group to reflect on stories from childhood in which you can see in retrospect that implicit bias was at work. Talk about whether each example was intentional or unintentional and whether that mattered for the effects of the bias.

- *If you are the one who experienced this, how did it make you feel at the time?*
- *If you are the one who witnessed it, how did it make you feel at the time?*
- *Why did you react (or not react) the way you did to the situations mentioned above?*
- *What reflections have you had on this since that time?*

## OPTION 2:

Have your group share examples from their lives of ideas or things they did not like early in life but became more open to as they got older. After listing some items have them share:

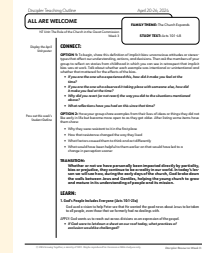
- Why they were resistant to it in the first place
- How that resistance changed the way they lived
- What factors caused them to think and act differently
- What would have been helpful to them earlier on that would have led to a change in perception sooner

## TRANSITION:

**Whether or not we have personally been impacted directly by partiality, bias or prejudice, they continue to be a reality in our world. In today's lesson we will see how, during the early days of the church, God broke down the walls between Jews and Gentiles, helping the young church to grow and mature in its understanding of people and its mission.**

Choose one of these options to capture attention. Then use the transition statement to move into the *Learn* section.

## Resource Week 3.1



# LEARN

Items Needed:

- **RESOURCE WEEK 3.2**

Give everyone in your group a copy of the *Student Outline* (**RESOURCE WEEK 3.2**) and something to write with. This outline gives the major points of the lesson and space for taking notes.

The initial opposition and resistance faced by the early church caused followers of Jesus to spread out beyond Jerusalem. As a movement from within Judaism, the vast majority of the first followers of Jesus understood themselves as Jewish. In spite of the opposition and resistance that they experienced, the Jesus movement continued to grow among Jews throughout the Roman empire. But soon the stories of Jesus would begin to take root beyond Jewish communities. One of the most significant challenges that would confront the early church in the stories of Acts and in Paul's New Testament letters is the question of how Jewish and Gentile Christians would relate to each other. This meant addressing the implicit and explicit biases of both groups. In Acts 10, we see God challenging Peter's perceptions and biases about who was to be fully included and embraced in the family of believers.

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## God's People Includes Everyone

(Acts 10:1-23a)

Acts 10 introduces the reader to another prominent figure in the early history of the church. Cornelius was a high-ranking Roman soldier who lived in Caesarea (verse 1). Luke described him as a devout, God-fearing man. As were many Gentiles of his day, Cornelius was drawn to the teachings and the God of the Jewish faith and appears to have been responsive to the teachings of Jesus.

# EXPLORE

Acts 10:1 tells us that Cornelius was a centurion who commanded the Italian Cohort. His position was closely akin to a captain in the Army. It is unclear how many men were under his command. A cohort was roughly one-tenth of a legion. Some suggest that 300-600 men were under his leadership, while others propose that there were only 100 men (based on the strict meaning of the word "centurion"). Either way, Cornelius was a man of influence and power, who commanded a group of soldiers based out of Italy.

In addition to being successful as a commander, Cornelius was also a dad and husband, and we see in the passage that his entire family were also God-fearers, Gentiles who were open and responsive to the Jewish faith. Verse 2 indicates that he gave generously and prayed continuously. Somehow in the midst of all of this, he and his associates had become aware of Jesus and His teachings and wanted to learn more. As Cornelius continued to respond to God and grow, God opened doors for him in a unique way.

## Resource Week 3.2



One afternoon while Cornelius was worshipping, God came to him in a vision. Although he was startled, and perhaps a bit frightened by the presence of the angel, he remained open (verses 3-4). The angel began by expressing God's favor toward him (in the typical way that angels often begin by seeking to lessen the fear that their appearances sometimes elicit). The angel told Cornelius that God was pleased with his prayers and his care for the poor. He then said that God wanted Cornelius to send some of his men to Joppa to bring back a man named Peter, who was staying at Simon the tanner's house (verses 5-6). After the angel departed, Cornelius explained what had happened to two servants and a soldier and sent them to find Peter (verses 7-8). Cornelius's heart was ready to learn more of the gospel, and now God was bringing Peter to share with Cornelius—and to make a few things clearer to Peter, as well.

Meanwhile, back in Joppa, God was working on Peter's heart in preparation. Around noon the next day, while the group from Caesarea was making their way to Joppa, Peter decided to go on the rooftop to pray. As is often the case while praying, a distraction arose. For Peter, it was hunger. While waiting for food to be prepared, Peter fell into what the passage describes as some sort of trance (verses 9-10). Peter experienced a vision in which God lowered something like a great sheet down from heaven that was filled with all kinds of animals (verses 11-12). Suddenly, God spoke and commanded Peter to kill the animals and eat them (verse 13). Not surprisingly, Peter refused to obey because the animals were unclean. What God was telling him to do completely contradicted all he had learned about Jewish instructions regarding food and how it was to be handled. This was not the way he had been raised (verse 14)! Perhaps because Peter's resistance was so persistent, this scene was repeated three times before the sheet was removed. God's message for Peter was that he was not to judge anything as unclean or impure that God had declared clean (verse 15-16).

## EXPLORE

Leviticus 11 records the dietary instructions given to the Jews. Throughout their history, Jews have made these kosher guidelines a serious part of their practice. Understandably, Peter balked at the notion of eating "common or unclean" foods; not only was it a matter of obedience to the law of God, it was a matter of identity. The problem was that practices intended to demonstrate a community's devotion to God can slide toward enacting division from others. The challenge for Peter in this vision was to hold both meaningful practices and identity gently enough to make room for others who might worship God differently.

It is probably hard for us to grasp how shocking this would have been to Peter and his ingrained cultural sensibilities. Once the sheet was removed, Peter wondered what this vision meant (verse 17). In the meantime, the men from Caesarea arrived, and there was a knock at the door. Interrupting his thoughts, the Lord instructed him to go down and join the men who had come seeking him and to go with them. The command to go without hesitation because God had sent them must still have sounded strange to Peter. But he, too, responded to what God was doing and invited these Gentiles into his house as his guests (verses 21-23). He recognized that these were people that God had sent and that God was already at work in their lives.

He also recognized that God was sending him to go with them. His life and ministry changed forever after that night.

## APP<sub>Y</sub>

### **God wants us to reach out across divisions as an expression of the gospel.**

For a Jew, interacting in familiar and hospitable ways with Gentiles was similar to eating meat from an unclean animal—a problem of purity before God. Jesus used the vision of unclean animals to make it clear to Peter that He was extending the invitation to be a part of the people of God beyond national or ethnic boundaries, and that His kingdom would be marked by differences of many kinds. God's Spirit was moving in unexpected places. God had been at work in the heart of Cornelius and the other Gentiles at his house to prepare them to more fully receive the gospel. At the same time, God was at work in the heart of Peter to prepare him to approach matters of belonging and association in new ways that reflected God's expanding family.

Personal and systemic biases and prejudice are alive and well today, even as they manifest in new ways. How often do we think or hear the worry that “those people” are “just not like us.” Churches are not immune from segregation or practices that privilege some groups over others. And beneath the surface of these practices are often beliefs that some people are to one extent or another “unclean” or unworthy or a threat to the unity of the community. Not all of this is intentional, but all of it is real. When we are truly honest in our introspection, it is likely that we will detect places in our own hearts where seeds of prejudice or bias still stir—where we have internalized a communal prejudice against others or even against ourselves, where we have internalized superiority or inferiority. The vision of the sheet and difficult conversations, decisions, and changes that followed for the early church are invitations for reflection on our present communities.

