

THIS IS US

Week Seven | September 24, 2017 | Sharing the Gospel Boldly

PREPARATION

MONDAY THROUGH WEDNESDAY

Spend some time alone with God's Word reading through Matthew 10:32-33, Mark 8:38, Acts 9:27-28, Romans 1:16, Ephesians 6:19-20, and 2 Corinthians 5:11-20. Pray that God, through His Spirit, would bring to life the truths of this text and allow you to teach it well to those in your care.

THURSDAY THROUGH SATURDAY

Read through the questions included in the guide this week. Many questions have been included in this week's guide. Read through this lesson to determine which questions will work best to encourage, push, and grow your group.

DAILY

As you prepare, pray for the preaching of God's Word this coming week at the corporate church gathering. Pray also for your time together as a group, that the Spirit would make effective your teaching and bring gospel clarity, gospel change, and a heart for gospel mission to those that are present.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL REALITY

We are called to obediently and unashamedly share the gospel with others.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

In order to be good gospel witnesses who are unashamed and bold, we must acknowledge Jesus in our daily lives, understand the gospel's power to save souls, rely on the prayers of our community, view unbelievers through a spiritual lens instead of a worldly one, and view ourselves as ambassadors. When we do this, we share the gospel in a biblical way.

MEDITATE

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." (Romans 1:16)

GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

- 🗣️: *What are some events or experiences in your life that were so exciting you had to share with others? How often do you feel this excited about sharing the gospel?*
- 🗣️: *What are the big fears most Christians have about sharing the gospel? What makes you nervous or timid to share about your faith?*
- 🗣️: *What does consistent isolation do to a person? How does this impact those who love the isolated person?*
- 🗣️: *Why do non-Christians have a hard time hearing the gospel from someone who does not follow Jesus as Lord in their everyday decisions?*

Whether we realize it or not, everyone evangelizes in some way. While sharing the gospel seems like something only Christians do, the truth is, everyone shares “good news” with others. In fact, people do it every single day, religious or not. Whether it’s the new job we just landed, the cutting-edge gadget we just got, the new health fad we are learning about, or the team that just won the biggest game of the year, we like to tell other people the big news going on in our lives. We share videos, send texts, and comment online about our passions almost daily, telling all of our virtual contacts about the things we value most. With every post, comment, or share, we are telling some sort of news to people around us. We do it instinctively.

In this lesson, we will learn about sharing a particular type of news with others: the gospel. If sharing the message of Christ isn’t something we do often, there’s usually a reason why. Perhaps there’s an excitement missing or a boldness that’s lacking. Perhaps there’s a crucial element absent from our whole perspective about gospel-sharing. In this lesson, we will unpack the elements necessary for a good gospel witness, and prayerfully over time, we will become just that.

Q: *What are you most passionate about? What things do you naturally like to share with others?*

Q: *What makes you pick up the phone and call a friend, gushing with details? Why do you think you don't bring this type of confidence and boldness in sharing the gospel with lost friends?*

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

Up to this point in our series, we've explored multiple parts of our identity in Christ. We are a people defined by the gospel, a people of the Scriptures, a people committed to church planting, a people offered hope in brokenness, a people committed to the vulnerable, and a people committed to small groups. In this lesson, we will learn about another aspect of who we are as believers: a people committed to boldly sharing the gospel. Through this week's Scripture passages, we will learn that a faithful witness for the Lord must do these three things:

1. ACKNOWLEDGE CHRIST IN ORDINARY LIFE

2. BE UNASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL

3. BE A PRAYERFUL AMBASSADOR FOR THE LORD

GOING DEEPER

+ *This next section will help show what God's Word says about this week's particular focus. Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week's biblical truth.*

ACKNOWLEDGE CHRIST IN ORDINARY LIFE

■ 10:32-33 AND MARK 8:38

Q: *What is on the line if we don't acknowledge Jesus before others?*

Q: *Explain why the Bible equates “denying” Jesus in our daily life with being “ashamed” of him. Given this definition, what does being “unashamed” mean?*

