

Session 5: The Church Is Built through Blocking & Tackling

SESSION GOALS

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

Main Idea

The most powerful thing we can do to build the church is the ordinary, common work of discipleship and evangelism.

Head Change

To know that staying faithful to our calling is the most powerful way we can build God’s church.

Heart Change

To feel boldness in the face of opposition to the gospel.

Life Change

To seek out ways we can be missionaries for Jesus, wherever God has placed us.

OPEN

What habits have you taken up in your adult life that have changed the way you live or work?

It is often the little things, the small habits, that make the biggest changes in our lives. Small habits—things like eating healthier, practicing an instrument, or reading one chapter of a book every night—reap big rewards over time.

In today’s session, Louie Giglio will show us the fundamental habits that built God’s church. They are so basic we might not think of them as revolutionary. But when we practice them, we will see incredible breakthroughs for the kingdom of God.

DISCUSS

These four chapters of Acts represent a radical change in the early church. For the first time, God established a predominantly Gentile church in Antioch. While most of the leaders of the church lived in Jerusalem, the church in Antioch began to lead the way in sending missionaries and establishing new churches.

Read Acts 11:19–21.

In the last session, we saw God sending his witnesses to people who had never heard about the work of Jesus. **In what ways did those who came to faith continue in evangelism without the apostles?**

We don't know the names of the men from Cyprus and Cyrene who proclaimed the good news of Jesus to the people of Antioch. But through them, God established one of the most influential churches in the ancient world. **How important is it to you to be recognized for your accomplishments? What do you want people to think when they hear your name?**

Our ambitions to make an impact or to be remembered aren't necessarily evil. But we get into trouble when we would rather be remembered for temporary success rather than eternal impact. **In what ways could your passions and ambitions be used to build God's church?**

Would you be okay if you, like the men of Cyprus and Cyrene, had an impact but were forgotten by history? Why or why not?

Louie spent a lot of time in this session talking about "the power of stay." In today's culture, many of us are drawn to the next fun thing and find it difficult to anchor ourselves in familiar work. But the familiar work God calls us to can change our workplaces, neighborhoods, and churches when we stick with it. Read Acts 11:22–26.

Saul was hidden away in Tarsus so that the Jewish authorities would not kill him (9:29–30). We don't know what Saul did in Tarsus, but it wasn't the influential ministry he would do later in life. Today, we want our work to be visible and appreciated and we tend to believe the most visible ministry leaders are the most influential and worthy of praise. But we forget that God protected Saul by hiding him. **In what ways can a quiet and small ministry be impactful? How might God be protecting you by not making you more visible?**

Saul and Barnabas spent a year actively ministering to the Gentiles, a group of people most followers of Jesus had dismissed as unsavable (see 11:1–18). But it was these unlikely converts who became so enraptured by Jesus that they were called Christians, meaning “those of Christ.” **When do people realize you are “of Christ”? What actions, reputation, and attitudes in your life mark you as a person who follows Jesus?**

Note: To take a deeper look at the word “Christian,” go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.

Saul and Barnabas nurtured the faith of the Antioch Christians for a year, which can feel like a long time. But their long commitment to these Gentiles established a church sold out to Jesus and his work. **What could you do to help establish the church in your community? How long would you be willing to do this work?**

While the church in Antioch was thriving, the church in Jerusalem was suffering from a famine (11:27–30) and ongoing persecution. Read Acts 12:1–5.

The persecution of the church in Jerusalem had escalated. King Herod, the political leader of the Jews, killed the disciple James and imprisoned Peter. We could ask: Where was God in all of this chaos? **When life gets difficult, what do you think God is up to?**

In what ways have you felt forgotten or punished by God in difficult circumstances?

In the midst of this trouble, the church in Jerusalem earnestly prayed. We often think of prayer as a nice thing to do but may not consider it the most important or powerful action we can take in times of distress. **What do you think prayer actually accomplishes? Do you think it changes anything?**

Note: To learn more about the power of prayer, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.

Peter was rescued from jail by an angel and delivered to the house of Christians who were praying for his release. However, the people praying did not believe that Peter had been rescued. Read Acts 12:13–17.

When you pray, do you believe that God can do what you are praying for? What causes you to doubt that your prayers can be answered?

Louie pointed out that we often have trouble noticing miracles, even when they present themselves to us like Peter at Mary's house. **What prayers have been answered in your life? Do you think of these answered prayers as miraculous? Why or why not?**

One way to remind ourselves of God's faithfulness is by reminding ourselves of our prayers and the way God has answered them. **What could you do to regularly recognize God's provision for your prayers?**

Acts cuts back to the church in Antioch just as Saul and Barnabas are being sent out on their first missionary journey. Read Acts 13:1–3.

Just as God sent Philip to the Samaritans and Peter to Cornelius, he sent Paul and Barnabas to the Gentiles of the Mediterranean. Through Paul, God repeats the fundamental pattern of the church Louie talked about in the video: sending and establishing. Even if you are not a missionary or a pastor, you should still be involved in God's mission through sending missionaries and establishing God's church. **Where do you see God sending workers and establishing his church in the world today? In your own community?**

Note: To learn more about the elders in Antioch, go to **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this study.

During Paul's first missionary journey, he found both success and opposition wherever he went. It was on this journey that he was first called Paul (13:9), which Louie mentioned was his Greek name. Read Acts 14:8–20.

Paul and Barnabas were called by God to take the gospel to Gentiles. The church in Antioch had laid hands on them and prayerfully commissioned their missionary journey. Though they had every reason to believe that they would be successful on their journey, they were often met with opposition and misunderstanding. **When reading about Paul and Barnabas's experience in Lystra, would you call it a success or failure for their mission?**

In what ways did Paul and Barnabas do exactly what they were called and commissioned to do?