Ask this:

- *If God were to let down a sheet on our roof today, what practices of exclusion would be challenged?*
- *How do you find yourself responding to the idea that those groups that we have intentionally or unintentionally regarded as “unclean” are included and fully welcome to God?*
- *What are some ways our church could more effectively reach out and include those from groups that might otherwise be excluded?*

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### **The Church Expands Through People’s Connections**

(Acts 10:23b-33)

The next morning, Peter and other Jewish brothers from Joppa set out with the men sent from Cornelius on their day-long journey to Caesarea (verse 23b). It is interesting that it was not Peter alone who set out on this journey, but that he took others with him. We are reminded here that church and ministry are more than something that just happens individually between

God and me, but are something we do together as a community. Working in groups or teams is how the church is most effective.

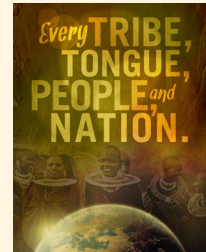
When they arrived at their destination, they observed that Cornelius had invited a number of relatives and close friends there as well. He was so excited about hearing from Peter that he invited as many acquaintances as possible (verses 24, 27).

Upon seeing Peter, Cornelius bowed down before him (verse 25). This was a powerful and unexpected gesture for a man of Cornelius's status, but Peter immediately helped Cornelius back to his feet. They were equals before God (verse 26). Because Cornelius's family had knowledge of the Jewish tradition, they understood that Peter was risking impurity by entering Cornelius's home and associating with them. But, with his recent vision in mind, Peter was now beginning to reconsider such matters of belonging and difference. This he made clear at the outset (verses 28-29).

Display the *Every Tribe, Tongue, People, and Nation* poster (**RESOURCE WEEK 3.3**) to reinforce the truth of this lesson.

After the initial greeting, Cornelius recounted his own visit from the angel of God and invited Peter to share all that God had commanded (verses 30-33). This was a monumental event that would forever shape the landscape of the church.

### Resource Week 3.3



## APP<sub>LY</sub>

### God's Spirit works with people to break down barriers.

It is much easier to maintain prejudice and bias against people when we keep ourselves isolated from them. As God works in our hearts and guides us toward getting to know them and sharing life with them, we often come to realize that the things we have in common are greater than the things that make us different. As others in our sphere of influence experience this with us, the way is opened for God's kingdom to expand and come together in directions that we might not have anticipated before. The barriers that separated Jews and Gentiles were real and deeply ingrained, but the gospel proclaims that we are all part of God's family. To his credit, Peter was willing to face his cultural, ethnic, and religious forms of prejudice and examine long-held beliefs in order to connect with the Gentiles at Cornelius' home. In the process, he came to recognize that God was at work in the lives of others just as much as God was at work in his own. No one is excluded from the reach of the gospel.

Ask this:

- *What sometimes gets in the way of our ability to reach out to others who are regarded as "unclean" in some way?*
- *How might our assumptions about who is "unclean" inhibit our own experience of the gospel? Are we open to being reached by those we look down on?*
- *What are some ways we could connect with people outside our normal sphere of influence?*

- ***What are some of the ways we are growing, personally and as a community, in learning Peter's lessons?***
- 

## **None Who Believe Are Excluded**

(Acts 10:34-48)

At the request of his host, Peter began sharing the story of salvation in the name of Jesus. He said God had taught him that a righteous, God-fearing Gentile is just as acceptable in God's eyes as a righteous, God-fearing Jew (verses 34-35). God shows no favoritism to either person, and doesn't judge according to human standards. Acts 10:34 teaches us that God does not respect one person over another. This is the only time this particular Greek word for "respect" appears in the New Testament. (Read the following passages to see how similar words are used: Romans 2:11, Ephesians 6:9, Colossians 3:25, and James 2:1.)

In verses 36-38, Peter reminded his listeners of what they had heard about Jesus—how He had been anointed with the Spirit and had done many good works. Peter pointed his listeners to Christ, the Messiah sent from God, as the focal point for their faith, and he made it clear that this story that emerged from within the particularity of God's relationship with Israel was also a story in which they were invited to participate.

Peter reminded everyone that he himself was an eyewitness to this story. He had been there for the ministry of Jesus as one of the twelve disciples, and he had witnessed Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection (verses 39-40). He recounted how he and the other disciples had the privilege of eating and drinking with the risen Christ, which verified the reality of His bodily resurrection (verse 41), and how God had commanded Christ's followers to tell everyone that this risen Christ offers salvation through His name (verses 42-43).

Peter clearly had a lot to say and share, all of which was valuable. But, in the middle of Peter's message, before he had finished saying all he had to say, the Holy Spirit came upon the Gentiles. God interrupted Peter in the midst of his presentation to make it clear to his Gentile hearers that they had been embraced by God—for now the same Spirit that had fallen on those gathered at Pentecost was falling on the Gentiles gathered in a Roman centurion's home. The Jewish Christians present were "amazed" or "astonished" at this (verse 45). The word literally means that they were "beside themselves." Not only had they witnessed Peter, a Jewish disciple, associating with Gentiles, now they were watching Gentiles being filled with the same Holy Spirit that had filled them at Pentecost—speaking in tongues, just as the disciples had at Pentecost (verse 46). God used this special sign to make it clear to the believers present, and those who would hear about the story in the future, that these Gentile believers had full and equal status before God as fellow followers of Jesus. In recognition of this, Peter proclaimed their need to be baptized. This public act would further identify them with Christ and His church.

Peter and his friends stayed several days with Cornelius. God was expanding the church to all who would believe, both insiders and outsiders. What mattered more than identity was a genuine responsiveness to God's love and grace revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

# EXPLORE

Many people refer to Acts 10:44-46 as the Pentecost of the Gentiles. The word for “tongues” is the same in verse 46 as in Acts 2. The emphasis is on the fact that God was verifying the inclusion of Gentiles in the community and work of the church in the same manner as that of the Jewish believers that had been present at Pentecost. This was a powerful statement of God's gracious opening up of the story to all people.

# APPLY

**The message of the gospel extends to every nation, kindred, tongue and people.**

Through the visions of Peter and Cornelius, the apostle realized that God was pursuing unexpected people and breaking down barriers in surprising ways. Furthermore, God was already at work in the lives of people before Peter got there to preach. Peter was not bringing God to them, but joining with the work that God was already doing in them. He was there to witness about the good news about Jesus he had experience firsthand, which connected with the ways God was already at work with them. God's Spirit is not limited by a person's background, culture, lifestyle, personality, or religious upbringing, and the sign of the church is the gathering of people with many differences to be in community together. We are invited to be more attentive to the ways that the Spirit is at work in the lives of people and to expect that God shows up in unexpected ways in unexpected places.

Ask this:

- *How could we do better at recognizing the way that God is at work in the lives of all people, especially among those we might tend to exclude?*
- *Who are the groups of people that we struggle the most to include? Why do you think we struggle this way?*

Use the *Talk Sheet* (**RESOURCE WEEK 3.4**) to spark discussion. Give a copy to parents to use as a discussion starter at home.

# RESPOND

## OPTION 1:

Items Needed:

- **RESOURCE WEEK 3.5**

## Resource Week 3.4



Use one or more of these options to help your group members put this lesson into practice.

Use *All the World May Know* (**RESOURCE WEEK 3.5**) to help your group members consider the gospel's welcome of all people as the people of God. After they write the verses on the handout, discuss them together. Talk about how these realizations might be able to play out in their lives over the next week.

