

Summer 2008 TEACHING PLANS

The following teaching plans and extra resources are provided as a suggested teaching tool for leading college-aged students in Bible study. To maximize your teaching experience, be sure to utilize and reference the Bible Study Commentary for these lessons, also available for download.

Additionally, at the end of each session are provided Optional Discussion Questions. Permission is granted to print these pages for distribution to students, if desired.

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When available, Extra Resources are included at the end of each session.

NEXT QUARTER'S STUDY: 1 & 2 Kings; Esther

IN THE WORD .01
The Week of June 1, 2008

Focal Passage: Acts 1–2

Focus of the Study: The coming of the Holy Spirit

Life Question: How does God equip and empower me to serve Him?

Teaching Goal: Lead students to understand that after Jesus ascended physically, the Holy Spirit came down to indwell and empower believers to serve and witness for Christ.

Get Started

Prior to the session, locate magazine photographs of makeovers, such as hair and clothing before-and-afters, as well as room or home makeovers. Display the photos or distribute among the group as students arrive.

Challenge students to think about how the before-and-after concept applies to the Christian life. On the board or a large sheet of paper, list characteristics of life without the Holy Spirit and what life should be like after the Holy Spirit takes residence in our lives. Allow volunteers to share what they think it means to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Discuss.

Explore the Bible

1. One Lord, but many hands and feet (Acts 1).

Call on a volunteer to read aloud Acts 1. Discuss books, TV shows, and films that end with “to be continued.” Lead a discussion on waiting and beginning a story, only to be denied to know the conclusion. Ask students how it feels to wait until a later time for the rest of the story to be revealed.

Explain that Acts was designed to be a continuation of the Gospel of Luke. Explain that the Book of Luke is concerned with Jesus’ time on earth, while Acts is the follow-up to those events and deals with the work of the disciples and the early church.

2. The evidence of God within the believer (Acts 2:1-13).

Call on a volunteer to read aloud Acts 2:1-13. Explain that the disciples did the last thing Jesus told them to do: wait in Jerusalem (1:4). They may not have known what else to do, so they did the one thing they could: they prayed. Relate how our effectiveness in serving God is dependent upon our obedience to the last thing He told us to do. When we let God’s Spirit have full reign in our lives, people will notice that God is working in us.

Explain that this passage speaks to us of the power available to us to continue the work of Christ. Discuss the three specific evidences of the Spirit’s coming:

1. A noise: “a sound like that of a violent rushing wind” (v. 2). This was not a weather phenomenon; instead, *wind* is Luke’s descriptive term for the sound the

- descension of the Spirit made. In both Hebrew and Greek the words for *wind* and *spirit* are the same (Gr. *pneuma*).
2. Tongues of fire (v. 3). This was not literal fire, but another description from Luke. That each person was touched by it indicates that all who were there received the Spirit at that moment. This is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. By this, they were made into one spiritual body—the body of Christ.
 3. Began to speak in other tongues, or *glossa*, which were known languages (v. 4). The mixed languages enabled the message of the gospel to be heard, understood, and responded to by the multiple nationalities present in Jerusalem for the feast. This experience was not some ecstatic utterance, but known languages for the purpose of communicating the gospel.

Explain that no amount of opposition could stop the work of the Spirit that began at Pentecost. Others were “astounded and amazed” (v. 7) because they heard “the magnificent acts of God,” (v. 11) and asked “what could this be?” (v. 12). Peter, hearing that question and sensing an opportunity, jumped up, found a prominent place, and raised his voice and preached the first sermon of the church age.

Explain that the work of the Spirit continues today. Just as He gave power to the apostles to continue the work through His one-time baptism and continual filling, so also does He do the same for us today. His is a work of empowerment, in order that we may look like Christ, live for Christ, and witness about Christ.

Ask:

- **What did the fire symbolize to the Jews?**
- **When have you experienced God’s power or presence in your life?**
- **Why do you think God waited until Pentecost to give believers the Holy Spirit?**
- **What do you think it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit?**

3. Transformed with one message (Acts 2:14-36).

Read aloud Acts 2:14-17. Ask: **How is Peter’s reaction here different from His reactions in the days following Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion?** Point out that Peter had been afraid to admit he knew Jesus a few weeks earlier and now he was boldly proclaiming God’s power.

Point out that Peter frequently told people about his experience with Jesus. He was bold and confident, but he also told his story simply and in a straightforward manner. Inform students that if they are Christians, they also have a story to share. The Holy Spirit leads us to witness to who Jesus is.

Explain that just as the Holy Spirit led Peter to boldly witness to who Jesus is, the Spirit does the same in our lives. Stress that when we become Christians, we receive the Holy Spirit who equips and empowers us to serve God. That always involves a changed life. Challenge students to commit to share their testimonies this week with someone who does not know Christ as Savior.

Stress that the Holy Spirit equips and empowers Christians to serve God and point people toward Christ, however, we can't convict them and make them accept Christ. It's the Holy Spirit's job to convict people; we're called to be faithful and obedient in witnessing about what Christ has done in our lives.

4. Passing the torch to others (Acts 2:37-47).

Read aloud Acts 2:37-41. Ask:

- **How did the people respond to Peter's sermon?**
- **What did He tell them to do?**
- **How many were saved that day?**
- **What caused the people's response?**
- **How do we sometimes try to be the Holy Spirit in people's lives? Why?**

Stress that the Holy Spirit equips and empowers Christians to serve God and point people toward Christ; however, we can't convict them and make them accept Christ. It's the Holy Spirit's job to convict people; we're called to be faithful and obedient in witnessing about what Christ has done in our lives.

Read aloud the "Word Study" on page 24 of *Collegiate* magazine. Allow time for discussion.

Distribute to students index cards and markers. Instruct them to write *My name is not the Holy Spirit* on the cards. Encourage students to place these cards in a prominent location. Explain that it's not our jobs to convict someone or lead them to Christ through any power of our own. Our jobs are to tell what Christ has done in our lives. We are called to witness; we aren't in control of the response.

Ask: **How can you respond faithfully and obediently to that call in your life?**

Apply to Life

Help students revisit the Life Question, *How does God equip and empower me to serve Him?*

Lead the group in one or more of the lesson applications below. Then close the session with prayer.

- Group students into teams of four and direct teams to discuss times in their life when they have personally experienced an empowerment from the Holy Spirit as they have been witnesses in their personal Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, or the ends of the earth.
- Pose the following questions:
 - **Where do you see yourself when you read Acts 2:1-13? Who do you identify with: disciples, skeptics, Peter?**

- **What can we do to be more open to the leadership of the Holy Spirit in our personal relationship with God?**
- **What are some challenges you face on campus when attempting to explain your faith to skeptics?**
- **What are some ways you would like to see the Holy Spirit work?**
- Discuss the importance of courage. A belief in Jesus is challenged when at college. Discuss Peter's courage in standing before leaders and rulers. In the same manner, college students must have the courage to stand before skeptics.

Optional Activity

Share a story from the International Mission Board, found in *Extra Resources*.

June 1, 2008

OPTIONAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is the purpose of “before and after” photos?
- What does a person’s life look like before receiving the Holy Spirit?
- How does this person’s life change as a result of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit?
- What’s the purpose of the Holy Spirit?
- Why is the Holy Spirit important in your life?
- What command did Jesus give the disciples in Acts 1:4?
- What promise did He make?
- When have you waited on the Lord to reveal Himself to you?
- What are we to do while we wait on God?
- How does it make you feel to understand that God has promised you an ever-present comforter and friend in the Holy Spirit?
- Once He reveals Himself to us, what should we do next?
- What does Acts 1:8 say we will receive when the Holy Spirit comes upon us?
- Where will we be witnesses for Christ?
- What is your Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and ends of the earth?
- How did the Holy Spirit come upon the people?
- How was the Father’s earlier promise fulfilled?
- How did the disciples reflect obedience in these verses?
- How do you think you would have reacted to the events in this Scripture?
- Who is the Holy Spirit and when do we receive Him today?
- How does having the Spirit dwell within you change how you live?
- How did some respond to what happened in Acts 2:13?
- When was the last time you were amazed at what God was doing in your life?
- How do we try to explain away things God does?
- Who addressed the crowd?
- How was his address different from his response to three questions asked him before Jesus’ death?
- What did Peter share with the crowd?
- Why is it important that salvation is for everyone?
- How did the people respond to Peter’s testimony?
- What did Peter tell them to do?
- How have you responded to Christ’s work in your life?
- How do we sometimes try to be the Holy Spirit in people’s lives? Why?
- How many were added to the church that day?
- What did the early church members do together? How often?
- In how many of these activities does your church participate?
- How did God bless this church?
- How has the Holy Spirit empowered you?
- What does obedience have to do with the Holy Spirit?
- What is God calling you to do? How can you be faithful to that calling?
- How have you become a different person since receiving the Holy Spirit?
- What are you not letting God have control of in your life? Why?
- What is your testimony of Christ?

- With what characteristics of the Spirit-filled life do you struggle?
- How can you allow the Spirit to have complete control of your life?

IN THE WORD .02
The Week of June 8, 2008

Focal Passage: Acts 3–5

Focus of the Study: God’s work in the Jerusalem church and the Sanhedrin’s reaction

Life Question: What do I do if people don’t like my witness for Christ?

Teaching Goal: Lead students to understand that while many people respond positively to a witness about Christ and others respond negatively, we are to remain faithful in speaking about Christ.

Get Started

After students arrive, group them into three teams. Assign each team one of the following words: courage, boldness, or obedience. Provide each team a tear sheet and markers. Instruct them to create a superhero using their word. (For example, the courage team might create Captain Courage.) Direct the teams to develop a five-frame comic-strip character study of their superhero, telling the story of their superhero and his or her trait. Allow time for teams to work, then bring students back together for a time to share.

Ask: What role do courage, boldness, and obedience play in sharing Christ and our story of His working in our lives with others?

Explain that today’s study will look at being obedient when the Holy Spirit leads us to share Christ, courageous in witnessing for Him, and bold to do so even when we face opposition.

Explore the Bible

1. God wants to use us to meet people’s needs (Acts 3:1-10).

Group students into two teams. Assign one team to read Acts 3:1-10, and the other team to read Acts 4:1-12. Allow teams time to read and discuss their passages, then ask:

- **How did God interrupt normal, everyday life in these passages?**
- **How did Peter and John respond to the lame man’s request?**
- **How was that different than what he expected?**
- **How did Peter and John respond to their arrest in Acts 4?**
- **How are the disciples’ responses similar in both instances?** (*In both passages, they responded to an interruption with courage and obedience, but also used the opportunity to proclaim boldly God’s truth.*)

Refer to Acts 3:1-10. Relate that in these verses, Peter and John’s daily task of going to the temple was interrupted so that God might use them to meet the man’s needs and bring glory to His name.

Ask:

- **What kind of interruptions or opportunities has God brought into your life?**
- **How will you respond when He interrupts your life with an opportunity to meet needs and proclaim His message?**

Point out that sometimes God interrupts our plans to use us to proclaim His message and bring glory to Him in someone else's life. Stress that God desires to use us to meet others' needs.

Ask:

- **What kind of interruptions has God brought into your life?**
- **How did you respond?**
- **What are some needs you can see on campus, in our church, community, or world to which you can respond?**
- **How will you respond when God interrupts your life with an opportunity to meet needs and proclaim His message?**

2. Meeting the needs of others opens the door to sharing Christ (Acts 3:11-26).

Call on a volunteer to read aloud Acts 3:11-26. Draw attention to two large sheets of paper you have posted on the walls of the room. Label one *Needs* and the other *Wants*. Provide markers and encourage students to list basic human needs and wants on the posters. After a few moments, discuss the two lists. Compare and contrast the students' responses. Discuss the difference between wants and needs.

Ask:

- **How did Peter and John meet the lame man's needs?**
- **What was the difference between what he wanted and what he needed?**
- **How did Peter and John discern his needs?**
- **What happened after Peter and John met the man's needs?**
- **How can meeting someone's needs open the door to sharing God's message with them?**
- **How did meeting the lame man's needs lead to an opening to talk to the Jews about Jesus?**

Stress that Peter and John used the people's amazement and wonder at the man's healing to turn the conversation to God and His message of salvation. Urge students to consider the needs list from earlier and discuss ways that meeting the needs they listed could lead to conversations about God.

If possible, invite a church member or a Christian in your community to share personal examples or accounts of how meeting someone's basic needs has led to opportunities to talk about God with others. Be prepared to share your own personal examples as well, if appropriate. Use this time to discuss concrete ways to put this principle into practice and help students to understand that sharing their testimonies doesn't have to be confrontational. Stress that Peter and John used the opening simply to talk about God and

the way He had provided for the people. Challenge students to be open and ready for such conversations whenever they may arise.

Read aloud the “Think About This” paragraph on page 25 of *Collegiate* magazine. Allow time for silent reflection.

3. Some people will question and challenge our commitment to Christ (Acts 4:1-22).

Call on a volunteer to read aloud Acts 4:1-22. Explain that the response of others, however negative it may be, should not deter us from being a positive witness for Christ.

Relate that being a sold-out follower of Jesus Christ is costly. Jesus said as much in Luke 14. He said that no one can claim to be a disciple of His who wasn’t willing to hate His father/mother/husband/wife/children in comparison to their love for Him. He said that no one could call themselves a disciple who wasn’t willing to sell everything they had, every possession they owned, if that’s what it took to follow Him completely. He said no one could claim to be a disciple who wasn’t willing to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Him. That’s tough medicine.

Explain that this passage represents a record of the first persecution. They were faced with the choice of standing firm in the face of that persecution and paying whatever price was necessary to demonstrate that Jesus was really Lord. They were faced with compromising their witness in order to keep from alienating themselves from the world. Thankfully, they chose to stand firm. Jesus had prophesied persecution for all who followed him (Mark 13:9-11). That was now fulfilled in the aftermath of the healing of the lame man, and Peter’s sermon on the temple porch.