We often define spiritual success and failure by our results. We sometimes think opposition or struggle is a sign that we are moving in the wrong direction. But God had not called Paul and Barnabas to be universally successful. He had called them to be faithful. **In what**

GO DEEPER

This section has two potential functions:

1. It can supplement your small group discussion with topics your group may be interested in. We've highlighted where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide. As the leader, it would be good to familiarize yourself with this section just in case your conversation turns to one of these topics.
2. These sections can also function as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting. Consider using these sections to deepen your group's study of the book of Acts.

1. Christian

The Greek word for Christian, *cristianos*, is an interesting title for people who follow Jesus. The term *christ* is the Greek word for messiah and the suffix *-ian* is Latin. In one simple word, we find Hebrew theology made accessible to the Greeks described in the language of Rome. It is a simple title, but one that all people of the Mediterranean world could have understood.

"Christ" is a common word today, even used as a personal name for Jesus. But in the Bible, it is a rare term and is only used three times. What's more, followers of Christ never call themselves Christians. In Acts 11:26, people use the title to associate people with Jesus. The Christians there were so unique that they needed a name, and we can presume that they spoke so freely about Jesus Christ that he became their defining characteristic.

To what degree is belonging to Jesus a defining characteristic of your life?

Read the other two times the title "Christian" is used in Acts 26:28 and 1 Peter 4:16.

The second time we see the term *Christian* used in the Bible, it comes from the mouth of an unbelieving king named Agrippa, who became suspicious that Paul was trying to convert him. **What is the likelihood that you will tell people about Jesus, whether friends or strangers?**

What could it look like to be known for talking to people about Jesus?

In the third and final use of the title (1 Peter 4:16) we see that the name itself caused trouble. If a person was known as a “Christian” it could very well lead to their suffering. Today, we might not struggle for claiming to be Christians. For us, the struggle is often letting people know that we follow Jesus at all. We let our faith fly under the radar for fear of what people might think about us. **In what ways are you cautious about revealing to others that you follow Jesus? What reactions might you get if people knew you were a Christian?**

The name “Christian” was given to the church because they were most known by their similarity to Jesus, their eagerness to talk about Jesus, and their willingness to suffer for him. **In what ways are these characteristics similar or different to the characteristics of Christians today?**

What could we do to be more like the people who were first called Christians?

2. The Power of Prayer

In Acts, prayer led to incredible miracles. It often doesn't feel like praying is the most effective or meaningful thing we can do in times of trouble. But prayer does more than we often give it credit for. Read Luke 18:1–8.

According to Jesus, we should always pray and not lose heart. **In what ways is it easy to lose heart, even while we are praying?**

What, if anything, have you stopped praying about because you were discouraged?

In this parable, a widow is pestering a cruel judge. This judge does not even pretend to be just or caring. Even so, he gives the woman justice simply because she was persistent. If even an unrighteous judge does right by a person when they are persistent, how much more will God? He hates injustice, loves you, and hears you when you pray (Psalm 17:6; 34:17).

What would change in your prayer life if you prayed knowing that God hears you?

What would it look like for you to persistently pray for what is troubling you?

3. Saul to Paul

It was not unusual in the ancient world for people to have more than one name. Sometimes, names were changed after life-altering events (Jacob becoming Israel in Genesis 32:28), others when they assimilated into a new culture (Esther was also known as Hadassah, see Esther 2:7). We even see people changing their names to focus on their purpose in life (Simon becoming Peter in Matthew 16:16–18).

But Saul switches his name to Paul for no apparent reason. In Acts 13:9, we simply read that he was also called Paul while on his mission to Cyprus. So why did he change?

Paul is a Roman name. Since Rome was the unpopular ruling nation of Judea, we should not be surprised that Paul preferred to be called a Jewish name, Saul, while in Judea. But when Saul began to minister in Roman territories like Cyprus, he switched to his Roman name.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:19–23.

Paul was a flexible and empathetic evangelist. He found ways to become relatable to others so that he might win more people to Christ. **Who are the people you are ministering to? What qualities and traits set them apart from others in your community?**

The gospel is always relevant—it is for all people in all times and in all cultures. Likewise, every culture is looking for things only God can give. Paul adjusted his gospel presentation to address his audience, focusing on their specific hopes and worldview. When we talk about Jesus, we should also think about how the gospel is good news for the people we are talking to.

What does your culture want out of life? What is the dream everyone is chasing?

In what ways will the culture's hope let people down?

How does God give people in your culture what they truly hope for (acceptance, meaning, purpose, value, etc.)?

In what ways could your gospel presentation adjust to better reach the people in your life?

Acts is a long book, and we won't be able to study every verse of it during each of these sessions. This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entirety of the book so that you can dig more deeply into God's Word.

This week's reading guide will walk you through Acts 11–14. There is a lot in this section of Acts, from the opposition of Peter's Gentile evangelism to Paul's first missionary journey throughout the known world. Note how quickly the church mobilizes to reach Gentiles and the variety of ways God uses Paul to reach cultures throughout the northern Mediterranean region.

Day 1: The Opposition to Gentile Salvation (Acts 11:1–18)

Day 2: The Church of Antioch (Acts 11:19–30)

Day 3: Herod Persecutes the Church (Acts 12)

Day 4: The First Missionary Journey pt. 1 (Acts 13:1–12)

Day 5: The First Missionary Journey pt. 2 (Acts 13:13–52)

Day 6: The First Missionary Journey pt. 3 (Acts 14)