## OPTION 2:

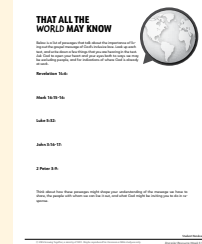
With the group, brainstorm ways to make connections with people you do not know well. After compiling a list, encourage your group members to pick an idea or two to implement. Some examples are:

- Make connections through participating in one of the ministries of your local church.
- Get better informed about the issues or concerns of people in the groups we don't know well.
- Have actual conversations with people from one of the groups, just for the purpose of getting to know them.

## OPTION 3:

Sometimes we don't know how to reach out to others, largely because we don't know them. Think of some ways to become involved in community activities or groups that would provide you the opportunity to interact with and get to know people that you normally would not interact with. Listen, learn, and get to know people as people, not projects. Notice things you have in common. Be attentive to how things look from their perspectives. Be alert to ways you see God at work in their lives in some way. See where all that leads you—God may surprise you!

## Resource Week 3.5



Encourage the parents in your group to try **HOME CONNECTION**, a simple, downloadable page that gives parents:

- A weekly Bible passage to **READ** together as a family
- Suggestions to help them **PRAY** together as a family
- Suggested activities to **DO** to put their faith in action

**HOME CONNECTION** also provides the theme, application verse, and the “takeaway” from each age level in GT Curriculum. This way parents know what each family member is experiencing in his or her Sabbath School class.

**HOME CONNECTION** is available for FREE download at [www.growingtogether.church](http://www.growingtogether.church)

Encourage your group members to complete the daily devotions in the **DISCIPLER DEVOTIONAL GUIDE** this week to help them apply and respond to this lesson.

Also encourage the parents in your group to use the **HOME CONNECTION** for this week.

## Take Home Week 3





**ALL ARE WELCOME****FAMILY THEME:** The Church ExpandsNT Unit: The Role of the Church in the Great Commission  
Week 3**STUDY TEXT:** Acts 10:1-48Display the April  
Unit poster**CONNECT:**

**OPTION 1:** To begin, share this definition of implicit bias: unconscious attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions. Then ask the members of your group to reflect on stories from childhood in which you can see in retrospect that implicit bias was at work. Talk about whether each example was intentional or unintentional and whether that mattered for the effects of the bias.

- *If you are the one who experienced this, how did it make you feel at the time?*
- *If you are the one who witnessed it, how did it make you feel at the time?*
- *Why did you react (or not react) the way you did to the situations mentioned above?*
- *What reflections have you had on this since that time?*

**OPTION 2:** Have your group share examples from their lives of ideas or things they did not like early in life but became more open to as they got older. After listing some items have them share:

- Why they were resistant to it in the first place
- How that resistance changed the way they lived
- What factors caused them to think and act differently
- What would have been helpful to them earlier on that would have led to a change in perception sooner

**TRANSITION:**

**Whether or not we have personally been impacted directly by partiality, bias or prejudice, they continue to be a reality in our world. In today's lesson we will see how, during the early days of the church, God broke down the walls between Jews and Gentiles, helping the young church to grow and mature in its understanding of people and its mission.**

**LEARN:****1. God's People Includes Everyone (Acts 10:1-23a)**

God used a vision to help Peter see that He wanted the good news about Jesus to be taken to all people, even those that we formerly had no dealings with.

APPLY: God wants us to reach out across divisions as an expression of the gospel.

- *If God were to let down a sheet on our roof today, what practices of exclusion would be challenged?*

Pass out this week's  
Student Outline

- *How do you find yourself responding to the idea that those groups that we have intentionally or unintentionally regarded as "unclean" are included and fully welcome to God?*
- *What are some ways our church could more effectively reach out and include those from groups that might otherwise be excluded?*

## 2. The Church Expands Through People's Connections (Acts 10:23b-33)

Cornelius invited a number of relatives and close friends to hear what Peter had to say. Many heard the gospel and believed that day because of their connection to Cornelius.

APPLY: God's Spirit works with people to break down barriers.

- *What sometimes gets in the way of our ability to reach out to others who are regarded as "unclean" in some way?*
- *How might our assumptions about who is "unclean" inhibit our own experience of the gospel? Are we open to being reached by those we look down on?*
- *What are some ways we could connect with people outside our normal sphere of influence?*
- *What are some of the ways we are growing, personally and as a community, in learning Peter's lessons?*

## 3. None Who Believe Are Excluded (Acts 10:34-48)

God has commanded Christ's followers to tell everyone that the risen Christ has been appointed Judge of all, and anyone who believes in Him will receive forgiveness of sins through His name.

APPLY: The message of the gospel extends to every nation, kindred, tongue and people.

- *How could we do better at recognizing the way that God is at work in the lives of all people, especially among those we might tend to exclude?*
- *Who are the groups of people that we struggle the most to include? Why do you think we struggle this way?*

## RESPOND:

**OPTION 1:** Use *All the World May Know* (**RESOURCE WEEK 3.5**) to help your group members consider the gospel's welcome of all people as the people of God. After they write the verses on the handout, discuss them together. Talk about how these realizations might be able to play out in their lives over the next week.

**OPTION 2:** With the group, brainstorm ways to make connections with people you do not know well. After compiling a list, encourage your group members to pick an idea or two to implement. Some examples are:

- Make connections through participating in one of the ministries of your local church.
- Get better informed about the issues or concerns of people in the groups we don't know well.

Use this week's Talk Sheet for discussion.

Encourage the parents in your group to review this week's Home Connection

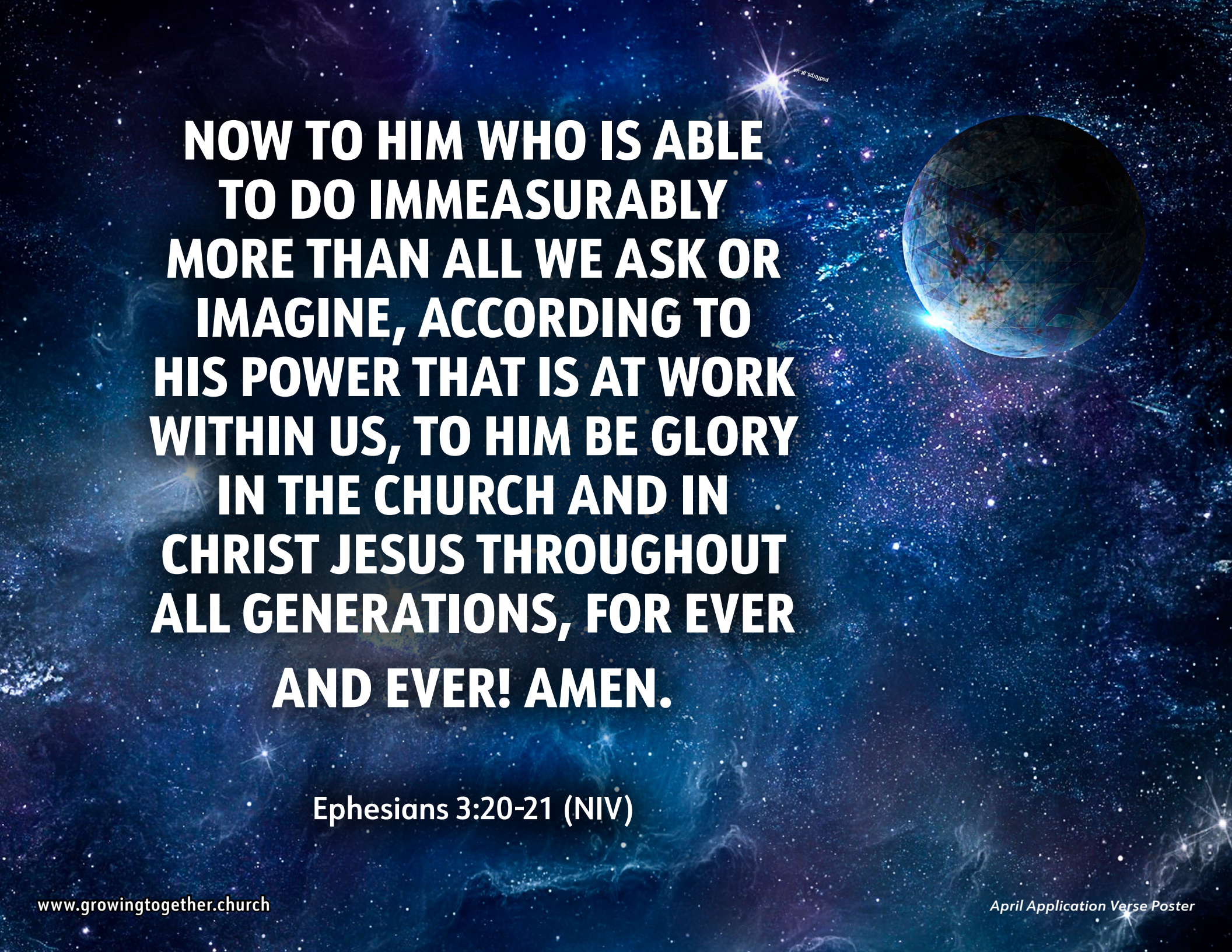
Encourage your group members to complete this week's devotions in the Discipler Devotional Guide