Ask:

- **Why were the Sadducees opposed to the apostles’ teaching? (4:2)**
- **Why did they approach Peter and John? (vv. 1-2)**
- **Why do you think members of the high priest’s family were present? (v. 7)**
- **How did Peter answer the questions of the council? (vv. 8-10)**
- **How did the civil authorities respond to Peter and John? (vv. 13-14)**
- **How did the Sanhedrin punish Peter and John? (vv. 15-17)**

4. God provides the strength to speak in His name with boldness (Acts 4:23-31).

Read aloud Acts 4:23-31. Point out, once again, that the Holy Spirit should make a difference in the Christian’s daily life, including our willingness to take a stand for Him and how we choose to respond to negative reactions to Christ. Stress that it’s easy to hang back or even respond in anger when someone challenges our faith, but it’s not what we’re called to do. Explain that living according to the Spirit every day means daily seeking the Spirit’s guidance. Talk about the importance of prayer and allow time for students to seek the Spirit’s guidance.

Apply to Life

Help students revisit the Life Question, *What do I do if people don't like my witness for Christ?*

Encourage students to think this week about the following questions:

- **What is the most persecution you've ever experienced due to your faith in Jesus Christ?**
- **Who is your Sanhedrin?** (*professors, parents, friends, tolerance*)
- **What are some of the risks we face in telling others about Christ?**
- **How should Christians stand up to political and religious groups in our society?**
- **How has knowing Jesus changed you so that people will know that you've "been with Jesus"? (4:13)**
- **How would you handle being put into jail for your faith in Christ?**
- **In what ways could you take a stand for the cause of Jesus Christ this week?**
- **To whom can you tell the gospel message this week?**

Close in prayer.

June 8, 2008

OPTIONAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are examples of interruptions in your life and how do you deal with them?
- What are some things that can affect your everyday life? Why?
- What is the most courageous thing you have ever done?
- What role does courage, boldness, and obedience play in sharing Christ with others?
- How does the Holy Spirit affect your daily life?
- Why were Peter and John going to the temple?
- What was the lame man doing at the temple gate?
- How did the lame man's request interrupt Peter and John's plans?
- What caused Peter and John to notice this man on this visit to the temple?
- How did Peter and John respond to this man?
- How was their response different from what the man expected?
- How was the man's life changed?
- What was his response?
- How should we respond to those in need around us?
- Why were the religious leaders upset with Peter and John?
- How was being arrested an interruption to Peter and John's plans?
- How did the disciples respond to this interruption?
- According to Acts 4:12, what's the one way to salvation?
- How did Peter and John use an interruption in their lives to share the gospel?
- How can you use an interruption in your life to share the gospel?
- How did the crowd respond to the event in Acts 3:11-26?
- What was Peter's message to the people?
- What do these verses tell us about God's character?
- According to Peter, what changed the man's life (v. 16)?
- What instruction did Peter give the people (v. 19)?
- What does repentance do for a person?
- How did Peter and John turn meeting the lame man's needs into a conversation about God and salvation?
- How can you do the same?
- According to Acts 4:13, what did the people recognize about Peter and John?
- Can the same be said of you? Why or why not?
- What gave Peter the ability to speak boldly to his accusers?
- What does it mean to be "unable to stop speaking"?
- According to Acts 4:20, what are we supposed to be talking about?
- What is keeping you from sharing the story of Christ in your life with others?
- How does the fact that God uses ordinary people to do His work make you feel?
- What did the high priest do to the apostles?
- What instruction did God give them and how did they respond?
- What might have happened to them by continuing to share Jesus?
- Why were they driven to share?
- How did God bless their obedience?
- What does it mean that the disciples counted themselves "worthy to be dishonored"

- on behalf of the name”?
- If you had been one of those apostles, how do you think you would have handled this event?
 - What does it mean to be bold?
 - How do we proclaim the good news of the Messiah?
 - What is the good news of the Messiah?
 - How can you meet people’s needs this week?
 - Who do you need to share Christ with during this week?
 - What things might keep you from doing this?
 - What approach can you take to make this happen?
 - Why aren’t we like Peter and John and unable to stop talking about God?
 - How can you be?
 - How can you respond to people who challenge or question your faith in a way that brings glory to God?
 - How does God want to use you to meet others’ needs and do His work?
 - What is your testimony or witness about?

IN THE WORD .03
The Week of June 15, 2008

Focal Passage: Acts 6–8

Focus of the Study: Stephen

Life Question: How can God possibly bring anything good out of my difficult situation?

Teaching Goal: Lead students to understand that God can use any circumstances we are in to point others to Christ and bring glory to Himself.

Get Started

Prior to the session, gather several copies of recent newspapers or news magazines. As students arrive, instruct them to find partners or form small teams. Distribute newspapers and magazines to each group and direct them to find a news story about a negative event that ended happily. If they cannot find one with such an ending, instruct them to discuss positive things they can identify within that bad situation. Allow time for volunteers to share a synopsis of their stories. Discuss our usual responses to difficult or “bad” situations.

Ask: **How can God use even difficult situations to bring about something good?**

Stress that God is always in control, and He can use all situations, even bad ones, to bring glory to His name.

Explore the Bible

1. Focusing on the big picture reminds us that no task of service in the church is unimportant (Acts 6:1-7).

Call on a volunteer to read aloud Acts 6:1-7.

Ask:

- **Why were needs of some of the early church members not getting met?**
- **What was the solution to this problem?**
- **What were these men called upon to do? (*serve*)**
- **Do you believe God has a specific ministry task for each of us, even in difficult situations?**

Stress that God has specific ministry tasks for each Christian, and He desires to work through all situations and circumstances in our lives, even the difficult ones. Service and ministry are rarely “glamorous.” Choosing areas of ministry because they are more prominent, seem easier, or are more inclined to receive praise is not serving Christ, but serving self.

Ask:

- **How have you been guilty of seeking attention and notoriety in serving God?**
- **What are some ministry opportunities in which you believe God may want to use you?**
- **What steps will you take this week to allow Him to use you in these areas?**

Allow time for students to prayerfully consider these questions.

Explain how the church had grown, with as many as 20,000 Hellenistic and Hebraic Jews. Even though there were distinctions in their language, geographic origin, and culture, they were still all Christian.

Point out the problem the church was facing: neglect in the daily distribution of food. Judaism had a system for distributing food/supplies to the poor, including widows. The number of Hellenic widows dependent upon relief from the church had become disproportionately large. Widows were often left with no relatives to care for them.

Explain that while these men were not officially called deacons, their ministry was referred to by the same word (*diakonos*). The ministry to which they were appointed was essentially the same as what Paul covered in the title of “deacon” in 1 Timothy 3.

2. Focusing on the big picture allows us to see Christ as more valuable than even death (Acts 6:8–7:60).

Take a few minutes to discuss popularity, then read aloud Acts 6:8-15. Call on a volunteer to read aloud Acts 7:51-60.

Ask: **Was Stephen popular? Why or why not?**

Point out that Stephen is a good example for Christians because even when he faced opposition and even though speaking the truth wasn't popular, he still boldly proclaimed it. He knew he faced a hostile group, yet he still chose to obediently follow the Spirit's leading and tell the people about God.

Ask: **What are some hostile situations you could face as a Christian on campus, in your home, community, or world?**

Record responses on the board or a large sheet of paper. Discuss their findings, then ask: **How can you speak the truth even when faced with these kinds of situations?**

Lead students to develop concrete answers and responses of how they could proclaim God's truth in real-world, hostile situations. Use this discussion to talk about what it really means to die to yourself and follow God obediently. Stress that allowing God to use you, even in difficult situations, means letting Him take complete control and being obedient, even if it's not your first inclination or desire. As a Christian, dying to yourself means putting God and serving others first. Point out that Stephen's attitude wasn't focused on himself or becoming famous but rather on God and His truth.

Read aloud “More on the Subject” on page 26 of *Collegiate* magazine. Allow time for discussion.

3. Focusing on the big picture allows us to see great good even in grim circumstances (Acts 8).

Call on a volunteer to read aloud Acts 8:1-8. Stress that although the early church faced great difficulty in the form of persecution, God used those circumstances for good. Because of the persecution that followed Stephen’s death, the gospel was spread to more places more quickly than it would have been otherwise.

Ask:

- **How have you seen good come from bad situations?**
- **What does the world see as good?**
- **How does that differ from the Christian viewpoint?**

Point out that following God obediently and seeking Him in all situations changes our point of view. When we focus on His purpose rather than ours, we see the world from a new perspective and seek to discover how God’s will can be fulfilled in the situation rather than our own wants or desires.

Apply to Life

Help students revisit the Life Question, *How can God possibly bring anything good out of my difficult situation?*

Challenge students to consider:

- **What role can you play this week in helping resolve conflicts between believers you know?**
- **Who are some people in your community who may get overlooked by the church?**
- **What are some practical ways can interact with other cultures?**
- **How can you help your church focus on reaching those who are being overlooked in your community?**

Close in prayer.

June 15, 2008

OPTIONAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are difficult situations that people encounter in life?
- What are some ways people choose to handle these situations?
- Which of these would be most pleasing to God?
- How can God use difficult situations for good?
- How do difficult situations and ministry opportunities relate?
- Why were the needs of some of the early church members not getting met?
- How was this problem resolved?
- What were the characteristics of the seven chosen men?
- Why do you think these characteristics were important?
- What were the men called to do?
- Is ministry always glamorous? Why or why not?
- Why was Stephen singled out to be persecuted?
- What words are used to describe Stephen in these verses?
- Could these words be used to describe you? Why or why not?
- Stephen knew he faced a hostile audience. Why did he still boldly proclaim God's truth?
- How did Stephen react when forced to stand before the Sanhedrin to be questioned?
- How would you have handled this situation?
- What was the result of Stephen's boldness?
- When has your boldness for Christ come with a cost?
- What good resulted from the severe persecution of the early church?
- Who was one of the main people in persecuting believers?
- What does it mean that the crowd paid attention with "one mind" as Philip spoke? (Acts 8:6)
- Where did Philip go and how was his ministry described?
- How did God work through Philip in Samaria?
- Where did the angel tell Philip to go?
- How did Philip respond?
- How would you respond if God asked you to do something but didn't outline the entire plan?
- How did God work through Philip when He brought him to the Ethiopian?
- What do you think would have happened if Philip had not obeyed God?
- If the idea that God is in control and knows best for us is true, how should that affect our attitude and outlook when bad things come our way?
- What role did obedience play in Philip's success with the Ethiopian?
- How did God use the persecution of the early Christian church and Philip's obedience to bring about something good?
- If God has a specific ministry task for each of us, how do we know what it is?
- How have you been guilty of seeking attention and notoriety in serving God?
- What does service have to do with being a Christian?
- What are some ministry opportunities in which you believe God wants to use you?

- What steps will you take this week to allow Him to use you in these areas?
- What are some of the costs involved in being a Christian and sharing Christ with others?
- How can we face our fears and be willing to share Christ with others regardless of these costs?
- What are some hostile situations you face in your home, school, community, or world?
- How can you speak God's truth in these situations?
- How have you seen God use bad situations to bring about something good?
- What does the world see as good?
- How does that differ from the Christian viewpoint?
- How does trusting God give Christians a new perspective when faced with difficult situations?
- What difficult situation are you facing now or have you faced recently?
- Are you in this situation by your own fault or by circumstance? Explain.
- How can you be obedient to God in this situation?
- How can you focus on His perspective in this situation?
- Evaluate your attitude about the situations you are currently facing. Are you a victor or a victim? Why?
- How can/did God take your difficult situation and turn it around to be used for Him?

IN THE WORD .04
The Week of June 22, 2008

Focal Passage: Acts 9:1-31

Focus of the Study: The conversion of Saul

Life Question: How do I know God will save just anybody?

Teaching Goal: Lead students to understand that regardless of a person's past, God will save anyone who turns to Him.

Get Started

As students arrive, lead them to consider people they've encountered in life who they believe are least likely to embrace Christianity or follow Christ. Call for volunteers to describe the most intimidating person they've ever met. If possible, list characteristics on the board or a large sheet of paper.

Point out that to the first-century church, Saul of Tarsus would have been the person they would have least expected to have a personal encounter with Jesus Christ.

Explore the Bible

1. God reaches out to even those who openly rebel against Him (Acts 9:1-4).

Call on a volunteer to read aloud Acts 9:1-4. Lead discussion about Saul/Paul, a devout Jew who was probably the last person many believers believed would become a leader of the early Christian church. Discuss Saul's past and review the things he did to the early Christians as studied in previous sessions.

Ask:

- **Why was Saul going to Damascus?**
- **What did God do to get his attention?**
- **When has God tried to get your attention?**
- **Why did God reach out to someone who had so openly rebelled against Him?**
- **When have you seen God reach out to you or someone else in the middle of rebellion?**

Be prepared to talk about a time in your life when God tried to get your attention or reached out to you in the midst of your rebellion. Allow time for volunteers to share their experiences also. Continue to point out that God's salvation isn't just for people who meet certain criteria or those who seem deserving. He is willing to reach out even to those who rebel against Him. Explain that God desires to save and use all people despite who they are or what they have done.

Stress to students that all conversion experiences are not as dramatic as Paul's but all experiences are just as important and life-changing.

Read aloud the “Word Study” on page 27 of *Collegiate* magazine. Allow time for discussion.

2. Our response to an encounter with Christ is to acknowledge Him as Lord (Acts 9:5-9).

Read aloud Acts 9:5-9 and ask: **How did Saul respond to his encounter with God?** Stress that Saul responded by calling the voice “Lord.”

Ask:

- **Why is Saul’s response important?**
- **What does it mean to recognize God as Lord?**
- **How do you recognize God as Lord in your life?**
- **What is the difference between Christ as Savior and Christ as Lord?**

Direct attention to two large sheets of paper you have placed on the wall, labeled “Christ as Savior” and “Christ as Lord.” As a group, work to list characteristics or facts about Jesus that would fall under one of those titles. Point out that Jesus wants to be our Savior and our Lord.