When it comes to sharing the gospel with others, the first step is simply acknowledging our faith around our lost friends in our daily lives. Do we live in a way that clearly reveals we know the son of God, who paid for all our sins, gave us his perfect record, and conquered the grave? Before we can share the gospel explicitly with people, our life must show that we actually believe it ourselves. If we don't acknowledge Jesus' place in our day to day lives, why would someone trust a gospel conversation we have with them? More than that, if we don't acknowledge Jesus in front of our earthly relationships, he says that he won't acknowledge us before all of heaven's citizens, including the Father and the angels! If we confess him in our words and actions, Jesus will do the same for us before the Father. If our lives prove that we don't really follow him as Lord, he takes that as a denial, and promises to deny us before the Father as well. It is here that Jesus equates the idea of outward denial with internal shame. For Christ, to deny him in our life and words is to be ashamed of him. On the flip side, being “unashamed” is equal to confessing or acknowledging him in our lives and before others. Jesus' point is clear: if we aren't acknowledging him as Lord in our daily life and decisions, then inwardly, he isn't actually our Lord in the end.

Q: *Do the non-Christians in your life know you're a believer? If you shared the gospel with them tomorrow, would they be surprised to know you follow Christ?*

Q: *What daily habits in your life fail to show that Jesus is Lord? How do you “deny” him in certain areas?*

First, we want Christ to know that we acknowledge him. And second, we want others around us to know we acknowledge him. Before we ever get to the ministry of actually sharing Jesus' gospel verbally, we must determine if our daily deeds give evidence to our relationship with him. Why would we ask a lost person to acknowledge Jesus as Lord during a gospel conversation if we haven't done the same in our daily lives? As we make a habit of “confessing Christ” in ordinary moments, our gospel message will have much more credibility with our lost friends and family.

Q: Explain why gospel conversations come more easily when our lives show evidence that Jesus is Lord.

BE UNASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL

■ ROMANS 1:16 AND ACTS 9:27-28

Q: Why is Paul “not ashamed” of the gospel in Romans 1:16?

Q: Given that Jesus equates being unashamed with outward acknowledgement, what do we expect of Paul when he says he’s “unashamed” of the gospel?

Now that we know the first step to being effective gospel witnesses is acknowledging Jesus in our day to day lives, we can move on to the second step: understanding the power of the gospel. When we understand this “power of the gospel,” we become unashamed of it, and once unashamed, we acknowledge it before others. So what kind of power does the gospel have, exactly?

Paul tells us in Romans 1 that the gospel is “the power of God for salvation.” This little phrase has incredibly deep meaning. Paul is saying that when the gospel is verbally shared with others, God is active and present, working to bring the hearts of lost people to faith. The gospel is God telling of His great love for wayward people through the mouths of His followers. The message of the gospel is not a lifeless lecture about stale religious history; instead, it is God at work! As scholar Robert Mounce puts it, “to truly hear the gospel is to experience the very presence of God.” The gospel, when shared with our lost friends or family, brings with it the power to save. We don’t muster up the power of salvation. God brings the power through the message itself. In short, the mouthpiece doesn’t bring the ability to save, the message does. This frees us from pressure when it comes to sharing the gospel. The results aren’t up to us! The gospel itself carries the transformational power required for a lost person who is spiritually dead to become found – made spiritually alive. All we must do is open our mouths and let the power of the gospel work through us!

When we finally understand the power that the gospel message brings with it, then we, like Paul, are emboldened and unashamed to share it with others. Why would we ever hide or hold back such a powerful agent of change in someone else’s life? We, like Paul, can share the good news confidently, saying “I’d be ashamed of this message if

it did nothing or ended up being fake. But I'm not ashamed of this message, because it actually has the power to change people, and I'm one of them! This message has proven it's own power in the lives of countless believers around the globe. It changes everything."

Q: *In Acts 9:27-28, once Paul has experienced the power of the gospel for himself, what does he do?*

Q: *What does Paul's example teach us about how we are to respond to the gospel?*

We know that Paul says he's unashamed of the gospel in Romans 1, but what does this look like in his own life? In Acts 9:27-28, after his encounter with Christ, Paul comes to understand the true scope and power of the gospel. As a result, he shares about his conversion with Barnabas, who ends up introducing him to the apostles. Though the apostles are skeptical of Paul, who used to persecute the church, Barnabas vouches for him. Barnabas shares a clear report of everything Paul has told him, as well as what he has seen of Paul's ministry with his own eyes.