- Have actual conversations with people from one of the groups, just for the purpose of getting to know them.

**OPTION 3:** Sometimes we don't know how to reach out to others, largely because we don't know them. Think of some ways to become involved in community activities or groups that would provide you the opportunity to interact with and get to know people that you normally would not interact with. Listen, learn, and get to know people as people, not projects. Notice things you have in common. Be attentive to how things look from their perspectives. Be alert to ways you see God at work in their lives in some way. See where all that leads you—God may surprise you!



# **THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN THE GREAT COMMISSION**



**NOW TO HIM WHO IS ABLE  
TO DO IMMEASURABLY  
MORE THAN ALL WE ASK OR  
IMAGINE, ACCORDING TO  
HIS POWER THAT IS AT WORK  
WITHIN US, TO HIM BE GLORY  
IN THE CHURCH AND IN  
CHRIST JESUS THROUGHOUT  
ALL GENERATIONS, FOR EVER  
AND EVER! AMEN.**

Ephesians 3:20-21 (NIV)



# ALL ARE WELCOME

**FAMILY THEME:** The Church Expands

**STUDY TEXT:** Acts 10:1-48

## 1. God's People Includes Everyone (Acts 10:1-23a)

Notes:

Application:

## 2. The Church Expands Through People's Connections (Acts 10:23b-33)

Notes:

Application:

## 3. None Who Believe Are Excluded (Acts 10:34-48)

Notes:

Application:

**How will I put this into practice this week?**



## LET'S TALK ABOUT **THE CHURCH EXPANDS**

**STUDY TEXT:** Acts 10:1-48

**DISCUSSION LEADER:** Use some or all of these questions in class or in an out-of-class discussion group. This page can also be copied and given to parents to use as a discussion starter at home.

- Why do we sometimes find it hard to welcome in people who are different than us?
- What kinds of obstacles do we have to overcome to live out the gospel with people who are different than us?
- What did Cornelius risk in inviting Peter and how did that impact others in his family/household?
- How did God show Peter that the gospel was inclusive of all people?
- What convinced the Jewish Christians with Peter that the Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit just as they had?
- How can we move out of our comfort zones to include people who are different than us?
- Why do you think that God shows no partiality between people of various ethnic groups, education level, or economic status? How does this relate to God's sticking up for the powerless and the marginalized?
- What could you do this week to connect with or live out the gospel with someone who is not like you?
- Peter needed to change the way he thought about things. In what ways might God be leading you to see things differently as well?

*Every* **TRIBE,**  
**TONGUE,**  
**PEOPLE,** *and*  
**NATION.**





# THAT ALL THE WORLD MAY KNOW



Below is a list of passages that talk about the importance of living out the gospel message of God's inclusive love. Look up each text, and write down a few things that you are hearing in the text. Ask God to open your heart and your eyes both to ways we may be excluding people, and for indications of where God is already at work.

**Revelation 14:6:**

**Mark 16:15-16:**

**Luke 5:32:**

**John 3:16-17:**

**2 Peter 3:9:**

Think about how these passages might shape your understanding of the message we have to share, the people with whom we can live it out, and what God might be inviting you to do in response.

## FAMILY THEME

The Church Expands

# HOME

connection

Week 3: April 20-26, 2024

### OBJECTIVES

- Know:** God used Peter's encounter with Cornelius to open and expand their understanding of the gospel.
- Think:** God's love is radically inclusive and that love should be reflected by the church.
- Do:** Look for ways to be more inclusive and dismantle divisions as we live out the good news of the gospel.



### READ: LISTEN TO GOD

**Read Acts 10:1-48.** Whether we have personally experienced bias or prejudice, we all can think of ways in which these show up in society and even in the church. During the early days of the church, God worked to transform the church's bias and prejudice. God is working to break down barriers between us, and that is part of the good news that includes all.



### PRAY: TALK TO GOD

God wants to embrace all people as a part of the church, so that whoever responds can feel welcome. God is working in everyone's heart inviting us to both receive and share the gospel. Think of those you know, and perhaps those you don't, and pray for them.



### DO: WALK WITH GOD

**OPTION 1:** Buy some flower seeds, and consider buying a few cut flowers. Show your family the seeds and the flowers. Explain that these flowers started out as tiny seeds. With the help of water, sunshine, and food, the tiny seeds grew into beautiful flowers. The early church started out small, just like those flowers. But through God's grace and the boldness of the disciples, the church grew. And the church is still growing today! Talk about how including different seeds makes for even more flowers in all their variety. Every day, more people start following Christ.

**OPTION 2:** Ask your family members to share stories of times when someone has showed bias or prejudice. After sharing, ask:

- *Why are bias and prejudice hurtful?*
- *Why does it feel so bad to feel left out or treated differently?*



**The Role of the Church in the Great Commission**  
(New Testament)

**THIS WEEK IN  
GROWING TOGETHER:**

**PreK**

Today, children learned that Peter and John were going to the temple when they saw a man who could not walk. Peter told the man to get up and walk. The man stood up and was healed! Jesus helped Peter heal the man. Peter followed Jesus and helped others. **I Can Follow Jesus** and help others too.

**Kindergarten**

**Heartprint: I Can Follow Jesus**

**Primary**

Today, students learned God told Cornelius in a vision to find a man named Simon Peter. God also spoke to Peter and told him that the gospel was for everyone, not just Jews. Peter and Cornelius met, and Cornelius and the other Gentiles became followers of Jesus. Peter told those around him God's message was for all people.

**Juniors**

**Junior High**

Teens discussed God's plan for His church to grow and reach all people. Encourage your teens to share Jesus' love and offer of salvation with someone they know who needs Him.

**Youth**

**DISCIPLER**

Adults examined how God led Peter to an awareness of how he had been excluding others, and to act in ways that would fully include others who had seemed "other" to him in the life of the church.