Ask: **If someone is the lord of your life, what does that title say about the influence he or she has in your life?** Discuss students’ responses and talk about how Christians are often prone to trying to retain control of their lives rather than letting God alone lead.

Distribute paper and pens to students. Encourage them to list areas in which they are not allowing Him to have influence. Ask: **How could allowing Christ full access and control of those areas change your life?** Direct students’ attention back to their lists and challenge them to pray about these areas of their lives.

Ask: **How could you allow God to be Lord of your life in these areas?** Be sure that students understand that Christ’s Lordship is implicit in salvation. His role as Savior and Lord cannot be easily separated.

Be aware that everyone in the group may not be a Christian. Use this time to present the gospel using whatever method with which you are comfortable. Stress that allowing Jesus to be the Lord of their lives begins with students first allowing Him to be their Savior. Take time to pray, thanking God for His gift of salvation through His Son and His desire to be more than just our Savior. Remind students that you are always available to talk to them about any decisions they might have made.

Emphasize that while Luke did not say if Saul prayed a “sinner’s prayer,” Saul’s first question to Christ used the word “Lord.” Implicit in acknowledging and receiving Christ’s redemptive work as Savior is a recognition and acknowledgement of His lordship.

3. All who come to Christ need encouragement and discipling (Acts 9:10-31).

Call on two volunteers to read aloud Acts 9:10-31. Discuss what it means to be a mentor

and the mentoring roles both Ananias and Barnabas played in Saul's life. Stress that becoming a Christian does not mean we won't face discouragement or fear. Point out that we all need encouragement and discipleship in our Christian walks.

Ask:

- **How would you feel if you were Ananias? (vv. 13-14)**
- **Why was Ananias afraid to go to Paul?**
- **How did God convince Ananias that he would be safe? (vv. 15-16)**
- **What is the significance of the way Ananias addressed Saul? (v. 17)**
- **What was the result of Ananias' ministry to Paul?**
- **What do you admire about Ananias?**
- **How did Saul react when his sight was restored? (vv. 18-19)**
- **How would you describe Saul's message? (v. 20)**
- **How did the Christians react to Saul? (v. 21)**
- **Who welcomed Saul in Jerusalem? (v. 27)**
- **What was Barnabas' role in accepting Saul? (v. 27)**
- **How did Saul relate to the apostles? (vv. 28-29)**
- **How did Saul follow in Stephen's example? (v. 29)**
- **Describe the early church when Saul came on the scene. (v. 31)**

Explain that Saul had just regained his sight, then had studied under Ananias and the disciples for a few days. Point out that he immediately began telling others about Jesus.

Distribute pens and index cards and instruct students to write the name of a person they know who does not know Christ. Direct them to write the following steps below the name and commit to following these in the days ahead:

- Pray for this person and an opportunity to share.
- Build a relationship with this person.
- Share in the events of this person's life.
- When the Holy Spirit prompts, share Jesus with this person.

Pray for students as they begin this commitment to share Christ's message of hope with the people they have listed. Open the prayer, then allow time for students to pray for those they will be seeking to reach in God's name. Close the time of prayer by thanking God for the gift of salvation He offered to all of us while we were still rebellious.

Apply to Life

Help students revisit the Life Question, *How do I know God will save just anybody?*

Lead the group in one or more of the lesson applications below. Then close the session with prayer.

- Challenge students to consider those people they know whom they could be helping to grow in their faith. Instruct them to take time now to pray by name for both the people who have guided them in their faith and those they themselves could be mentoring in the Christian faith.

- As an encouragement to the ministers at your church, make this week Minister Appreciation Week. Instruct students and church members to write letters to your ministers, then make a book of letters to be presented to your pastors during a worship service. Some other ideas might include collecting a love offering or planning for ministers and their spouses to enjoy a night out. The key is to make the church staff feel special and appreciated. You also may consider encouraging students to use this week to write notes, e-mails, or otherwise recognize the people who have guided, mentored, and influenced them in their Christian walks.
- Pose the following questions for consideration this week:
 - **How did the Lord first get your attention?**
 - **How was your conversion similar to Saul's?**
 - **How did Jesus show himself to you?**
 - **Was there an "Ananias" in your life? If so, who?**
 - **In whose life have you been an Ananias?**
 - **What if everything you grew up believing to be right was actually wrong?**
 - **We are called to be witnesses and encouragers like Ananias. To whom can you be an "Ananias" this week?**
 - **Who do you need to challenge this week?**

June 22, 2008

OPTIONAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are some of the criteria people have to meet to be Miss America? President of the United States? Or to get a certain job?
- How have you seen people's pasts affect their ability to get a certain job or take part in a certain activity?
- Is Christianity open to everyone or do we have to meet certain criteria to even be considered? Explain.
- How does the fact that Jesus wants to use us despite our pasts make you feel?
- Why was Saul traveling to Damascus?
- What was Saul's history with the early believers?
- What did God use to get Saul's attention on the road to Damascus?
- How has God reached out to you, even in the midst of your rebellion?
- What has God used to get your attention in the past?
- God spoke audibly to Saul, but how does He speak to us today?
- Who did Saul acknowledge as calling his name?
- What is significant about that?
- What direction did Jesus give to Saul? Did Saul follow?
- Why did Jesus allow Saul to be blinded?
- What is the importance of recognizing and acknowledging Jesus in the midst of our circumstances?
- When was a time God gave direction for your life?
- How did you respond?
- What is the difference between the words *Savior* and *Lord*?
- What did God instruct Ananias to do?
- What was his initial response?
- Because Ananias obeyed, what happened to Saul?
- What did Saul immediately start doing?
- How did the people who knew him previously respond?
- Who was Barnabas and what was his role in this story?
- When others wanted to kill Saul, what did the fellow believers do with him?
- What happened to the church? (9:31)
- Can people who know you tell a difference in you since you became a Christian? Explain.
- How might God be trying to get your attention today?
- What past mistakes or sins are you hanging onto that have kept you from being what God wants?
- What steps will you take this week to let go of your past and allow God to work through your life?
- Is Jesus the Lord of your life today? Why or why not?
- What steps will you take today to allow Him full access and control of your life?
- How can you make Christ Lord of your life on a daily basis?
- Who do you know who does not know Christ as his or her Savior and Lord?
- What steps will you take this week to reach out to that person with God's message of hope?

- On a scale from 1 to 10 with 1 being new believer and 10 being fully matured, where would you rate your spiritual maturity? Explain.
- What steps can you take to move further in your spiritual journey?
- Does knowing that Jesus is for everyone motivate you? If so, how?
- Who has been a mentor to you in your Christian walk? Explain.
- How can you show your appreciation to that person this week?
- Who have you mentored or helped grow in his or her faith? Explain.
- What qualities do you need to develop in your life in order to be a mentor and guide to new Christians?
- What steps will you take to do so this week?

IN THE WORD .05
The Week of June 29, 2008

Focal Passage: Acts 9:32–11:18

Focus of the Study: Peter and Cornelius

Life Question: With whom should I share the gospel?

Teaching Goal: Lead students to understand that we should share the good news of salvation with all people, regardless of ethnicity or background.

Get Started

Before the session, bundle an assortment of small candies within a bed sheet. As students arrive, place the sheet in front of the group, then open it to reveal the candy. Deliberately invite only a portion of the students to come forward to get a piece of candy by excluding some students, based on the length of their last names.

After some time, assure students that you have only been trying to demonstrate what prejudice is like. Invite those who were left out earlier to get candy. Call attention again to the sheet and challenge students to discover during the session how a sheet full of food helped spread the gospel many years ago.

Explore the Bible

1. God meets us right where we are when we seek Him (Acts 10:1-8).

Begin the study by calling for everyone in the room to stand if they are Gentile. Help students to understand that anyone who is not of Jewish origin is a Gentile. Point out that Jesus and all His disciples were Jews, as well as many of their first converts.

Read aloud Acts 10:1-2. Emphasize Cornelius' sincerity in following God in spite of his Gentile lineage. Lead students to think of someone they know who seems interested in spiritual matters.

Ask:

- **Could Cornelius be saved by his prayers and acts of charity?**
- **Can the seeker you know be saved by the good things he or she is doing?**

Lead a short discussion and emphasize that salvation is not based on what we do, and kind acts do not save us. Call on a volunteer to read aloud Acts 10:3-8. Explain that God knew Cornelius was truly seeking to know Him, and He prepared a means for Cornelius to hear the gospel. Cornelius had a desire to follow God, even though he did not fully understand what it meant to follow Christ.

2. Believers are to see all people equally: loved by God (Acts 10:9-22).

Discuss ways the Jewish nation deliberately set itself apart, such as their festivals, dietary laws, circumcision ceremonies, and Hebrew language. Stress that one of the major

differences between the Jews and the world was their strict dietary laws, which grouped animals into two groups: clean and unclean.

Call on a volunteer to read aloud Acts 10:9-16. Challenge students to find the word in verse 12 that describes how many animals were represented in the sheet (*all*). Explain that Peter's vision did more than just abolish Old Testament dietary laws—it pronounced Jews (symbolized by clean animals) and Gentiles (symbolized by unclean animals) equal in God's eyes. Group students into two teams.

Ask: **If you were going to create a modern-day version of this vision, what would you use to symbolize that salvation is available to all people?** Allow students time to discuss, then call for them to present their ideas.

Pray with students, asking God to help you all to learn to see people as He sees them. Emphasize that Peter, as a Jew, was very set in his prejudice against Gentiles (non-Jews). God had to get Peter's attention in a dramatic way to help him overcome his prejudice against Gentiles. God used a dramatic vision that Peter would understand to change his point of view and point out that believers are to regard all people equally.

3. The message of salvation is the same for all people (Acts 10:23-48).

Distribute sticky notes and instruct students to write one thing that makes them different, or set apart, from their peers in the class, campus, community, or world. Allow students time to work, then direct them to post the sticky notes on themselves. Lead a discussion about the differences you see listed and talk about how we sometimes allow differences to become full-blown prejudices.

Ask: **What are some prejudices you see on campus, in your community, or in the world?**

Allow time for responses, then discuss their answers. (*Possible answers: race, economic class, age, grade level, language barriers, schools, educational levels, religion, or cliques*)

Ask: **What prejudices or tendencies toward prejudice can you identify in your own life?**

Point out that as a Jew, it was unacceptable for Peter to even spend time with Cornelius, yet he put aside his ideas and allowed God's love (and equality of all people) to take the lead. Ask: **What steps can you take so that God's love for all people is a vital part of your life?**

As a large group, work to list practical ways students can put this truth into action in their own lives and build relationships with all kinds of people. Stress that God loves all people and wants us to share the good news of salvation with them, despite their ethnicity or background.

4. Through our words and example, we can encourage others in overcoming prejudice (Acts 11:1-18).

Bring to the session a current newspaper and distribute to student sections of it. Invite students to share some of today's headlines. Urge them to invent headlines that could have appeared in a Jewish newspaper when news of Peter's meeting with Cornelius reached church leaders. Record their responses on the board or a large sheet of paper. Read aloud Acts 11:1-3.

To help students understand how Peter dealt with the church leaders' criticism, call on a volunteer to read aloud Acts 11:15-18. Discuss Peter's account as well as his audience's response.

Ask:

- **How was Cornelius' relationship with God? (10:1-2)**
- **What made Cornelius' encounter with God so unusual? (v. 2)**
- **How did Cornelius help those in need? (v. 2)**
- **Why do you think God chose Cornelius to bridge the Jew/Gentile gap in the early church?**
- **How did the angel affirm Cornelius' lifestyle? (v. 4)**
- **What did the angel command Cornelius to do? (v. 5)**
- **What was Peter doing? (v. 9)**
- **What was Peter's vision? (vv. 11-12)**
- **Why did Peter protest against the command? (v. 14)**
- **Why do you think God repeated His instructions to Peter three times? (v. 16)**
- **Why do you think God chose Peter to be the first to go to the Gentiles? (11:3)**
- **What does Peter mean when he says "at the beginning"? (v. 15)**
- **How did Peter dispel the notion that Gentiles were second-class citizens? (vv. 15-17)**
- **Why do you suppose the Jewish Christians decided to accept these new Gentile Christians after hearing Peter's report? (v. 18)**

Read aloud the "More on the Subject" paragraphs on page 28 of *Collegiate* magazine. Allow time for silent reflection.

Apply to Life

Help students revisit the Life Question, *With whom should I share the gospel?*

Lead the group in one or more of the lesson applications below. Then close the session with prayer.

- Ask the following questions and discuss:
 - **Like Cornelius, what can you give to someone this week who may be in need?**
 - **How can you become more open-minded toward other cultures?**
 - **How can you be an effective witness for Jesus Christ this week among people who are different than you?**

- Contact students prior to the session and ask them to bring examples of research papers they have recently completed for a class assignment. Allow volunteers to show their work, paying special attention to their lengths. Ask: **Why would a professor require you to write a six-page paper?** (Examples: *important topic, wanted you to gain understanding.*) Hold up your Bible and remind students that today's Bible study covered one and one-half chapters of Acts. Ask: **Why would Luke, the writer of Acts, dedicate a sizable portion of his Book to the story of Cornelius and Peter?** The inclusion of the Gentiles in the body of believers was of great importance. Challenge students to explain why. Challenge them with this final question: **What will you do this week to include all kinds of people in the body of believers?**

June 29, 2008

OPTIONAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is prejudice?
- How do people show prejudice?
- Have you ever been a victim of prejudice?
- What does prejudice have to do with sharing the gospel with others?
- How did Cornelius show he desired to follow God?
- Could Cornelius's prayers and acts of kindness save him? Explain.
- What did Cornelius need?
- What did the Lord tell Cornelius to do?
- How did Cornelius react to God's request?
- How do you react when God directs you to do something?
- Who do you know who is interested in spiritual matters or seems receptive to Christ?
- How did God get Peter's attention?
- What was God teaching Peter?
- According to these verses, how are believers to see all people?
- Did Peter's feelings affect his obedience to God's command?
- When has God called you to reach out to someone you didn't necessarily want to associate with? What happened?
- Why was Peter willing to associate with Cornelius?
- What important truth did Peter point out in Acts 10:28?
- How does this truth affect you today?
- What did Peter stress in his gospel presentation?
- How did Peter's fellow travelers react to the Gentile conversion?
- Whom are you guilty of doubting God can save?
- Why were the Jewish Christians upset?
- How did Peter's response encourage them to overcome their prejudice?
- Who is very different from you?
- How has prejudice hindered God's work in your life?
- Who are you guilty of treating like they are "unclean"? Why?
- What are some examples of prejudice you see on campus, or in your community or world?
- What attitudes of prejudice can you identify in your own life?
- What steps will you take to build a relationship with someone who is very different from you?
- Do your attitudes and actions toward others testify that God loves all people? Why or why not?
- How will your witness change as you begin to see people as God sees them?