Verse 27 reveals that first, Paul obviously relayed his entire gospel experience to believers like Barnabas—how he had “seen the Lord, who spoke to him” on the Damascus road. When we meet the Lord and are changed by Him we can't help but tell those around us what happened! We run to the family of faith and share what happened to us, and to join them. Second, in verse 27 we see that Paul didn't just run to tell believers about his experience, but many unbelievers too, as “at Damascus he preached boldly in the name of the Lord.” Paul does not hide himself away with the current believers after his conversion, staying in a Christian bubble. While he definitely joined the other believers in fellowship, Paul also boldly shared the gospel with non-Christians all throughout Damascus, to anyone who would listen to his message that Jesus was the Christ.

This teaches us something very vital: with believers, our experience with the gospel is meant to be celebrated, while with unbelievers, it's meant to be shared. When we come to faith, we join one group (believers) and we invite another group (the lost) into what we've experienced. Paul shows us exactly what being unashamed looks like, as he clearly acknowledges Christ before everyone in his life, both believers and nonbelievers. He has experienced the gospel's power firsthand, and he can't wait to let that power out in the lives of others by boldly and unashamedly declaring the gospel message. Empowered by our own firsthand experience with Jesus, we too can go out in confidence and unashamedly share the gospel with those who don't know him.

Q: *What barriers keep you from boldly sharing the gospel?*

BE A PRAYERFUL AMBASSADORS FOR THE LORD

EPHESIANS 6:19-20 AND 2 CORINTHIANS 5:11-20

Q: *What does Paul ask of the Ephesian believers?*

Q: *Why do you think Paul asks for this?*

We've seen that being effective witnesses for Christ requires acknowledging him in our daily lives and understanding the gospel's power to save souls. Now, in Ephesians 6, we see two other aspects of being an effective witness. First, we see that Paul's efforts in evangelism are not a solo-project. He asks for many to pray for him as he shares the gospel with others! He considers their prayers and his gospel proclamation to be working in partnership with one another, resulting in the salvation of many. In verse 19, he asks the Ephesian believers to pray specifically for words to be given to him as he boldly declares Jesus' good news with unbelievers. We, too, must not assume we can go out into the world sharing the gospel alone, with no prayerful support system. As we learned last week, we are a people of community. There's nothing in the Christian life that we do alone, and this includes our gospel witness to lost friends and family! While we share the hope of the gospel with others, we must always prepare by asking other believers to intercede on our behalf, and rest in their prayers. Like Paul, we must ask specifically for our community to pray for God to give us the exact words needed to reach our lost friends and family with the gospel. We must lean into the prayers of our community if we want to properly share the good news.

Q: *When preparing for a spiritual conversation with a lost friend or family member, do you ask for others to pray? Why do we often forget to do this?*

Q: *2 Corinthians 5:16 tells Christians to view people through what lens? What does it mean to view a person according to "the flesh"?*

On top of leaning into prayer, Paul gives us another strategy for sharing the gospel more effectively: looking at people through the right lens. He tells us not to view people "according to the flesh." Just as he misjudged Jesus, seeing him as a troublemaking Jewish carpenter, Paul warns that we, too, can easily misjudge those around us.

Paul once sized up Jesus according to worldly standards, and was blinded to the fact that Christ was the true

Messiah. He expected the Messiah to be a powerful political hero, overturning Rome's power and reinstating the Jewish people to their former glory and influence. Instead, the Messiah came as a nobody, a poor carpenter born under scandalous circumstances who suffered a criminal's death on a Roman cross. This man, in Paul's mind at one time, was the farthest thing from the Messiah. He didn't ruin Rome for the sake of the Jews. Rome ruined him at the request of the Jews! For Paul, before meeting Christ on the Damascus road, the belief of Jesus as the true Messiah was foolishness. Paul's entire perspective about Jesus was off because he was judging Jesus by the values of the world instead of viewing him from the perspective of God. The world judges a person by their outward offerings: money, prestige, power, influence, and status. God judges a person based on their inward heart: humility, character, integrity, and loyalty. Jesus was the perfect Messiah, but because he didn't look the way that many Jews expected, Paul missed him.

We, too, can view people according to the flesh. We can look through the wrong lens, and size up unbelieving people according to worldly standards. Instead of judging people according to the world's standards, we should look at them through heaven's lens. Many times, we look at the lives of the lost around us and assume they aren't interested in Jesus, have hostility toward the gospel, or hate spirituality in general. Or, perhaps, we see them as fine without God. They have a pleasant job, an enjoyable family, good health, and money to spare, so we assume that offering them hope in Jesus would make no sense to them. But we must remember that from heaven's view, there are only two types of people: those who are spiritually bankrupt, and those who have riches in Christ. No matter what condition we presume our lost friends are in, we must check our assumptions at the door, and share the gospel with them anyway. Only God can truly read someone's heart and soften it to hear the good news. We have no idea what secret issues are going on underneath a person's façade, or what spiritual questions they may have. We must trust that God knows these things, and like Paul, view our lost friends and families as those who need Christ.