# DISCIPLER

APRIL 27-MAY 3, 2024

## WEEK 4

## When Things Get Ugly

### Family Theme:

The Church is Preserved

### Study Text:

Acts 12:1-25

### Lesson Objectives:

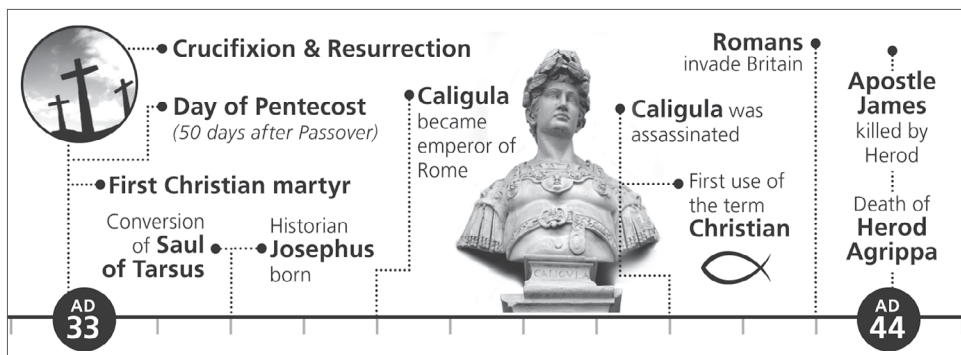
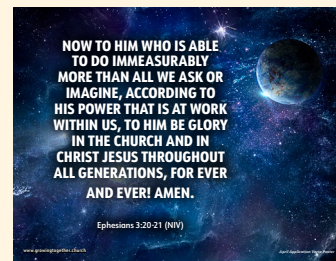
- Know:** Even though the early church faced persecution and trials, God was still with them in powerful ways.
- Think:** Even when we face tough times, God remains with us.
- Do:** Even when hard times come, continue to trust that God is with us. Pray for and support all who experience forms of persecution.

New Testament Unit: The Role of the Church in the Great Commission, Lesson 4

**APPLICATION VERSE:** Ephesians 3:20-21 (NIV)

### Checklist:

- Discipr Resource Week 4.1
- April Unit Poster
- April Application Verse Poster
- Discipr Resource Week 4.2
- Discipr Resource Week 4.3
- Discipr Take Home Week 4



Display the **APRIL UNIT POSTER** and **APRIL APPLICATION VERSE POSTER** to help reinforce the theme and application verse throughout this unit.

# CONNECT

Items Needed:

- **RESOURCE WEEK 4.1**

Use the *Teaching Outline* (**RESOURCE WEEK 4.1**) as a guide for teaching this lesson.

## OPTION 1:

Ask your group members to think of people they know or know of (themselves included if it applies) who have experienced bad things happening to them. Perhaps they were victims of a crime or the malicious actions of another person or entity. List a couple of examples and ask:

- *What are the negative ways they were impacted by what happened?*
- *How did they cope with the situation when it was happening?*
- *Despite this bad situation, how were the people impacted able to demonstrate resilience?*
- *Where was God in the midst of all that was happening?*

## OPTION 2:

Review what you studied together in Lesson 2 on opposition and resistance. Review the video selection from Option 2 in the Response section: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5iGbnGTrvRw>. As you think about what it is like to live in situations where actual persecution is taking place, think about how the Christian communities responded. Invite your group to reflect on these questions and share their reflections:

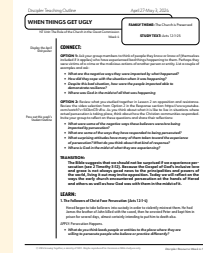
- *What were some of the negative ways these believers were/are being impacted by persecution?*
- *What are some of the ways they have responded to being persecuted?*
- *What surprising attitudes have many of them taken toward the experience of persecution? What do you think about that kind of response?*
- *Where is God in the midst of what they are experiencing?*

## TRANSITION:

The Bible suggests that we should not be surprised if we experience persecution (see 2 Timothy 3:12). Because the Gospel of God's inclusive love and grace is not always good news to the principalities and powers of the world, living it out may invite opposition. Today we will reflect on the ways the early church encountered persecution at the hands of Herod and others as well as how God was with them in the midst of it.

Choose one of these options to capture attention. Then use the transition statement to move into the *Learn* section.

## Resource Week 4.1



# LEARN

Items Needed:

- **RESOURCE WEEK 4.2**

Give everyone in your group a copy of the *Student Outline* (**RESOURCE WEEK 4.2**) and something to write with. This outline gives the major points of the lesson and space for taking notes.

Even though the church had experienced the murder of Stephen, it was not common for the first believers to experience aggressive violence. Stephen's death prompted many believers to scatter outside the city of Jerusalem; however, they still remained in the familiar regional territory (11:19). The gospel message was being proclaimed—although some were still hesitant about sharing with the Gentiles—the Lord was adding to their number regularly (11:19-21). A new missionary team was emerging in Barnabas and Paul (formerly Saul, see chapter 9), and the church was taking on a new identity: they were now called Christians (11:22-26). Unknown to them, however, two events were on the horizon that would once more transform their trajectory. A severe shortage of food among believers and a new experience of persecution from without would force them to look to God for survival (11:27-12:1). These stories of opposition from without are told in chapter 12 and following.

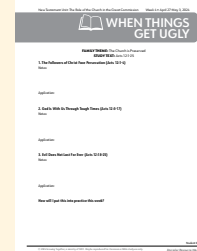
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## The Followers of Christ Face Persecution

(Acts 12:1-4)

As if the internal struggles with hunger were not difficult enough to navigate (11:27-30), the church was now facing a time of cruelty from the civil authorities. Herod the king began taking believers into custody with the intent to violently mistreat them (verse 1). He was not only going after his political rivals and naysayers but also was specifically targeting people within the church. There was a mean-spiritedness about this persecution that was directed specifically toward those who identified as followers of Christ.

## Resource Week 4.2



# EXPLORE

Herod the king (verse 1), also known as Herod Agrippa I, was the grandson of Herod the great. His father and grandmother were both slaughtered by his grandfather. During the rampage, Agrippa was sent to Rome by his mother to escape his grandfather's treacherous behavior. While in Rome, he became closely connected with the political families, which would serve him well later in life.

One of Herod's victims was James the brother of John, whom Herod had killed with the sword (verse 2). It appeared that Herod would do anything to maintain control and peace and to curry favor with religious authorities in Jerusalem, even if that meant killing innocent people. Because the death of James pleased the Jerusalem elite, Herod decided to arrest Paul and kept him in prison for several days, almost certainly intending to put him to death (verses 3-4). Herod had Peter placed behind bars, chained between two guards, and secured by other soldiers (verse 6). Clearly,

Herod was taking the persecution and possible impending execution of Christian leaders very seriously.

## EXPLORE

James and John were the sons of Zebedee—also called the Sons of Thunder (Mark 3:17)—and were among the first disciples whom Jesus called (Matt. 4:21). Once summoned by the Lord, James immediately left his family and his occupation to follow Jesus. This was the same James that requested a place of prominence in God's kingdom (Mark 10:35-45). The most popular form of killing by the Romans was crucifixion, but this was not the case with James. Acts 12:1 reports that he was "killed with a sword." It is not clear what form this execution took, but it was not crucifixion.

The arrest of Peter took place during the days of Unleavened Bread (verse 3). This annual event began the day after Passover, and continued for seven days, which brought thousands of visitors to Jerusalem. Herod may have taken this opportunity to garner the support of those who were not sympathetic to the Jesus movement or to warn those who were. Either way, this arrest would not have gone unnoticed.

## APPLY

### Persecution happens.

We might sometimes be tempted to think that bad things don't happen to good people. Scripture and history remind us, however, that in a fallen world bad things can and do happen to anyone. Jesus himself, who was the epitome of a good person, experienced the worst that evil could devise. The earliest followers of Jesus experienced persecution, as have many Christians down through the centuries. Even as we consider this history, it is important to acknowledge that persecution also happens to other groups of people who are not Christian, and too often persecution has happened at the hands of Christians towards others. What is important is that experiencing persecution is not at all a reliable indicator that one has lost their way.