IN THE WORD .06
The Week of July 6, 2008

Focal Passage: Acts 11:19–12:25

Focus of the Study: Peter's release from prison

Life Question: How do my prayers for others make a difference?

Teaching Goal: Lead students to understand that God works on behalf of others when we earnestly pray.

Get Started

As students arrive, call for volunteers to share ways they have helped others. List their responses on the board or a large sheet of paper.

Ask:

- **How many of you have changed a tire for someone?**
- **How many of you have helped a friend or classmate in some way?**
- **How does changing a tire or helping someone make a difference?**
- **Could praying for someone make a difference? How?**

Explain that, in this session, students will discover that prayer does make a difference, because God works on behalf of others when we earnestly pray.

Explore the Bible

1. Following Christ costs some people their freedom and some people their lives (Acts 12:1-4).

Call on a volunteer to read aloud Acts 12:1-4, then direct students to review the verses on their own. Call for them to discover what they can about King Herod, James, the Jews, and Peter. Clarify information by discussing the following:

- King Herod, a Roman ruler, sought the support of his Jewish subjects. Ask: **What was he willing to do to please them?**
- James was the first apostle to be martyred and the only one whose death was recorded in Scripture. Ask: **How might God be glorified when a Christian is killed for his or her faith?**
- Jewish reaction to James' death resulted in Peter's imprisonment. Ask: **Why would the Jewish leaders desire the deaths of James, Peter, and the other apostles?**
- Peter was heavily guarded during his imprisonment to prevent escape. Ask: **Why do you suppose Herod thought this might be necessary? What do these verses imply that Herod was planning to do to Peter after the Passover?**

Use these verses and discussion to segue to a discussion of the cost of following Christ. Be sure students understand that every choice we make in life has a cost, and that

includes following Christ. Sometimes following Christ costs us friendships, popularity, maybe a job. Sometimes, as these verses attest, following Christ costs believers their freedom and maybe their lives.

2. God will work things for His glory and our good when we earnestly pray (Acts 12:5-11).

Bring to the session copies of entertainment magazines and distribute to the students. Direct them to find headlines or stories about actors, actresses, and performers of whom they are fans. Ask: **As a fan of this person, how does any negative information make you feel?** Allow students to respond, then point out that the church members in Jerusalem probably felt many of the same emotions when they heard that Peter had been imprisoned.

Call on a volunteer to read aloud Acts 12:5-11. Ask: **What does this verse tell us about the church's reaction?** Guide students to understand that rather than being discouraged, the church began to pray earnestly.

Ask:

- **How do you react when faced with unexpected news about a fellow Christian?**
- **Is prayer on your list of possible responses? Why or why not?**
- **Why is it important that the church came together to pray for Peter in this difficult time?**
- **When have you come together to pray with others about a situation a fellow believer was facing? What happened?**
- **Who do you know who needs your prayer and God's help?**

Lead to a discussion of the importance of praying for one another in the body of believers. Stress that God always honors the prayers of His children and always hears them, but His answers may not always be what we expect. Help students understand that just because they prayed for healing in someone's life doesn't mean that person won't die or that they didn't pray hard enough. God honored the prayers of the church and rescued Peter. This is not a blanket principle that God always "rescues" in the way we ask Him to rescue.

Ask:

- **What was Peter doing before his rescue? (*sleeping*)**
- **What does that say about his trust in God's will?**
- **What does your prayer life say about your trust in God?**
- **How have you seen God answer prayer in a way that brought Him the greatest glory?**

Note again that the church members prayed earnestly on Peter's behalf. Point out that praying earnestly for the body of believers involves more than praying for our close friends and acquaintances every so often. It means praying for other believers consistently. Provide publications like your state Baptist newspaper, *Voice of the Martyrs*

magazine, and your church's prayer list, and challenge students to use these materials to learn of specific prayer needs of God's people, including ones they know personally and those they don't.

Read aloud the "More on the Subject" paragraph on page 34 of *Collegiate* magazine. Allow time for reflection and/or discussion.

3. We need to ensure that God gets the glory for the things He does for us (Acts 12:12-25).

Call on a volunteer to read aloud Acts 12:12-25. Explain that in Acts 12 Luke told a story which, at its heart, deals with the power of prayer. Peter found himself in a grave crisis—a position in which there was no apparent way out. He was the victim of the tyrant king Herod Agrippa I (grandson of Herod the Great and nephew of Herod Antipas who tried Jesus). Herod had a large geographical territory to protect and, anxious to preserve peace in Palestine, he was in no mood to support minorities like Christians who were likely to disrupt it. He had James, the brother of John, beheaded, and when he saw how pleased the Jews were at this, his next step was to go for the leader. He seized Peter and threw him in prison, fully intending to try him and execute him publicly after the Passover had concluded.

Ask:

- **What do you think Herod disliked about the church? (12:1-3)**
- **Why do you think Peter didn't seem to fear death while in prison?**
- **How did Peter escape from prison? (v. 6)**
- **Where did Peter go when he realized what had actually happened? (v. 12)**
- **What happened when Peter arrived at Mary's door? (vv. 13-16)**
- **What did Peter say when he entered the house? (v. 17)**
- **What was Herod's reaction once he realized that Peter was gone? (v. 19)**
- **What can we learn from the way Peter handled these circumstances?**

Apply to Life

Help students revisit the Life Question, *How do my prayers for others make a difference?*

Lead the group in one or more of the lesson applications below. Then close the session with prayer.

- Ask the following questions and discuss:
 - What missionary or church leaders can you pray for during the next week?
 - What unreached people group can you pray for?
- Take time throughout this upcoming week and conduct a prayer walk on your campus in which you pray for Christ to be revealed to the people who are in specific academic programs, for specific faculty members, or to specific groups.
- Distribute pens and index cards to students and instruct them to write down situations they (or their families) are facing about which they would like to request prayer. Collect the index cards and redistribute them to various students in

the group. Lead the group in a time of popcorn prayer in which each student lifts the need on his or her card to God in a short sentence prayer. After students have had a chance to lift up the needs as they feel comfortable, close the prayer. Challenge students to continue to pray for the need listed on their cards over the following days and weeks.

Extra Resource

Suggest the following books for further study:

- Kenneth Leech, *True Prayer*
- Watchman Nee, *The Prayer Ministry of the Church*
- Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*
- Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*
- Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*

July 6, 2008

OPTIONAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What act of kindness have you recently performed for someone else?
- Who do you know that needs help?
- What is something someone did for you in the past that really helped you?
- How important is prayer in your life?
- How could praying for someone who needs help really make a difference?
- What happened to Jesus' disciple James?
- What possible good could have come from James's death?
- What motivated King Herod to arrest Peter?
- How many soldiers were assigned to guard Peter?
- Why is that important?
- What was Herod planning to do with Peter after the Passover celebration?
- Does following Christ have a cost? Explain.
- In your experience, what has been the cost of following Christ?
- How did the church respond to Peter's imprisonment?
- What does the church's response to Peter's arrest teach us?
- The early church responded to Peter's arrest with prayer. How do you respond to difficult situations or unexpected news about other believers?
- Is prayer even in your list of responses? Why or why not?
- Why is it important that the church came together to pray for Peter during this time?
- When have you come together with other believers to pray about a tough situation? What happened?
- Who did God use to rescue Peter?
- What was Peter doing before his rescue?
- What does that say about his trust in God?
- How do we know it wasn't a hurried escape?
- Whom did Peter credit for his freedom?
- How have you seen God answer prayer in a way that brought Him the greatest glory?
- How can you give glory to God for answering your prayers?
- Why was the church surprised to see Peter?
- When have you been surprised that God answered your prayer? Why?
- Who did they think Peter was?
- When God answers prayer, to whom are you tempted to give credit rather than Him? Why?
- Why do you think Peter would want his fellow Christians to know of his escape?
- Why did he leave and go to another place?
- Why is it important that God receive the glory for the things He does?
- How do your prayers for others make a difference?
- For whom do you need to pray?
- What steps will you take this week to lift that person up in prayer?
- What can you do this week to develop the habit of prayer in your life?
- How can you give glory to God for the things He's done in your life today?

IN THE WORD .07
The Week of July 13, 2008

Focal Passage: Acts 13–14

Focus of the Study: Paul's first missionary journey

Life Question: How can God use me in missions?

Teaching Goal: Lead students to understand that God can use us to reach beyond our own community to impact other peoples and cultures with His gospel.

Get Started

As students arrive, discuss how big the world is and why it is so important to take the gospel to the world. Challenge students to use information they will learn in today's session to discover ways they can be used in missions beyond their own community.

Prior to the session, invite a member of your church to speak about his or her involvement in a short-term mission project. Encourage your guest to share why he or she committed to the project, how he or she prepared for it, and what he or she did specifically to have an impact on others with the gospel.

Explore the Bible

1. God's Holy Spirit calls us and leads us to where He wants us to serve Him (Acts 13:1-3).

Call on a volunteer to read aloud Acts 13:1-3. Note that Acts 13 marks a turning point. Remind students that the previous sessions in Acts focused mostly on Peter and the early church in Jerusalem and Judea. Explain that Acts 13 will begin to tell of the apostle Paul and the spread of the gospel to Gentiles throughout the Roman world.

If possible, locate a map of Paul's travels and display or pass among students. Direct students to note the location of Syria, some 300 miles away from Jerusalem. (*Antioch*) Explain that it was here that believers were first called Christians, and that this church became the base of Paul's ministry.

Using the information from these verses, discuss what it means to be called to do something by God. Be sure students understand the importance of listening to and allowing the Holy Spirit to guide us into places of service for the Lord. Point out that the church members were already fasting and seeking God's guidance in how they should minister to others, and God showed them what to do and where to go. Help students understand that God can use them in ministry and mission work, but they need to seek His leading and listen for His call.

Read aloud Acts 13:5 and 14:1 and direct students to describe the first step in Paul and Barnabas' pattern of ministry in the towns they visited. (*They went first to the synagogue, where the Jews worshiped and with whom they had a common heritage or background.*)

Explain that even though Paul and Barnabas were traveling outside of their home communities to share the gospel, they always started their work within the synagogue because the Jews' religious background should have prepared the people to hear the message of the Messiah's coming. Discuss how students could put that principle into practice when they step outside of their communities to minister to other cultures. Note that Paul and Barnabas' pattern of ministry naturally progressed to sharing the gospel with Gentiles who were eager to hear it.

Ask:

- **Who are some people groups or cultures today that you know are eager to hear the gospel?**
- **How can you step out of your community to share God's hope with them?**

2. In missions and evangelism, we should start with the people who are most receptive (Acts 14:1-7).

Call for two volunteers to read aloud Acts 13:44-49 and 14:2-7. Label two large sheets of paper, one with the headline "Positives," the other "Negatives," and post them side-by-side. Lead students to categorize the results of the mission efforts as described in Acts 14:1-7.

Ask:

- **How did Paul and Barnabas respond to opposition?**
- **Have you ever experienced opposition when witnessing to others? Explain.**
- **Does opposition mean you should give up in your efforts to reach out to others? Why or why not?**
- **Why is it appropriate to take the message of Christ to those who are eager to hear it?**

Use Paul and Barnabas' experience in Iconium to show the pattern of their ministry: they went first to the synagogue, then moved to the Gentiles who were eager to hear the message. Stress that while we are not to ignore people, it is appropriate that we take the message of Christ to those who are eager and willing to hear and accept the gospel.

3. God's work is often misunderstood (Acts 14:8-20).

State that this first missionary journey of Paul was full of dramatic events, including the ones recorded in Acts 14:8-20. Group students into two teams and direct them to answer the following questions.

Ask:

- **How did the people misunderstand God's work in these verses?**
- **How do people today try to explain away something God has done?**
- **How can acknowledging what God has done in your life help you to have an impact on other peoples and cultures?**
- **How often are praying and fasting mentioned in verses 2-3?**
- **Why do you think the church prayed and fasted before and after the selection of Barnabas and Saul?**

Stress that after Acts 13:9 the name Saul was dropped and the apostle was always referred to as Paul.

Apply to Life

Help students revisit the Life Question, *How can God use me in missions?*

Invite a student to read aloud or quote Acts 1:8. Ask: **Where are we to begin our missions and evangelism efforts?** (*in our own Jerusalem*) On the board or a large sheet of paper, draw concentric circles labeled *Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and Ends of the earth*. Distribute pens and index cards and encourage students to draw the circles on their cards. Lead students in considering their own personal mission strategy by asking:

- **What is your Jerusalem?**
- **Who do you know who has a background or an interest in faith there? How can you start sharing with them?**
- **How will you impact your Judea?**
- **Who do you know who has a background or an interest in faith there? How can you start sharing with them?**
- **Are you preparing to be a gospel-bearer to all the world? Explain.**
- **How can you be a part of sharing the gospel with people groups and cultures from around the world?**

Prior to the session, consult with your ministry staff or other sources to discover mission opportunities, both local and away, currently available to students. Present your findings, as well as printouts from the Web sites of the Southern Baptist Convention missions agencies (www.imb.org and www.namb.org). Discuss specific ways students can be involved in a short-term mission project or other outreach activity. Challenge students to make missions and everyday ministry a matter of prayer. Ask: **How does God want to expand His message through you?**

Close in prayer. Consider reading aloud the prayer under “Dig Deeper” on page 35 of *Collegiate* magazine.