❓: *What does Paul consider himself in Ephesians 6:20? According to 2 Corinthians 5:11-20, does he believe this is a job for just himself?*

❓: *How would you define the role of an ambassador?*

So far, we've seen that being a good gospel witness requires us to acknowledge Jesus in our daily lives, understand the gospel's power to save, rely on the prayers of our community, and look at unbelievers through a spiritual lens instead of a worldly one. Finally, Paul gives us a final strategy: looking at ourselves through the right lens. As we see in both Ephesians 6 and 2 Corinthians 5, Paul uses the term "ambassador" for both himself and Christians in general. Instead of seeing the Christian as a lecturer who simply spouts off personal viewpoints and agendas, the Bible considers us ambassadors who speak on behalf of a superior.

Ambassadors hold a very honored position. They usually represent a king, president, or governing figure and carry

messages from the figure to other leaders. Important for us to note, though, is that the message an ambassador brings originates from the king. While the ambassador has some liberty to speak on behalf of the king in negotiations, the original message and its limitations are set up by the governing figure, not the ambassador. In short, while a lecturer speaks for himself, an ambassador speaks for a ruler. Paul helps us see that we are the Lord's ambassadors, those who carry a gospel message of "reconciliation." From heaven's ruler himself, we are the bearers of God's message that the Lord wants to be reconciled with mankind, and he's made a way to do that through Christ. When we view ourselves through this lens of ambassador, we realize the incredible task the Lord has given us to speak to the lost on behalf of God! What a privilege! Just as we have been reconciled to God, in our new role as ambassador, we invite others to be reconciled to Him, too. Sharing the gospel message becomes an exciting mission when we view ourselves through this lens.

NEXT STEPS

+ Connect the truths from God's Word to your daily life. Process how what you've learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.

- Q: Consider the habits in your life that do not demonstrate that you believe Jesus is Lord. How can you live in a way that displays Christ to your lost friends, showing that he is the ultimate authority in your life?*
- Q: As we saw from Paul's example, asking believers to pray for us as we share the gospel with others is crucial. Take time to think of a prayer team that can faithfully intercede for you as you share the gospel this week and month.*
- Q: Who in your life do you view "according to the flesh?" Who do you judge by worldly standards, assuming there's no hope for them to come to know Jesus? What would being an ambassador to this person look like?*
- Q: Think about your weekly schedule. In the coming weeks and months, when can you share the gospel with a person who needs to hear it? How can you make yourself available and ready when these conversations naturally arise? Ask your group to pray with you for opportunities to pursue gospel conversations in your daily life.*

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.

- God, thank you for reconciling me to yourself even though I, like Paul, didn't understand the gospel at first.
- God, help me view nonbelievers through your lens instead of a worldly one. Give me a burden for those who don't know you.
- God, bring to mind those that need to hear the gospel in my life. Grant me great boldness to share the gospel with them this week.
- God, help me remember that the result of sharing the gospel is not up to me. I am simply called to share the message, and you produce the fruit.

COMMENTARY

MATTHEW 10:33 In tragic irony, Jesus tells us that the eternal consequences for those who deny him will be far worse than the persecution that they sought to avoid.

ACTS 9:27 According to Gal. 1:18–19, this visit between Paul and Barnabas took place three years after his conversion. Paul also met with Peter for 15 days and later met James, the brother of Jesus.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17 Though our lesson centers on the way Christians should view non-Christians in their witnessing, this passage also teaches how a Christian should view his fellow Christian: as a new creation. Just as a believer should view an unbeliever through a spiritual lens, he should view his Christian brother or sister likewise. While a Christian should view the lost as those who do not have the Spirit, cannot escape slavery to sin, and have a hard heart toward God, a Christian should view his fellow believer as just the opposite, one who does have the Spirit, is free from the power of sin and their past mistakes, with a new heart of flesh that has the ability to love God and others, all due to Christ. This “new creation” is also the beginning of Israel's final restoration from God's judgment in the exile (see the context of Isa. 43:1–21; 65:17–25).

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