In fact, persecution might sometimes be an indication that a group is unsettling powerful people with its commitment to live with justice, grace, and love. While persecution is not proof that we are either good or righteous, neither is it an indication that we are not. Though it is neither enjoyable nor desirable, we should not be surprised when it arises (2 Timothy 3:12; John 15:20; John 16:33). Despite a sense at times that some Christian values are at odds with some cultural values, Christians in North America have benefited both from commitments to religious freedom and from being the majority religion, but that is not the case in all parts of the world.

Ask this:

- ***What do you think leads people or entities to the place where they are willing to persecute people who believe or practice differently?***

- *Is there a difference between being persecuted and not being able to pass a law or elect a candidate that you think aligns with your religious beliefs? How so? What might be some problem with combining these two things?*
- *How do you think you would respond if your freedom to believe in Jesus and share God's love with others were violently repressed or attacked?*

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## God Is With Us Through Tough Times

(Acts 12:5-17)

The believers in Jerusalem heard about Peter's imprisonment and turned to God in prayer for him (verse 5). Peter was in prison alone, but the community of believers that he was a part of was still with him in prayer. And further, God was with him in the midst of it all. Peter was not alone. Although the church had no power to deliver him out of prison, they did have the power of their supportive solidarity, lifting him up together in prayer. They knew that God, who had raised Jesus from the dead, was more than able to set Peter free. They also knew that sometimes, as in the case of James, things do not turn out as hoped. And they knew that no matter what happened, God would be with Peter. Of that they could be certain.

Meanwhile, surrounded by several soldiers and chained between two of them, Peter waited in his cell for his appointed time before Herod. Luke tells us that on the night before he was to be brought out for trial, an angel of the Lord came to him, woke him, released him from his chains, and miraculously delivered him from the guards (verses 6-10). At first, Peter, who had been suddenly awakened from sleep, was unsure about what was taking place. The angel had to prompt him to get dressed and follow him out. Peter thought he was seeing a vision. It was not until he was outside the gate that he realized that the Lord had delivered him (verse 11). In this case, the prayers of the church were answered with Peter's deliverance!

Once Peter got his bearings again, he headed toward John Mark's mother's house where the other believers were praying (verse 12). When Peter arrived at the house, a servant girl by the name of Rhoda responded to his knock. Recognizing his voice, she was overjoyed and went to tell the others that Peter was at the door. In her exuberance, she forgot to let him in, leaving him standing outside (verses 13-14).

Even though they had been praying for Peter, they were not expecting Peter to be restored to them quite that easily. In fact, Luke tells us that they thought that Rhoda might not be entirely in her right mind. Her exuberance during such a serious time may have given them this notion. When she persisted, they still suggested that maybe it was Peter's "angel" whom Rhoda had seen.

## EXPLORE

Exactly what they meant by "his angel" is a topic of debate. This may have been a reference to a common Jewish belief at the time that each person has a guardian angel that, in human form, would look like the person they were assigned to.



Others suggest that the reference may simply have been to a messenger that they thought Peter might have sent. The word translated "angel" literally means messenger. Either way, they clearly were not expecting Peter to be there in person.

Peter was finally let into the house, which left everyone astounded at how God had delivered him (verses 15-16). This was clearly more than they had dared hope for. However, Herod's violence was not thwarted entirely. In fact, when he found out what had happened, he directed that violent anger at those who had been guarding Peter (verses 18-19). By including this detail, Luke reminds readers of the true nature of the principalities and powers and tempers any triumphalist exuberance that Peter's release came without cost.

Knowing that the authorities would be looking for him soon enough, after telling his community about what had happened, he left instructions to inform James and the other believers, and then left (verses 16-17). James, mentioned in verse 17, was the brother of Jesus, not the disciple who had been killed by Herod. By this time, James the brother of Jesus was emerging as a leader in the church at Jerusalem and his influence would continue to expand.

## APP<sup>LY</sup>

### **Know that God is with those who experience persecution, and continue to pray for them.**

God is indeed with us in the midst of persecution; nevertheless, this does not mean things will always turn out as they did for Peter. Stephen and James both were martyred for their faith, as were many other disciples, and even Peter's release had tragic results for others caught up in Herod's web of power. What it does mean is that God will accompany us in all situations, even when those situations do not resolve the way we might wish. Whatever happens, we can know that we are not alone as we are lifted in prayer by our fellow believers, and as we rest in the assurance of God being with us.

Ask this:

- *How can knowing that Jesus suffered unjustly at the hands of others help us when we are facing suffering and persecution—or when we witness the persecution of others?*
- *Why are the prayers of others so important when going through tough times?*
- *Who can you pray for and encourage/help through dire times?*

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### **Evil Does Not Last Forever**

(Acts 12:18-25)

The following morning, Herod and the soldiers frantically searched for the missing prisoner (verse 18). On the one hand, the soldiers were on edge because they feared the king's retaliation. They knew that they would be held responsible for Peter's escape. They had some explaining to do. On the

other hand, Herod was outraged because of the potential political fallout he would encounter. This could damage his image among the Jerusalem elite, just when he thought his power and popularity were on the rise. His most important prisoner had escaped. This could be extremely humiliating for him. Once they had exhausted all of their resources, the inevitable happened: Herod had the guards killed (verse 19).

## EXPLORE

It was a common Roman practice that if a guard allowed a prisoner to escape, then the guard would face the same penalty that the prisoner would have faced. The Philippian jailer's reaction in Acts 16:27 is illustrative of this custom. This explains why the guards were so frantic about finding Peter. Even though Herod was not a Roman ruler, he still chose to enact their penalties. In the end, Herod was responsible for their deaths. Peter's release was good news for those who loved him, but it did not eliminate the violence of imperial rule. Because of his insatiable desire for control, Herod chose to slaughter several innocent soldiers.

Things did not ultimately end well for Herod. After this he left Judea and went to Caesarea (verse 19). The famine predicted in Acts 11:28 was now coming to fruition, and it was having a devastating effect on the cities of Tyre and Sidon.

Staying true to his character, Herod used the dire circumstances of the famine to bully those under his authority. Needing his help in order to survive, the residents of Tyre and Sidon petitioned Blastus, Herod's personal assistant, and asked for peace because they were in desperate need of food (verse 20). Thousands of people begging him for relief appealed to Herod's enormous ego, and he tried to make the most of it (verses 20-21). Herod gave a speech, to which people responded by claiming that his voice was like the voice of a god. But as often happens to those who try to make themselves something they are not, his end was tragic.

Ironically, Herod's attempts to squelch the church were unsuccessful. No matter how hard he tried to stop it, God's kingdom was moving forward. Luke plainly stated that in the midst of such turmoil—famine and persecution—the word of God continued to grow and spread and thrive, unlike Herod who was struck down (verse 24). In spite of the persecution, the church continued to grow, and in part as a result of persecution, the church began to spread abroad. Paul's missionary work was about to begin as he, Barnabas, and John Mark left Jerusalem and headed for Antioch (verse 25).

## EXPLORE

Luke gives us a glimpse into what he records as angelic activity in Acts 12. In verses 7-10, we learn that an angel was sent to deliver Peter out of prison. Then, in verse 23, an angel was sent to strike Herod down.

# APPLY

## We don't need to seek retribution.

We are not invited to take on the role of avenger, but rather are invited to remain faithful to Jesus and the gospel. We can trust God to make sure things are set right in the end (Romans 12:17-19). In fact, the latter part of Romans 12 goes on to say that we should feed our enemy if they are hungry, and give them something to drink if they are thirsty (Romans 12:20), which echo some of the core teachings of Jesus. We are invited to perform acts of love and compassion even to those who mistreat us (Luke 6:27-28).