Optional Activity

Share a story from the International Mission Board, found in *Extra Resources*.

July 13, 2008

OPTIONAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Name some people who have had an impact on you? your community? your country? your world?
- What does it take to reach out to another culture?
- What is missions?
- Who should be concerned about missions?
- How can you reach out to other cultures and make an impact on them for Christ?
- What church sent Paul and Barnabas?
- Who were the people in leadership at the church in Antioch?
- What does “they were ministering to the Lord and fasting” imply?
- When have you actively sought the Lord about a matter? What happened?
- Who chose Paul and Barnabas for special work?
- How were they commissioned?
- What do these verses say about Paul and Barnabas’ obedience to God’s call?
- Who do you know who has been called to ministry?
- What’s the difference between being called as a minister and being called to a specific ministry? (*All Christians are God’s ministers in this world. He sometimes calls specific Christians to specific ministries, such as foreign missions, serving as a pastor, and so forth.*)
- Where did Paul and Barnabas first preach in the cities they visited? Why?
- To whom did they take the gospel next? Why?
- How did Paul and Barnabas respond to opposition?
- Have you ever experienced opposition when witnessing to others? Explain.
- Does opposition to the gospel mean that we can stop sharing it with people? Why or why not?
- Why is it appropriate to take the message of Christ first to those who are eager to hear it?
- Why did Paul heal the lame man?
- How did the people misunderstand God’s work in these verses?
- What are some ways the people tried to explain away something God did or give credit where it wasn’t due?
- How do people try to explain away God’s work or take credit for it today?
- How did Paul and Barnabas respond?
- To what city did Paul go after he was stoned?
- What does this say about Paul’s determination to share the gospel with all kinds of people?
- How determined are you to share the gospel in all places?
- To what specific ministries has God called you?
- What steps will you take to obey His call this week?
- What situations, callings, or relationships do you need to take before the Lord in consistent prayer, like the church at Antioch?
- How does God want to expand His message of hope through you?
- Who are some people groups or cultures you know are eager to hear the gospel?
- How will you step out of your community to share God’s hope with them?
- How have you tried to explain away or take credit for God’s work?

- What steps will you take this week to give Him the glory?
- How can acknowledging what God has done in your life help you to have an impact on other peoples and cultures?
- In what other ways can you have an impact on other cultures and peoples?
- Where should you begin your missions and evangelism efforts?
- What missions opportunities are available to you?
- How can you prepare yourself to be better used by God in missions and ministry?
- What steps will you take this week to be more attentive to the Holy Spirit's call in your life?
- How can you get involved in a short-term ministry project?
- What steps will you take to do so this week?
- How can you get involved in ministry to other cultures or people groups in your own community?
- What steps will you take to reach out to someone of another culture in God's name today?

IN THE WORD .08
The Week of July 20, 2008

Focal Passage: Acts 15:1-35

Focus of the Study: The Jerusalem Council

Life Question: What are the essential elements of the gospel?

Teaching Goal: Lead students to understand that the gospel should not be limited by non-essential issues.

Get Started

The following obituary ran in the *New York Times* on October 21, 1899.

DEATH ENDS A LONG FEUD

Terhune's wife had not spoken to him in 12 years

HACKENSACK, N.J., Oct. 20.—Jacob Terhune, age about 60 years, died this morning at East Hackensack from typhoid fever. For the last 12 years it is said that he and his wife had not spoken until he was ill with his fatal sickness. It is said they had differed upon some detail of farm management and ceased to speak. Despite this they lived in the same house for 12 years. A year ago Mrs. Terhune wanted to make some improvements in the house and ordered the work done. Her husband ordered the workmen away. Upon this, Mrs. Terhune left home. She lived with her son here until it became known her husband would die. He then sent for her, and she nursed him toward the last.”¹

Explain that conflict, when not handled properly, can cause division, disharmony, and even split families and churches. Relate that today's study will look at a situation in which Paul and Barnabas were faced with resolving a disagreement in Antioch.

Explore the Bible

1. Don't run from the discussion (Acts 15:1-5).

Read aloud Acts 15:1-5.

Ask the following questions and allow time for discussion:

- **What is the situation that occurred at the church in Antioch?**
- **Who were these men who had come down from Judea?**
- **Why do you think Paul and Barnabas might already be familiar with their teachings?**
- **In what ways were they clearly already prepared to handle a situation such as this?**

¹ “Death Ends a Long Feud.” *The New York Times*. October 21, 1899, page 3.

<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archivefree/pdf?res=9500EEDB173DE433A25752C2A9669D94689ED7CF>

Explain that several interesting things can be noted in this situation. First, Paul and Barnabas did not stop the men from teaching, or angrily drive them away. Ask: **Why do you think they chose not to do so?**

Secondly, Paul and Barnabas were clearly versed enough in Scripture and resolved in what they believed to be able to hold an intelligent debate.

Ask:

- **In what ways do you think their choice to talk about the issue showed respect for the Judaizers as well as for the believers in Antioch?**
- **Why do you think they did not simply write off the Judaizers as idiots, and walk away?**

Thirdly, when debate and discussion were not bringing resolution to the situation, they made a decision to seek outside help.

Ask:

- **What did they determine to do?**
- **Why was this a wise choice?**

2. Recognize the difference in what is essential, and what is important (Acts 15:6-1).

Call on a volunteer to read aloud Acts 15:6-21. Lead students to form four teams and assign the following questions for discussion. Then call students back to the large group and allow time for sharing.

Team 1

Ask:

- **When they arrived in Jerusalem, did Paul and Barnabas find an immediate solution to their problem?**
- **What happened on the floor of the council meeting when the issue was presented before the apostles and leaders?**

Team 2

Ask:

- **Why do you think there was so much difference of opinion among the men on the council?**
- **How does the historical context for this meeting give us some clues to the source of the conflict?**
- **What questions were now facing the early church that they had never encountered before?**
- **What things had changed in order to create this tension?**

Team 3

Ask:

- **Who stood up and took the floor following the general time of debate?**
- **Why do you think he was the right man to do so?**

- **What point did he make?**

Team 4

Ask:

- **Who followed the man in speaking to the council?**
- **Why was their testimony significant?**
- **What did James then do that was extremely significant?**
- **Why is it important for us to hold up disagreements concerning doctrine to the light of Scripture?**

Optional Activity

Distribute pens and note cards to each student and instruct them to label one side of the note card “Essentials” and the other side “Non-essentials.” On the board or a large sheet of paper, lead students to list issues that come up in churches today to cause conversation, debate, and even conflict (Examples: varying forms of baptism, Calvinism/Arminianism, speaking in tongues, church governance, eschatology, loss of salvation, and so forth). Then ask students to look at each issue and assign it either to the “Essential” or “Non-essential” side of their card. Encourage students to keep their answers to themselves and to consider, “What determines if a matter is essential or non-essential?”

Ask:

- **Why is it important for us to know what we hold as the essential doctrines of our faith?**
- **Why are there some issues that are important to stand up and fight for, and some that have room for compromise or compliant disagreement?**
- **How do we determine the difference in our own life?**

Explain that the council came to the resolve that the most essential doctrine was salvation by faith through grace. It is important that in seeking resolutions, we not only be considerate of all parties involved, but also hold to the truth of Scripture.

3. Don’t back away from what you know to be true (Acts 15:30-35).

Call on a volunteer to read aloud Acts 15:30-35. Discuss the identity of who the council selected to take the news back to the church at Antioch and why they selected this particular delegation. Consider how the news received by the church at Antioch.

Ask:

- **In what ways was a situation that began in conflict ultimately used for God’s glory?**
- **What precepts did this very important meeting of the Jerusalem Council establish that still affect the church today?**
- **How could this situation have been different if Paul and Barnabas a) chose to become angry and disassociate with the Judaizers, or b) backed down to the Judaizers and did not stand up for what they knew to be truth?**

Read aloud the “Think About This” paragraph on page 36 of *Collegiate* magazine. Allow

time for silent reflection.

Apply to Life

Help students revisit the Life Question, *What are the essential elements of the gospel?*

Ask the following questions for students to consider:

- **Why is it important for us to be able to discern when we should take a stand, and when we should compromise for the sake of unity?**
- **How can we learn to cultivate that discernment in our lives?**
- **What are some practical guidelines you can list that would help you the next time you face such a disagreement?**
- **What situations might you be facing today that would benefit from you applying this biblical model?**

Close in prayer.

July 20, 2008

OPTIONAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Who were the men who came to Antioch, and what was their purpose?
- Why do you think the church allowed these men to come in and begin teaching?
- From a historical perspective, what was happening in the early church as a whole during this time period?
- What was the error in the doctrine being taught by the Judaizers?
- Why was it important for Paul and Barnabas to address this false doctrine?
- How did they seek to resolve the disagreement? Do you think they handled it in a godly manner? Why or why not?
- What points of difference or conflict arise in our churches today?
- How have you seen disagreements handled in your own context in the past?
- If you were the pastor, and someone came to your church teaching a doctrine that differed from your own, how would you handle it? Explain.
- Why is it sometimes necessary to bring in an outside person to mediate in a case like this? Who would you choose to mediate for you in your own context?
- How did the question brought before the Jerusalem council have even greater implications than just settling a conflict in Antioch?
- Why was it important that the council come to a firm resolution on this issue?
- Was the council in agreement at the beginning? If not, what was at the root of their debate?
- Which leaders gave speeches during the council? Why do you think these particular men led out in the conversation?
- What was the main argument that each of these men made: Peter, Saul and Barnabas, James?
- Do you think that these men, being apostles in high standing, could have simply exerted their authority over the others and forced the issue? If so, then why do you think they chose to use rhetoric and influence instead?
- What four important steps did they take in the process of conflict resolution? What can we learn from their example?
- Have you ever been faced with a similar conflict? How did you resolve the issue?
- If you had been at the Jerusalem council, would you have done anything differently? Why or why not?
- What was the important doctrine that was established at the Jerusalem council, and which we still hold to in the church today? Why was this meeting so significant for all of us as believers?
- What do you consider an “essential” of the gospel?
- What do you consider a “non-essential” and something that is important, but takes a back seat to maintaining unity in the church?
- Have you seen any conflicts today that remind you of the situation in Acts 15? If so, how were they resolved?
- When is it important to speak up, and when is it important to back down? Explain.

- How do you think that we are expected to treat the people we disagree with when we find ourselves in such a situation? Cite some Scriptures that serve as guidelines for our behavior.
- How did the council decide to deliver the results of their decision to the church in Antioch?
- Who did they choose to accompany Paul and Barnabas? Why?
- How did the church in Antioch receive the news? What was the end result of this story?
- Why do you think this situation turned out the way it did, rather than resulting in anger and division?
- How are you going to prepare yourself today to face future conflicts in a godly manner?

IN THE WORD .09
The Week of July 27, 2008

Focal Passage: Acts 15:36–17:9

Focus of the Study: Paul and Silas in prison

Life Question: Why shouldn't I just wait until "the time is right" to be a witness?

Teaching Goal: Lead students to understand that God will give us opportunities to witness and disciple others regardless of our circumstances.

Get Started

Prior to the session, make two batches of pudding—one as directed and one without stirring properly so that lumps and dry patches are evident. Serve to students as they arrive. Use the differences in the two puddings to demonstrate *consistency*, which means "uniform or the same." Note that the second batch of pudding is definitely not the same throughout. As students enjoy eating the good batch of pudding, ask:

- **What does it mean to be consistent in our Christian walk?**
- **Why is it even important?**

Explore the Bible

1. We can carry out ministry even when we disagree (Acts 15:36-41).

Remind students of Paul's first missionary journey studied in the last session. Direct them to open their Bibles to Acts 16, which tells of Paul's second missionary journey. Note that on this trip the gospel was brought to the European continent for the first time.

Call on a volunteer to read aloud Acts 15:36-41. Discuss how Christians sometimes disagree, even in areas of ministry. Allow time for volunteers to share past conflicts and how they resolved them.

Invite students to provide a definition of the word *consistent*, then share its meaning from a dictionary, such as "sameness, fixed, firm; not contradictory or opposed." Give examples like these to get its meaning across: Meredith's grades are consistently high; the consistent barking of the dog wakened me; Daniel's inconsistent saving hurt his finances. Discuss what it means to be consistent in our Christian lives. Help students to understand that consistency in our Christian lives is of great importance.

On the board or a large sheet of paper, list the following: Timothy, Lydia, the jailer, and Paul. Involve students in listing ways these individuals showed consistency in the passage they studied earlier.

- Timothy—The believers at Lystra and Iconium recognized Timothy's consistent godly behavior and spoke highly of him. His consistency led to an opportunity for Timothy to accompany Paul on his second missionary journey.
- Lydia—Lydia's consistent participation in the worship of God in Philippi led to

- her opportunity to hear the gospel message through Paul.
- The jailer—The jailer’s actions (being baptized, washing the wounds of Paul and Silas and feeding them) were consistent with his conversion and gave evidence of his changed heart.
 - Paul—Paul’s consistent witness in the churches he established, in synagogues, amid angry mobs, and even in jail, led to the conversion of many, such as Lydia and the jailer.

2. We can also mentor others as we carry out ministry (Acts 16:1-5).

Call on a volunteer to read aloud Acts 16:1-5. Stress the importance of Paul’s mentoring relationship with Timothy and his consistent Christian witness that enabled him to mentor Timothy.

Ask:

- **How could Timothy have been affected if Paul had spent his time in jail worrying rather than being a consistent witness for Christ?**
- **Who has been an example of Christian consistency to you? How has he or she mentored you in your faith?**

As a group, work together to create a list of characteristics or attitudes that contribute to a consistent Christian witness. Record the list on the board or a large sheet of paper. Be sure that students understand that consistency is about constancy, about seeking to follow God in all situations, being obedient to His will, and doing it over and over. Stress that being a consistent Christian isn’t just about doing the “Christian” thing when it’s convenient.

Challenge students to evaluate their own lives for the characteristics of a consistent Christian they just listed. Allow for a time of silent prayer in which students can pray through that list and ask for God’s guidance and wisdom as they seek to be a consistent example of Him. After the prayer, distribute “My Name Is…” name tags and permanent markers to each student and instruct them to consider people in their lives for whom they could be an example of a consistent Christian. Encourage them to list the names of at least three people on their name tags and to keep it as a daily reminder to live a life marked by consistency.

3. We can be a witness regardless of our circumstances (Acts 16:16-40).

Direct students to think about times when someone did something that either hurt them or helped them, but something of which the person was completely unaware. Invite volunteers to share as they feel comfortable. (Remind students that this is not the time to dig up dirty laundry or seek to get revenge for an action that hurt them in the past.)

After a few students have shared, ask: **What does it mean to say that a consistent Christian witness will create witnessing opportunities of which we are not aware?**

Allow students time to respond, then call on three volunteers to read aloud Acts 16:16-40.

Ask:

- **Where were Paul and Silas?**
- **What were they doing?**
- **How did they exhibit a consistent Christian witness in jail?**
- **How did it lead to an opportunity to witness to the jailer and his family?**
- **Can you name some times when you've seen a person's consistency in their Christian walk lead to witnessing opportunities? Explain.**

Be sure students understand that if they strive to live their lives as a consistent example of a Christian witness, it will lead to opportunities to share the gospel with people in their lives who see them day-in and day-out. Challenge students to consider their relationships with people in their daily lives and evaluate how the students' consistent (or inconsistent) examples of a Christian witness have affected their friends' and acquaintances' relationships with Christ.

Read aloud the "Word Study" on page 37 of *Collegiate* magazine. Allow time for discussion.

Apply to Life

Help students revisit the Life Question, *Why shouldn't I just wait until "the time is right" to be a witness?*

Lead the group in one or more of the lesson applications below. Then close the session with prayer.

- Distribute pens and index cards and encourage students to write words or phrases that describe a consistent Christian walk on one side. Direct them to write a prayer on the other side of the card, asking God to help them embody these characteristics and to show them the areas in their lives that are lacking in consistency.
- Provide note cards with envelopes for students to write notes of encouragement to a fellow believer who is exhibiting a consistent witness in the midst of negative circumstances. Students may choose to write to someone they know, or you may provide information concerning someone involved in a high-profile demonstration of consistent Christianity in your church, community, state, or even the country or world. Guide students to be specific in their encouragement by using the word *consistent* in their correspondence.

July 27, 2008

OPTIONAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What does *consistency* mean?
- Who do you know who exhibits the quality of consistency? Explain.
- What does it mean to show consistency in our Christian witness?
- Why do we show inconsistency in our Christian witness?
- How do we become examples of a consistent Christian witness?
- How did Paul act as Timothy's mentor?
- Why is it important that Timothy's mother was Jewish and his father Greek?
- What does it mean that the Christians in Lystra and Iconium spoke "highly" of Timothy?
- Of whom do you speak highly? Why?
- How did Paul's consistent witness lead him to an opportunity to mentor Timothy?
- Does consistency lead us to greater opportunities to mentor others? Explain.
- How did Timothy's consistent witness lead to areas of greater service?
- What does it mean that the Holy Spirit "prevented" Paul and his group from going into Asia?
- Why did Paul and his companions travel to Macedonia/Europe?
- What happened in Philippi?
- Why is it important that only women seemed to be gathered at the place of prayer?
- How did Lydia respond to the gospel message?
- How were Paul and Silas treated in Philippi?
- When have you seen someone witness and people respond to the message of salvation?
- How was Paul's witness consistent even in these good circumstances?
- What are some good circumstances teens face in sharing their faith today?
- How did other people in Philippi respond when Paul healed the servant girl?
- What happened to Paul and Silas?
- How was this a negative situation?
- What are some negative situations teens today might face when sharing their faith?
- What does it mean to be a consistent Christian witness even in negative situations?
- How did Paul and Silas exhibit consistency in both of these situations?
- What were Paul and Silas doing while they were in jail? Why?
- How would you have reacted if you were in Paul and Silas' situation?
- How were Paul and Silas consistent witnesses even while they were in jail?
- What happened in the jail as Paul and Silas sang?
- Why didn't Paul and Silas escape?
- Why was the jailer about to kill himself?
- How did this situation lead to an opportunity to witness to the jailer and his family?
- How did the attitude of Paul and Silas affect the jailer?
- When have you seen someone's consistent Christian walk lead to opportunities to witness to people? What happened?
- Would others say you have a consistent Christian witness? Why or why not?
- What qualities do consistent witnesses embody?
- Who has been a consistent witness for Christ in your life? Explain.

- Has consistency led you to greater opportunities to serve God? Why or why not?
- Who should you be discipling or mentoring?
- How attentive are you to the Holy Spirit's leading?
- What steps will you take to become more tuned in to His leading?
- How can you be a consistent witness for Christ in good situations and negative circumstances?
- What steps will you take to do so this week?
- Do you ever "happen" upon witnessing opportunities because of your consistent Christian walk? Why or why not?
- What can you do to develop a more consistent Christian witness?
- How will you show consistency in a negative circumstance you are facing today?
- Whose faithful, consistent Christian witness has affected your life?
- On whose lives has your Christian witness had an impact?
- What steps will you take this week to become more faithful and consistent in your Christian walk?

IN THE WORD .10
The Week of August 3, 2008

Focal Passage: Acts 17:10–19:41

Focus of the Study: Paul in Athens

Life Question: How can I explain the gospel to those of another culture?

Teaching Goal: Lead students to understand that as we share Christ with others, we should talk about things with which we are familiar to point them to Christ.

Get Started

Prior to the session, research the English word “hello” in other languages. Print the words on the board or on small posters to distribute to students. Encourage volunteers to pronounce these words or phrases, then give the group an opportunity to guess which language is being spoken. Allow time for any students who wish to demonstrate their proficiency in foreign languages to do so. Use this exercise to demonstrate how language can be a barrier that affects the spread of the gospel.

Explain that language is just one of the difficulties that arise when we attempt to witness to those of another culture. Relate that in this session we will focus on ways to cross cultural barriers and point others to Christ.

Explore the Bible

1. Our walk and witness for Christ will often lead others to want to know more about the Christ we follow (Acts 17:16-21).

As students open their Bibles to Acts 17, ask if anyone can remember where Paul had gone when you ended your last session. (*Thessalonica*) Remind students that Paul had left Beroea because of persecution and was waiting in Athens for his traveling partners, Timothy and Silas, to join him.

Call for a volunteer to read aloud Acts 17:16 and note that like any visitor to a new city, Paul was doing some sightseeing.

Give some background information. Share how Athens was an intellectual and cultural center, and home of the great philosophers Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. This was the Athens of the great Greek literary writers and orators Homer, Aeschylus, Euripides, Demosthenes. This was the Athens that founded what we know as democracy—a free city that had a representative government that was responsible to the people.

This was the great Athens that welcomed the missionary named Paul. He was all alone—the only Christian presence in this great philosophical, cultural, and democratic capitol of the world. At this point, Paul was in the midst of his second missionary journey. He’d been spending time planting churches in Macedonia until things got a little hot. When

some Jewish leaders started to make things difficult, Paul had to get out of town quickly. That's how he landed in Athens.

Ask:

- **What troubled Paul about the city of Athens?**
- **Why did idolatry bother Paul so much?**
- **What are some “sights” in our city that should bother us?**
- **What are some “sights” in our world that should bother us?**

Mention that many times we are not bothered by the lost world because our relationship with God is not what it should be.

Direct students to read silently Acts 17:17-21, then ask them to raise their hands when they hear the correct response to this question: **What did Paul do after being bothered by the idolatry of Athens?** a) *Lounged by the pool at his hotel;* b) *wrote a letter to the editor;* c) *decided this was the perfect job for Timothy;* or d) *preached to whomever would listen.* Note again Paul's pattern of first preaching in the synagogue, and then in the marketplace.

2. All cultures have something that points to God or our desire for God (Acts 17:22-29).

3. Our witness always needs to focus on the person and work of Jesus Christ (Acts 17:30-34).

Stress that all cultures have something that points to God or our desire for God. Ask: **How do we know that was true in the Athenian culture?** (*altar to an unknown god*) Discuss how the altar to an unknown god points to an inkling of the one true God. Lead students to understand that Paul talked about things with which they were familiar in order to point them to God.

Ask:

- **What Scriptures did Paul quote when he spoke at the Areopagus?** (*none*)
- **Why do you think Paul did that?**

Explain that the Scriptures would have had little meaning to the crowd at that point, so Paul began by engaging the people where they were mentally and spiritually.

Encourage students to review Paul's entire message (17:22-34) and name things he said about God and Jesus. List students' findings on the board or a large sheet of paper as they call them out, then ask: **On what or whom did Paul's testimony focus?** (*God and Jesus*) Note that while Paul's approach to the gospel changed in the setting of Athens, the core truths did not.

Ask:

- **How did the people respond to Paul's address?**
- **Are you prepared for the people's response when you share with them? Why or why not?**

- **Does a negative reaction mean that the message was not received? Explain.**

Explain that while Paul's approach to the gospel changed in the setting of Athens, the core truths did not change. Just because we may receive a negative response does not mean the message was not received. God still worked in the hearts of many in the crowd.

Read aloud "Something to Consider" on page 44 of *Collegiate* magazine. Allow time for reflection and/or discussion.

Apply to Life

Help students revisit the Life Question, *How can I explain the gospel to those of another culture?*

Lead the group in one or more of the lesson applications below. Then close the session with prayer.

- Distribute pens and paper to students and remind them that Paul's testimony focused on the core truths of the gospel, God's work of salvation through Jesus. Lead students to consider their knowledge of God's work from His Word and in their own lives. Then direct them to outline their testimony according to these core truths. Allow students time to work, then call for a few willing teens to share their testimonies. After several students have shared, it may be appropriate to share your testimony (which you have written out according to these core truths prior to the session). Stress that our approach to sharing the gospel can and should change according to who we are sharing it with, but the core truths never change. Jesus came to save us through His life, death, and resurrection.
- Assign pairs/teams one of the following situations and encourage them to identify ways to share Christ with someone of another culture. Remind students that in relating to a worldview other than our own, we should:
 - Know the culture
 - Know the worldview
 - Know the language
 - How do you share your faith in a culturally relevant way?

After allowing some time to work, direct students to consider whether or not they would be prepared to share the core truths of the gospel in these situations. Take time to pray, asking God to prepare you to be a witness to those of other cultures.

August 3, 2008

OPTIONAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Who do you know that is from another culture?
- What is different about his or her culture?
- What would make it difficult to share the gospel with that person?
- What familiar things could you discuss that might point them to Christ?
- Why was Paul in Athens?
- What did Paul see in Athens that troubled him?
- How did Paul follow his pattern of taking the message of the gospel to the Jews first?
- Where else did he talk about God? Why?
- How was the audience at Athens unique?
- How did the Athenians respond to Paul?
- The idolatry of the Athenians bothered Paul and spurred him to action. What did he do?
- How did Paul describe the Athenians?
- What does it mean to say that all cultures have something that points to God or their desire for God?
- What object in Athens pointed to that culture's desire for God?
- Why do you think Paul chose not to quote Scripture in his speech?
- What does Paul's speech center on?
- What steps did Paul take so that his message was appropriate and effective to his audience?
- What are the core truths of the gospel?
- On whom should our witness always focus?
- What were the three responses to the gospel in Athens that day?
- What "troubles" you about your world, like idolatry troubled Paul?
- What actions are you prepared to take to respond to those bothersome things?
- What steps will you take to do so this week?
- What might you need to do to make sure your testimony is appropriate and effective to your audience? Why?
- What does your testimony center on: you or God's work? Explain.
- Does a negative response mean a witness was unsuccessful?
- Why do you think Paul was effective in Athens?
- How will you prepare to share the gospel with those of another culture?
- What steps will you take to do so today?

IN THE WORD .11
The Week of August 10, 2008

Focal Passage: Acts 20:1–21:14

Focus of the Study: Paul heads for Jerusalem

Life Question: When serving God, why should I not always avoid dangerous situations?

Teaching Goal: Lead students to understand that though we should be wise about unsafe situations, God's call to service may send us into dangerous settings.

Get Started

Prior to the session design three to five challenges for volunteers to complete, such as eating or drinking something disgusting, solving a brain teaser, or achieving a physical feat. When students arrive, encourage them to attempt the challenges. Volunteers who successfully complete a challenge can try the next challenge, and the person who completes the final challenge first wins a prize. Continue the activity by discussing what might motivate someone to attempt a difficult challenge. Define the word *danger*.

Explore the Bible

1. We should avoid dangerous ministry situations when possible (Acts 20:1-6).

2. We should do what we can for others when we are able (Acts 20:7-12).

3. Ministry sometimes means walking knowingly into risky or dangerous situations (Acts 20:17–21:14).

Call for students to suggest TV reality shows that entice people to take dangerous risks. Briefly discuss what, other than money, might motivate someone to try a dangerous challenge. Explain that sometimes believers have opportunities to take risks or complete difficult challenges, and that it is our responsibility to decide if we will face the danger or avoid it.

Point out to students that believers can prepare to face danger by practicing spiritual disciplines, such as prayer, Bible study, Scripture memory, fasting, and so forth. Lead a short discussion about spiritual disciplines, then group students into three teams. Supply paper and pens for each team and instruct Team 1 to read Acts 20:1-12, Team 2 to read Acts 20:17-38, and Team 3 to read Acts 21:1-14. Direct teams to list examples of believers practicing spiritual disciplines or evidences they were doing so. Allow teams several minutes to work, then call for responses. Record the various spiritual disciplines on the board or a large sheet of paper.

Provide some background on the passages. Remind students that the religious climate among Jews was not favorable to Paul, especially in Jerusalem, and Paul and the church were well aware of that.

Ask:

- **Why was Paul willing to walk into a dangerous situation in Jerusalem when earlier (20:3-4) he avoided danger?**
- **What makes some situations worth facing danger for?**

Allow time for discussion.