Ask this:

- *Why is it so difficult to leave retribution to God?*
- *When is this the most difficult?*
- *Why is seeking retribution harmful?*
- *What insights into retribution does Matthew 5:43-48 give us?*

Use the *Talk Sheet* (**RESOURCE WEEK 4.3**) to spark discussion. Give a copy to parents to use as a discussion starter at home.

### Resource Week 4.3



# RESPOND

## OPTION 1:

Having now reflected on the experience of Peter as he faced persecution, compare his experience with that of Paul and Silas in Acts 16:16-40. You can read the passage to the class and then consider the following:

- *How is the situation that Paul and Silas faced similar to that faced by Peter?*
- *What was different about what Peter did and what Paul and Silas did when they experienced God's deliverance?*
- *What were the differences between the two stories?*
- *How do you see God's grace at work in each of those two situations?*

## OPTION 2:

Prayer is central to the life of the church. It is notable that in the stories from Acts, fellow believers are often portrayed praying for those who are facing hardship. Recognizing that being persecuted is a very real thing for many around the world, how might we be able to express our support and solidarity with them? Brainstorm what kinds of things we can be involved in that would be supportive of both Christians and others who are facing persecution for their convictions.

Use one or more of these options to help your group members put this lesson into practice.

### OPTION 3:

When we are under attack from those who clearly do not have our best interests in mind or who wish us harm, what insights do we get from Matthew chapter 5 as to how we can relate to the experience? How does the story of Paul and Silas in Acts 16:16-40 reflect what Jesus was talking about?

Encourage the parents in your group to try **HOME CONNECTION**, a simple, downloadable page that gives parents:

- A weekly Bible passage to **READ** together as a family
- Suggestions to help them **PRAY** together as a family
- Suggested activities to **DO** to put their faith in action

**HOME CONNECTION** also provides the theme, application verse, and the “takeaway” from each age level in GT Curriculum. This way parents know what each family member is experiencing in his or her Sabbath School class.

**HOME CONNECTION** is available for FREE download at [www.growingtogether.church](http://www.growingtogether.church)

Encourage your group members to complete the daily devotions in the **DISCIPLER DEVOTIONAL GUIDE** this week to help them apply and respond to this lesson.

Also encourage the parents in your group to use the **HOME CONNECTION** for this week.

#### Take Home Week 4



**WHEN THINGS GET UGLY****FAMILY THEME:** The Church is PreservedNT Unit: The Role of the Church in the Great Commission  
Week 4**STUDY TEXT:** Acts 12:1-25Display the April  
Unit poster**CONNECT:**

**OPTION 1:** Ask your group members to think of people they know or know of (themselves included if it applies) who have experienced bad things happening to them. Perhaps they were victims of a crime or the malicious actions of another person or entity. List a couple of examples and ask:

- *What are the negative ways they were impacted by what happened?*
- *How did they cope with the situation when it was happening?*
- *Despite this bad situation, how were the people impacted able to demonstrate resilience?*
- *Where was God in the midst of all that was happening*

**OPTION 2:** Review what you studied together in Lesson 2 on opposition and resistance. Review the video selection from Option 2 in the Response section: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5iGbnGTrvRw>. As you think about what it is like to live in situations where actual persecution is taking place, think about how the Christian communities responded. Invite your group to reflect on these questions and share their reflections:

- *What were some of the negative ways these believers were/are being impacted by persecution?*
- *What are some of the ways they have responded to being persecuted?*
- *What surprising attitudes have many of them taken toward the experience of persecution? What do you think about that kind of response?*
- *Where is God in the midst of what they are experiencing?*

**TRANSITION:**

The Bible suggests that we should not be surprised if we experience persecution (see 2 Timothy 3:12). Because the Gospel of God's inclusive love and grace is not always good news to the principalities and powers of the world, living it out may invite opposition. Today we will reflect on the ways the early church encountered persecution at the hands of Herod and others as well as how God was with them in the midst of it.

**LEARN:****1. The Followers of Christ Face Persecution (Acts 12:1-4)**

Herod began to take believers into custody in order to violently mistreat them. He had James the brother of John killed with the sword, then he arrested Peter and kept him in prison for several days, almost certainly intending to put him to death also.

APPLY: Persecution happens.

- *What do you think leads people or entities to the place where they are willing to persecute people who believe or practice differently?*

Pass out this week's  
Student Outline

- *Is there a difference between being persecuted and not being able to pass a law or elect a candidate that you think align with your religious beliefs? How so? What might be some problem with combining these two things?*
- *How do you think you would respond if your freedom to believe in Jesus and share God's love with others were violently repressed or attacked?*

## 2. God Is With Us Through Tough Times (Acts 12:5-17)

On the night before Peter was to be brought out before Herod, an angel of the Lord came to him, woke him up, released him from his chains, and miraculously delivered him from the guards. God did not abandon Him.

APPLY: Know that God is with those who experience persecution, and continue to pray for them.

- *How can knowing that Jesus suffered unjustly at the hands of others help us when we are facing suffering and persecution—or when we witness the persecution of others?*
- *Why are the prayers of others so important when going through tough times?*
- *Who can you pray for and encourage/help through dire times?*

## 3. Evil Does Not Last Forever (Acts 12:18-25)

Herod swelled with pride when the crowd called him a god. The true God, however, had had enough. He sent an angel to strike Herod down.

APPLY: We don't need to seek retribution.

- *Why is it so difficult to leave retribution to God?*
- *When is this the most difficult?*
- *Why is seeking retribution harmful?*
- *What insights into retribution does Matthew 5:43-48 give us?*

## RESPOND:

**OPTION 1:** Having now reflected on the experience of Peter as he faced persecution, compare his experience with that of Paul and Silas in Acts 16:16-40. You can read the passage to the class and then consider the following:

- *How is the situation that Paul and Silas faced similar to that faced by Peter?*
- *What was different about what Peter did and what Paul and Silas did when they experienced God's deliverance?*
- *What were the differences between the two stories?*
- *How do you see God's grace at work in each of those two situations?*

**OPTION 2:** Prayer is central to the life of the church. It is notable that in the stories from Acts, fellow believers are often portrayed praying for those who are facing hardship. Recognizing that being persecuted is a very real thing for many around the world, how might we be able to express our support and solidarity with them? Brainstorm together about

Use this week's Talk Sheet for discussion.

Encourage the parents in your group to review this week's Home Connection

Encourage your group members to complete this week's devotions in the Discipler Devotional Guide