Continue:

- **At Tyre, what did the Christians advise Paul to do? (21:1-3)**
- **Why did Paul ignore this warning? (vv. 5-6)**
- **How did Agabus dramatize what would happen to Paul if he went to Jerusalem? (v. 11)**
- **What did Paul say to the Christians at Caesarea? (vv. 13-14)**
- **Why did Paul ignore this warning?**

Lead students to silently re-read Acts 20:1-3,22-25; 21:10-14. Discuss some possible reasons why Paul avoided one dangerous situation, but not the other. Point out that just as avoiding danger when God calls you to face it has a negative impact on ministry, facing danger when God calls you to avoid it can also have a negative impact on ministry. Help students understand that the Jewish religious climate, particularly in Jerusalem, wasn't too favorable of Paul at this time. Going to Jerusalem meant walking into a dangerous situation, something of which Paul and the early church were well aware. Explain that truly serving God sometimes means walking into risky, even dangerous situations, and sometimes it means avoiding them.

Remind students of the importance of spiritual disciplines, then emphasize that an intimate relationship with God will help them determine if they should face danger. Point out that because Paul had a close relationship with God, he was able to discern when he should confront danger and when it was best to avoid it.

Point out that one spiritual discipline that is very evident in these passages is praying with other believers (20:36; 21:5). Lead students through a time of corporate prayer, instructing members of Team 1 to pray silently that students in the class would be willing to step into danger for God; leading members of Team 2 to pray that students would always be ready to answer God's call to service; and guiding Team 3 to pray silently that they would all have the ability to stand strong during times of danger. Close the prayer by asking God to help these students not only be willing and able to face danger, but also to have the wisdom to know when to avoid it.

Apply to Life

Help students revisit the Life Question, *When serving God, why should I not always avoid dangerous situations?*

- Ask the following questions and discuss:
 - **How can you lift up a missionary this week who may be serving in an unsafe situation?**

- **Is persecution not always a bad thing? Why?**
- Prior to the session, research the Internet and other missions materials for stories about people who face danger spreading the gospel. Read aloud to the group.
- Read aloud “More on the Subject” on page 45 of *Collegiate* magazine. Allow time for reflection.

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OPTIONAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Tell about a time when you were scared because you felt you were in danger.
- For \$1,000, would you: eat live roaches? let someone hold you underwater for three minutes? spend a week on a deserted island with no human contact and no provisions?
- What dangerous situation would you find difficult to face for God? (Remind students that danger doesn't have to be physical. They might be intimidated by the danger of losing a friend or feeling foolish.)
- What uproar happened in Acts 20:1?
- What do you think the disciples might have been feeling after this uproar?
- Why was it important for Paul to encourage them?
- How does your group encourage each other after experiencing difficult situations?
- How would you like to be encouraged after you experience a difficult situation?
- What did Paul do when he learned the Jews were planning to harm him in Syria?
- Why do you think Paul avoided this danger?
- If you were Paul, what would convince you to avoid danger?
- What did the Holy Spirit communicate to Paul about Jerusalem?
- Why didn't Paul avoid this danger?
- What was the difference between this danger and the danger in Syria?
- How did Paul view his own life?
- How is this like or unlike the way you view your life?
- How do your choices about potentially dangerous situations prove how you truly view your own life?
- What does this passage tell us about why Paul threw caution to the wind concerning his own safety?
- How did Paul feel about his fellow believers? about lost people? How do you know?
- What were some things Paul did to prove how he felt?
- What warnings did Paul receive about Jerusalem?
- Why didn't he listen to those who loved him?
- How did Paul know he was doing the right thing by putting himself in danger?
- When is it appropriate to disregard the advice of people who love you?
- Why is it important to continue to obey your parents and seek their advice?
- How can you know if you should put yourself in danger or avoid it?
- How can staying fit spiritually prepare you to make wise decisions about danger?
- What should you consider when you're forced to make a quick decision that could put you in danger? (For example: Is this the only option for the desired outcome or is there a less dangerous way?)
- What will you do this week to get in better shape, spiritually speaking, so that you will be better prepared to face danger when it comes? Be as specific as possible.
- What trusted Christian adult will you turn to for advice when you're faced with a difficult decision about danger? Approach that person this week and ask him or her to begin praying that you will make wise decisions when you encounter dangerous situations.

IN THE WORD .12
The Week of August 17, 2008

Focal Passage: Acts 21:15–23:35

Focus of the Study: Paul’s arrest in Jerusalem

Life Question: What can I say when my actions or faith is challenged?

Teaching Goal: Lead students to understand that when we are called to explain our actions as Christians, we can use the opportunity to point to what Christ has done in our lives.

Get Started

After students arrive, call for volunteers to share times when they felt someone treated them unfairly. Be prepared to share your own experiences. Allow time for discussion.

Ask:

- **How much does it matter to you what other people think?**
- **Do you ever change something about yourself to please others?**
- **Is it wrong to let other people influence what we do? Why or why not?**

Explore the Bible

1. Envy, spite, or hatred can keep people from seeing a situation correctly (Acts 21:15-36).

Group students into teams of two or three and distribute several sheets of paper to each team. Lead teams to write on each sheet of paper one reason, good or bad, why a person might be motivated to change his or her behavior, attitude, or appearance. Instruct teams to attach their papers to the wall (with provided adhesive tape), then work as a class to place the papers into two groups: motives that please God and motives that don’t.

Briefly discuss how students think Paul would respond to people who tried to influence what he wore or how he acted. Call on a volunteer to read aloud Acts 21:15-26 and discuss what might have motivated Paul to agree to the elders’ recommendation. Lead students to consider how they grouped the motives and to move any motives to the other group, if necessary. Talk about how Paul’s example contradicts our sense of independence as well as the common belief that acting differently for the sake of others is an unnecessary compromise. Stress that Paul responded to the Jews’ concern with respect and didn’t cause a needless conflict or otherwise offend the Jews, which would have interfered in them listening to his message.

On the board or a large sheet of paper, write the words “Transparency” and “Integrity.” Encourage students to always act with these two qualities when considering whether or not to modify something about themselves. Point out that while holding to the faith is vital, sometimes the things people challenge us about aren’t the most important battles to

fight. Point out that any moment a Christian is challenged about his or her faith can become an opportunity to talk about what Christ has done.

Direct students to silently read and consider Acts 21:27-36, then ask: **If you knew people would reject behavior that you changed just for them, would you still change it?**

Lead a discussion about students' responses. Begin a discussion about the motives behind our actions. Explain that other people sometimes misunderstand our motives when we do something for their benefit. Point out that God always has a clear view of our motives, good or bad.

Ask: **What are some reasons people might misinterpret our actions or motives when we're doing something good for God?** Discuss students' responses, then point out the Jews' response to Paul's good intentions and actions in Acts 21:27-28. Stress that the Jews were so angry with Paul that they were sure he had broken their law and defiled the temple. Point out that sometimes envy, anger, spite, and even hatred can keep people from seeing a situation clearly, but God always sees things clearly.

Ask:

- **What happened when Paul went to the temple? (21:27)**
- **Who seized Paul? (vv. 27-29)**
- **What were the charges against Paul? (vv. 28-29)**
- **Were these legitimate charges?**
- **How did the Roman commander save Paul's life? (v. 32)**
- **How was Paul arrested? (v. 33)**
- **Why was Paul taken away by the soldiers? (vv. 35-36)**

2. The best defense when challenged is to tell what Christ has done (Acts 21:37–23:10).

Call on a volunteer to read aloud Acts 21:37-40. Lead students to discover what unexpected opportunity Paul received by willingly acting in a certain way for people who didn't care. Explain that even when things turn out badly, God can bring about unexpected opportunities to honor Him. Emphasize the importance of acting to please God, rather than to bring about a desired outcome, and trusting Him to use our obedience to affect others in ways we can't see or understand.

Ask: **What's your response when someone questions or challenges your faith?**

Allow students to respond. Remind them of the accusation against Paul by re-reading Acts 21:28-29. Direct students to scan Acts 22:1-21 to discover how Paul defended himself against this accusation. Encourage them to call out ways Paul defended himself. When they discover he didn't defend himself, point out that Paul took this opportunity to point people to God instead of trying to clear his name.

Ask:

- **When might it be important to clear your reputation?**

- **Why didn't Paul do that in this situation?**

Stress that Paul wasn't there to argue. He wanted to proclaim his testimony to all people, including the Jews. He knew they could easily argue about their beliefs, but they couldn't argue about Paul's changed life. Sometimes, when challenged, the best response is not to be concerned with your reputation, but rather to point others to God and what He has done in your life. Stress that Christians should always be attentive to the Holy Spirit's leading and guidance in such situations.

Read aloud the "Think About This" paragraph on page 46 of *Collegiate* magazine. Allow time for silent reflection.

Apply to Life

Help students revisit the Life Question, *What can I say when my actions or faith is challenged?*

Lead the group in one or more of the lesson applications below. Then close the session with prayer.

- Prior to the session, locate a small fashion item that is out of style, such as a scarf, wristband, jacket, jewelry, or shirt. Offer the item for students to examine or try on. Ask: **Would you wear this item to class? on a date? to your wedding?** Point out that although this item has no significance, whether or not they're willing to act or dress a certain way for the sake of someone else could have eternal significance. Remind students how important it is to make decisions out of obedience to God, not to preserve their image or please others. Pray aloud, asking God to give students courage to obey Him, even when it means sacrificing their right to express themselves.
- Ask:
 - How can you be a peacemaker this upcoming week?
 - How can you help bridge racial and ethnic barriers this week?Share a personal story of persecution.

August 17, 2008

OPTIONAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What's your favorite movie? favorite place to eat? favorite song?
- Do you let the opinions of others affect what you do? Should you? Why or why not?
- What do you think the apostle Paul would say if someone became offended by something he said or did?
- What did Paul do when the elders said he should show the Jews that their assumptions about him were wrong?
- Does his response surprise you? Why?
- How concerned do you think he was about what people thought of him?
- What do you think motivated Paul to do what he did?
- What kind of a situation would it take for Paul to ignore their concerns?
- What are some things, good or bad, that motivate people to change their attitudes, actions, or appearance?
- What motivates you to change your attitude, actions, or appearance?
- How can your response to a challenge about your faith turn into an opportunity to share your faith?
- In Acts 21:27-29, of what was Paul accused?
- Did people believe it? How do you know?
- Have you ever believed something about someone based on a rumor? When?
- What does this passage suggest about rumors?
- Paul went to the temple to try to erase people's concerns about him. What happened instead?
- Why is it important to have the right motivation when doing something for the sake of others?
- What should be your motivation? (*You should act out of obedience to God, not to bring about a specific outcome.*)
- If you knew people would reject your efforts to make things right with them, would you still try? Why or why not?
- What unexpected opportunity did Paul gain because the people rejected his effort to erase their concerns about him?
- Do you think Paul would have had this opportunity if he hadn't made the effort? Why or why not?
- What unexpected ministry opportunity have you gotten through a situation that seemed to turn out all wrong?
- How easy is it for you to leave the results up to God when you act in obedience? Explain.
- How did Paul quickly establish common ground with people who hated him?
- What do you find most effective about what he said in these verses?
- Who (person or group) hates you or has no respect for you?
- How can you establish common ground with him/her or them?
- Where does Paul refute the accusations made against him in Acts 21:28-29? (*Nowhere.*)
- Why didn't Paul defend himself?

- What was the focus of his testimony?
- Would you be able to keep from defending yourself in a situation like this in order to keep the focus on God? Explain.
- Share the basics of your testimony with a partner.
- Does your testimony focus on what God has done or on what you have accomplished?
- How can you change your story to focus more on God?
- What will you do this week to establish common ground with a person or group who doesn't like you?
- What steps will you take this week to turn challenges to your faith into opportunities to testify about God?
- This week, how will you strive to seek the Holy Spirit's guidance in all things rather than following the rest of the crowd?

IN THE WORD .13
The Week of August 24, 2008

Focal Passage: Acts 24–26

Focus of the Study: Paul’s defense before the Roman leaders

Life Question: How can my testimony make a difference?

Teaching Goal: Lead students to understand that when we center our testimonies in truth, God can use our stories to lead others to Him.

Get Started

Pre-enlist three students or adults to perform a simple demonstration (such as cooking or tying a necktie). Instruct one person to speak only true, relevant facts about the demonstration. Another person should share irrelevant information, and another should go into too much detail about everything. Use these demonstrations to segue into a conversation about what’s appropriate and relevant to share in certain situations. Explain that when Paul talked about what Jesus had done in his life, he told his listeners only what was relevant to them and the situation.

Optional Activity

As students arrive, group them into teams of four and instruct at least one pre-enlisted student in each group to share a three-minute testimony about how they came to know Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. Call the teams together after each has had time to share, then lead the group in a time of prayer.

Explore the Bible

1. A defense of the gospel focuses on the truth, not opinion, and it does not compromise (Acts 24–25).

Call on a volunteer to read aloud Acts 24. Share that there are many common points between this study and the previous one. Use this session to focus on the particulars of how we share our testimonies.

Without causing students to feel guilty, encourage students who have never shared their testimonies to do so. Be prepared to share your own testimony.

Read aloud the “Word Study” on page 47 of *Collegiate* magazine. Allow time for discussion.

2. Communicating your testimony in Christ (Acts 26:1-23).

Explain that although we should always watch for opportunities to talk about our faith, certain times are more appropriate than others. Remind students that in last week’s Scripture passage, Paul volunteered to speak in front of a hostile crowd in Jerusalem (Acts 21:35-39). Explain that later on, Paul responded differently to an offer to defend himself in Jerusalem.

Call on a volunteer to read aloud Acts 25:6-12, then ask: **How did Paul respond when Festus asked him to defend himself in Jerusalem?**

Discuss some possible reasons for Paul's refusal to return to Jerusalem, then emphasize that there are times and places when sharing our story might compromise the gospel. Lead students to name ways the gospel could be compromised because someone shared at an inappropriate time (such as getting "preachy" to an unsaved friend who is experiencing grief).