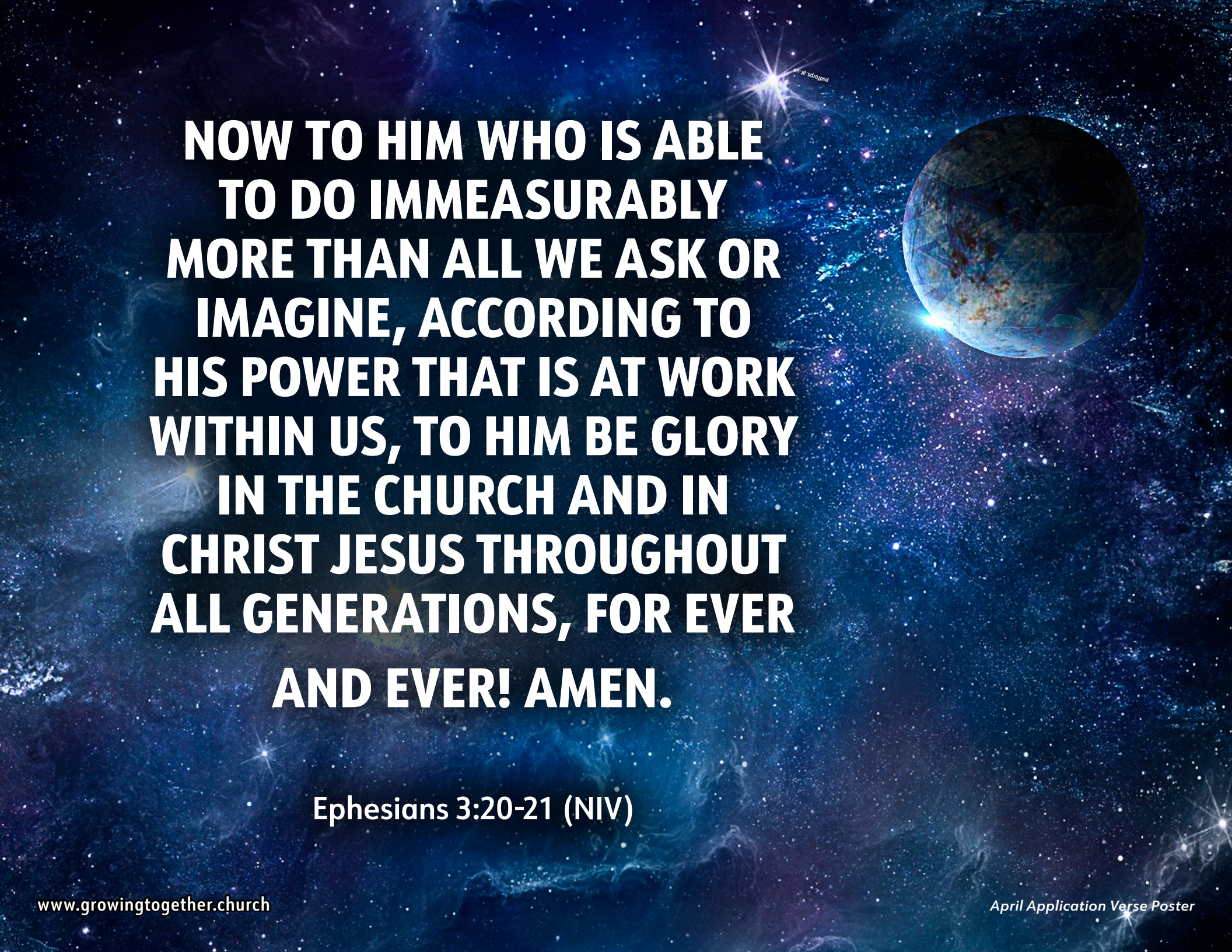
what kinds of things we might be involved in that would be supportive of both Christians and others who are facing persecution for their convictions.

**OPTION 3:** When we are under attack from those who clearly do not have our best interests in mind or who wish us harm, what insights do we get from Matthew chapter 5 as to how we can relate to the experience? How does the story of Paul and Silas in Acts 16:16-40 reflect what Jesus was talking about?



# **THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN THE GREAT COMMISSION**





**NOW TO HIM WHO IS ABLE  
TO DO IMMEASURABLY  
MORE THAN ALL WE ASK OR  
IMAGINE, ACCORDING TO  
HIS POWER THAT IS AT WORK  
WITHIN US, TO HIM BE GLORY  
IN THE CHURCH AND IN  
CHRIST JESUS THROUGHOUT  
ALL GENERATIONS, FOR EVER  
AND EVER! AMEN.**

Ephesians 3:20-21 (NIV)



# WHEN THINGS GET UGLY

**FAMILY THEME:** The Church is Preserved

**STUDY TEXT:** Acts 12:1-25

## 1. The Followers of Christ Face Persecution (Acts 12:1-4)

Notes:

Application:

## 2. God Is With Us Through Tough Times (Acts 12:5-17)

Notes:

Application:

## 3. Evil Does Not Last Forever (Acts 12:18-25)

Notes:

Application:

**How will I put this into practice this week?**



## LET'S TALK ABOUT **THE CHURCH IS PRESERVED**

**STUDY TEXT:** Acts 12:1-25

**DISCUSSION LEADER:** Use some or all of these questions in class or in an out-of-class discussion group. This page can also be copied and given to parents to use as a discussion starter at home.

- What kind of things go on in the minds and hearts of those who are being persecuted?
- What are some reasons people experience persecution?
- In what parts of the world is persecution still very much alive and well?
- How does it help us to know that Christ Himself suffered persecution?
- How might this shape the way we understand the persecution that people experience, including groups outside of Christianity?
- How can we help others who are being persecuted?
- What should we pray on behalf of those who are going through persecution?
- In what ways might a sense of being persecuted fuel the persecution of others?
- What is the right attitude to have towards those who persecute us?
- Are there times when some Christian groups feel like they are being persecuted for their faith when in reality others simply disagree with their political or cultural views?

## FAMILY THEME

The Church is Preserved

# HOME

connection

Week 4: April 27-May 3, 2024

### OBJECTIVES

- Know:** Even though the early church faced persecution and trials, God was still with them in powerful ways.
- Think:** Even when we face tough times, God remains with us.
- Do:** Even when hard times come, continue to trust that God is with us. Pray for and support all who experience forms of persecution.



### READ: LISTEN TO GOD

**Read Acts 12:1-25.** Herod the king was willing to go to great lengths to maintain his power and increase his popularity, even if it meant killing Christians. Nevertheless, God was present in the midst of the entire situation. During the moments of severe persecution, whatever the outcome for followers of Jesus, God did not abandon them.



### PRAY: TALK TO GOD

In many places all around the world, Christians are persecuted for their faith. Say a special prayer for your brothers and sisters in Christ who are persecuted, and pray for all people who experience persecution. Pray also that we might not mistake disagreement with us for persecution, and that we might pray for those who are harsh with us rather than becoming harsh with them.



### DO: WALK WITH GOD

**OPTION 1:** Talk to your children about examples of times when God's people have been persecuted for their faith. You might suggest the captivity of the children of Israel in Egypt, the three Hebrew captives and the fiery furnace, Daniel in the lion's den, the stories from this lesson, or even historical examples during the Middle Ages. Talk about how God was with them even in the midst of tough times, and how they were able to treat others in ways that reflected God's love in spite of what was happening. Talk about why it is important that we pray for people who are experiencing times like this, and to be supportive in any way we can. Also have them think about the blessing of living with religious freedom now and the responsibility of ensuring that freedom for others who are not from the same faith.

**OPTION 2:** Ask your family if they can think about historical figures who have persecuted others. Think about why they would act as they did. Talk about how being superior, power-hungry, or determined to win no matter what are destructive attitudes. Talk about why Jesus invited us to pray for people like this, rather than react to them by becoming like them.



**The Role of the Church in the Great Commission**  
(New Testament)

**THIS WEEK IN  
GROWING TOGETHER:**

**PreK**

**Kindergarten**

Today, children learned that King Agrippa had Peter arrested because he was a follower of Jesus. He was placed in a jail with many guards. Many people were praying for Peter. God sent an angel to rescue Peter, and the people rejoiced. **I Can Follow Jesus** just like Peter did.

**Heartprint: I Can Follow Jesus**

**Primary**

**Juniors**

Today, students learned that the king had Peter arrested and placed in a jail guarded with many soldiers. Many people in the church began praying for Peter. God sent an angel to rescue Peter from the jail. He went to where the people were praying and he shared what God did. The people praised God for answering their prayers.

**Junior High**

**Youth**

Teens learned that, because of the nature of Christianity, believers will always face the possibility of persecution. Remind your teen that when persecution comes, he or she will not face it alone. Pray together for the persecuted church around the world.

**DISCIPLER**

Adults learned that the early Christians were persecuted because of their faith in Christ, and discussed how we can be supportive of people in the world who still experience persecution and what our attitude should be if we should find ourselves experiencing persecution.

# DISCIPLER

## TEACHING GUIDE

2<sup>ND</sup> QUARTER 2024

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