Remind students that we should never compromise the gospel by speaking scriptural half-truths or deliberately putting the gospel in a situation where it will be perverted. Talk about how Paul was willing to stand for the truth, but not in situations in which his testimony would be compromised and distorted. Discuss that God sometimes leads people to speak their story to others who will make fun of them or treat them with hostility. Stress that only God can give us the wisdom to know when to speak and when to remain silent. Be sure students understand that the key to knowing when to share and when to remain silent is listening to and living according to the Holy Spirit's guidance.

3. Regardless of the reaction, we are to share our testimonies with courtesy (Acts 26:24-29).

Explain to students that although there are times when it is best to remain silent, God gives believers many appropriate opportunities to share their testimonies. Emphasize the importance of being prepared to tell others what Jesus has done in their lives, then explain that their testimonies should include three parts: life before Christ, encounter with Christ, and life since meeting Christ.

Ask: **How much detail of your life before Christ should you include in your testimony?**

Call on a volunteer to read aloud Acts 26:1-11. Lead students to list what Paul shared with King Agrippa about his past and why they think he shared those particular details. Point out that Paul didn't share random facts to prove how "bad" he was before meeting Christ. He shared specific details because of the way they related to God's work in his life.

Distribute pens and index cards to students and direct them to write at the top "Before Christ..." Then guide them to list on the card a few facts about their lives before Christ. Explain that they will use these details later in the lesson and encourage them to add additional facts throughout the lesson as they come to mind.

Call on a volunteer to read aloud Acts 26:12-18. Ask: **What amazes you most about the way Paul met Jesus?** Point out how the details Paul shared about his encounter with Christ specifically relate to the details he shared about his life before Christ.

Distribute another index card to students and direct them to write at the top "Meeting Christ..." Guide them to list details about their own encounter with Christ, then ask:

What amazes you most about the way you met Jesus? Encourage students to spend time this week thinking about this question if they don't have an answer.

Call on a volunteer to read aloud Acts 26:19-23, then direct students to notice how Paul's description of his life after meeting Christ contrasts his description of his life before Christ in a very specific way.

Distribute a third index card and direct students to write at the top "Since Meeting Christ..." Direct them to list on the card specific ways their lives have changed since their encounter with Christ.

Say: Paul did not resort to cheap flattery, but expressed a sincere honor to be before King Agrippa. He affirmed Agrippa's ability to understand what he was about to say. Even though Paul's life was at stake, he still thought of the one to whom he was speaking and encouraged Agrippa to come to Christ.

Ask: **What is a testimony?** (*To speak forth in establishing the truth about a matter.*)

Explain that a testimony is the story of how we came to know Jesus and how He's made a difference in our lives.

Ask: **Why give your testimony?**

- *Personal stories are powerful tools in evangelism.*
- *Hearing our stories about how Jesus has changed our lives can help others identify a need and recognize a desire for Jesus in their lives, too.*

Apply to Life

Help students revisit the Life Question, *How can my testimony make a difference?*

Lead the group in one or more of the lesson applications below. Then close the session with prayer.

- Ask the following questions and discuss:
 - **What public officials can you pray for this week?**
 - **What story of God in your life can you prepare to share with others this week?**
 - **How can you share your personal testimony this upcoming week?**
- Lead students to review the details they listed on each of their index cards, then guide them to choose which details tell their stories best. Encourage them to record those details on the back of one of the index cards. Explain that students should know their testimony well enough to share it at a moment's notice. Challenge them to keep the details of their testimony fresh in their minds and to remain flexible and able to share the facts that are most appropriate in diverse situations.

Instruct students to find a partner and to practice sharing their testimonies with

each other, then call students together as a large group. Lead them to discuss what they found most difficult about sharing their testimony. Encourage students to find at least one appropriate opportunity to share their story this week and to come to class next week prepared to share what happened during that encounter. Close the session by praying for God to give your students discernment to know how and when to share this week, as well as a sincere desire to see others come to know Jesus by hearing their stories.

Optional Activity

Lead an activity on how to develop your testimony, found in *Extra Resources*.

August 24, 2008

OPTIONAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- If you were accused of a crime, what qualities or skills would you look for in your lawyer?
- What information would you include in your testimony?
- If you needed to convince your parents that you had tried your best in a class, even though you made a bad grade, what would you say?
- What do you think is the best way for a person to share his or her Christian testimony with someone?
- Why do you think Paul refused to testify in Jerusalem?
- What are some reasons Paul may not have wanted to return and testify in Jerusalem?
- Are there times when it might be better not to share your testimony? When?
- What are some ways sharing your testimony in the wrong way or at the wrong time could compromise the gospel?
- How can you know when to keep quiet?
- What details did Paul give King Agrippa about his life before he met Christ?
- Why do you think he chose those details?
- How much detail should a Christian go into about his or her life before Christ?
- What details about your life before Christ do you think you should include in your testimony?
- What is most amazing to you about the way Paul met Christ?
- What is most amazing to you about the way you met Christ?
- How does Paul's encounter with Christ directly relate to the details he shared about his life before Christ?
- What are some benefits of sharing the facts of your personal encounter with Christ rather than arguing about what the Bible says?
- What facts from your encounter with Christ do you think would be helpful for others to hear?
- How do Paul's details of his life since meeting Christ contrast the details he shared about his life before Christ?
- What specific ways did Paul's life change as a result of meeting Christ?
- What specific ways has your life changed as a result of meeting Christ?
- Why do you need to tell others about how your life has changed since meeting Christ?
- What are some reasons people share their testimonies, good and bad?
- Why did Paul share his testimony with King Agrippa?
- What was Paul's goal in this situation?
- What is your goal when you share your testimony?
- What are some of your underlying, less obvious goals for sharing your story?
- How would the way you told your story be affected if your goals for telling it completely honored God?
- If you put together relevant facts about your life before Christ, your encounter with Christ, and your life since meeting Christ, what would your testimony say?
- How could you make your story relevant to a friend who thinks she's pregnant? a

parent or other relative who has lost a job? a friend who doesn't believe God is real? a sibling getting bad grades at school?

- Who do you know who needs to hear your story this week?
- What commitment will you make about sharing your story this week?

IN THE WORD .14
The Week of August 31, 2008

Focal Passage: Acts 27–28

Focus of the Study: Paul’s journey to Rome

Life Question: How do I interpret interruptions in my life?

Teaching Goal: Lead students to understand that each situation in which we find ourselves can be an opportunity to minister to others.

Get Started

Prior to the session, gather a permanent marker, some clear plastic cups, and a variety of bottles of water, soft drinks, and juices. As students arrive, discuss opportunities they had this week to share their testimonies with others. When most students have arrived, distribute a plastic cup and permanent marker to each student and lead them to write on their cup a recent interruption in their lives, either trivial or serious. Invite students to pour themselves something to drink, then call on volunteers to tell the group what’s in their cup. Point out that although it’s obvious when a cup contains grape juice or cola, we often don’t think about what else it contains—air. Explain that we often approach the interruptions in our lives in the same manner: we see the frustration but we don’t recognize that God is at work in the situation.

Call on volunteers to share the interruptions they listed on their cups, then ask:

- **How do you view interruptions?**
- **What type of interruption frustrates you the most?**
- **How do you feel when you have to interrupt someone?**

Hold up a cup and explain that when we experience an interruption, we often focus on the inconvenience, frustration, or even pain the interruption has caused. What we don’t often think about is what purpose God might have for giving us this interruption.

Explain that today’s study will focus on how Paul responded to interruptions in his life. It also will challenge students to see their own interruptions as possible God-given opportunities and to respond accordingly.

Explore the Bible

1. Life’s journeys often include unexpected detours and dangers (Acts 27).

Explain to students that travel delays are a common interruption. Write on the board or a large sheet of paper the words “Accident,” “Detour,” and “Bad Weather.” Point out that during Paul’s trip to Rome, he experienced several travel mishaps. Summarize his travel problems in verses 1-14, then call on a volunteer to read aloud verses 15-20. Discuss how students think they would react to this storm. Read aloud verses 21-25, 33-36. Then ask:

- **How did Paul respond to the storm?**

- **How did his response affect others?**

Talk with students about what this account might have meant to members of the early church who read Acts 27 or heard about Paul's journey.

Ask:

- **Why did Luke include so much detail about the storm?**
- **Why is Paul's experience important for us to read?**

Lead students to find evidence that Paul trusted God during this storm, then emphasize that because Paul maintained an intimate relationship with God, he was able to rely on that relationship for strength during this frightening experience. He also was able to encourage his frightened shipmates.

Lead students to think about a time of unexpected crisis or danger they have encountered, then instruct them to evaluate how much they truly trusted God, based on how they responded to the situation. Discuss practical steps they can take to prepare themselves to be able to trust God and encourage others during frightening times. Challenge students to list these steps and keep them in a place where they can review them when faced with a frightening situation. Stress that while interruptions in our lives can be frightening, we can always rely on God for strength and peace in the middle of them.

Read aloud "Think About This" on page 48 of *Collegiate* magazine. Allow time for reflection and/or discussion.

2. Our difficulties can be an opportunity to minister to others (Acts 28:1-10).

Direct students' attention back to the concept of travel delays and instruct them to call out possible reasons God might cause (or allow) those delays. Call on a volunteer to read aloud Acts 28:1-10, then discuss what possible reasons God may have had for allowing this detour in Paul's travel plans.

Explain that when a trip is interrupted by a detour, people often react with irritation or anger. Point out that when Paul was forced to take a detour to Malta, he immediately looked for opportunities to minister in his new situation.

Ask:

- **How did Paul minister to others on the island of Malta?**
- **How can carrying firewood be just as effective at ministering to others as healing a sick person?**
- **What does this tell you about ways God might want to use you to minister to others?**

Challenge students to list three inconvenient situations they might experience in their own lives and how they can use those situations as ministry opportunities. Lead them to share their situations and possible ministry opportunities with the group as they feel comfortable. Introduce students to the term *divine appointments* and discuss how God

can use situations that seem frustrating and difficult to us as a way to minister to others.

3. Times of waiting can be times of ministry (Acts 28:11-31).

Explain that being forced to wait for no reason is often just as frustrating as an interruption. Summarize Acts 28:11-16, then call for a volunteer to read aloud verses 30-31. Explain that Paul had come to Rome in hopes of gaining his freedom but instead was kept as a prisoner for at least two more years, perhaps longer. Share about your own experiences of being forced to wait for something “for no good reason” and urge students to do the same. Explain that sometimes God causes delays to give us time to prepare for a specific task, and other times there’s a specific task He wants us to complete during the delay. Stress that although Paul did not have complete freedom and he was awaiting trial, he did not sit idly by. He continued to speak and minister. Because Paul was forced to wait, he was able to write Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

Ask:

- **Who does Paul speak to in Rome? (28:17)**
- **In his meeting with the Jewish leaders, what points did he make? (vv. 17-20)**
- **How did the Jewish leaders respond? (vv. 21-22)**
- **Describe the meeting between Paul and the Jewish leaders. (vv. 23–24)**

Emphasize the importance of patience and seeking God’s wisdom during a delay to avoid missing God’s direction during that time.

Ask:

- **What are the situations in your life in which you are waiting?**
- **What might God be trying to teach you in this time?**
- **What might God be calling you to do during this time?**

Challenge students to prayerfully consider these questions. Stress that God doesn’t always follow our plan, schedule, or time frame. Explain that waiting isn’t always easy, but sometimes it is necessary and can be an opportunity to allow God to work in and through us.

Apply to Life

Help students revisit the Life Question, *How do I interpret interruptions in my life?*

Share the following description of a witness.

A witness is someone who sees something and tells others about it. As it pertains to our faith, a witness is someone who tells the truth about Jesus Christ. The Greek word for witness is marturh from which we get our word martyr. So many Christians sealed their testimony of Jesus Christ with their blood that the terms were practically interchangeable. In fact, many were drawn to faith in Christ by observing how calmly and joyously Christians often met their deaths. Theirs was a not-so-silent witness.

Ask: **How can you be an obedient witness in sharing the gospel with the people around you?** Close in prayer.

August 31, 2008

OPTIONAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What type of interruption frustrates you the most?
- How do you feel when you have to interrupt someone?
- Why do you think God allows inconveniences and interruptions into our lives, especially at the worst possible moments?
- How do you think the ship's crew and passengers were feeling during this storm?
- What clues do you see that the crew was starting to get desperate?
- How is this account of a ship in a storm similar to a difficult time in your life? How is it different?
- How have you responded to unexpected, difficult times in your life?
- How was Paul's attitude different from the others on board?
- How did his response affect others?
- What do you think this account might have meant to members of the early church who read Acts 27 or heard about Paul's journey?
- Why is Paul's experience important for us to read?
- How could he remain so calm during such a terrible storm?
- Why didn't Paul ask God to stop the storm?
- When has God given you peace and focus during a difficult situation?
- Is your reaction to frightening experiences more like Paul's or the crew's?
- Did Paul view this shipwreck as an interruption or an opportunity?
- How can carrying firewood be just as effective at ministering to others as healing a sick person?
- What does this say about ways God might want to use you to minister to others?
- What types of interruptions do you typically experience? How will you learn to regard and act on these interruptions as ministry opportunities?
- How long did Paul have to wait under house arrest in Rome?
- Why do you think God allowed him to wait for so long?
- What did Paul do with his time while he waited?
- When have you been forced to wait?
- How did you use your time?
- What could you have done differently?
- What can you learn from Paul's responses to the frightening storm, shipwreck, and waiting in Rome?
- Can you think of a time when you might have missed a ministry opportunity because you brushed off an interruption? When?
- What could you realistically have done differently?
- How will you use "waiting time" more efficiently to honor God with every moment He gives you?
- What detours or interruptions might God be placing on your life today?
- What might God be trying to teach you in this time?
- What might God be calling you to do in this time?
- What steps will you take to respond to Him and the opportunities He has given you to serve Him and others?