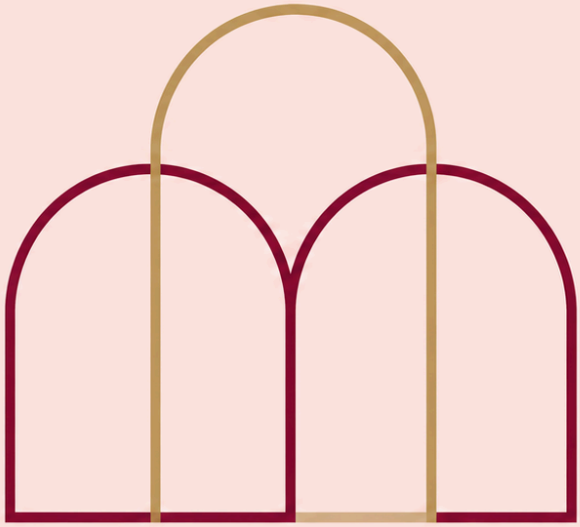
BIBLE STUDY

The Church



RESONATE

The Church is a

Fashion Show

This week we will study further in depth the “Fairytale of the Church – The Church is a Fashion Show”. We will look at different Scriptures, which combat this lie. Hopefully, we will discover within ourselves how we have been more concerned about image than being transparent with God and with others. May we walk together away from the fairytale and closer to the Truth, our Lord Jesus Christ.

DAY 1 / DAY 2 / DAY 3 / DAY 4 / DAY 5

DAY 1

The Word

Today's Scripture: Luke 18:18-30

18A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 19"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. 20You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother. 21"All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said. 22When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." 23When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. 24Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! 25Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." 26Those who heard this asked, "Who then can be saved?" 27Jesus replied, "What is impossible with men is possible with God." 28Peter said to him, "We have left all we had to follow you!" 29"I tell you the truth," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God 30will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life."

Verse 18: This ruler, who was a young man, had it all. He was probably dressed in the latest Hebrew fashions. People noticed him as he walked by. We can see in this verse that he was confident enough to approach Jesus in a crowd. He wanted Jesus to answer a question. So, he asks, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Despite his wealth and prestige, he knows something in his life is missing. He just didn't realize that the answer was standing right in front of him.

Verse 19: "What?", you may ask. Jesus, You are God, what are you saying? Jesus here is confronting the ruler's view of him. The ruler called Jesus a "good teacher". Jesus was going directly to the heart of the ruler. This rich man only saw Jesus as a teacher, not as God. The young man just thought he was getting advice from a smart guy. Jesus never claimed to be a smart guy. He called Himself equal to God. We cannot choose the title for Jesus. We either believe Him or we don't. This ruler was trying to play both sides. Jesus cuts down the fence that the young ruler was trying to stand on.

Verse 20-21: This ruler had done all the "right" things. A mama would be very glad to see her daughter bring this guy to dinner. His outward actions looked good. Yet, he was missing what was most important.

Verse 22: "Get rid of you large screen television, your massive shoe collection, your expensive jewelry. And, you know that Porsche camel that's parked outside your tent? Get

rid of that also. That's right have a huge garage sale, and then give all of the proceeds to Goodwill. And then, after you leave your life of luxury, then, come follow me, as I trod around in the desert." What would you do? The Word shows us the ruler's reaction.

Verse 23: Sadness. The thought of letting go of all of earth's "stuff" was just too much. He wanted eternal life, but he didn't want to sacrifice anything for it. Yet, he was looking at the One who left the riches of Heaven and the continual worship by angels to come live on earth. In a short time, Jesus would sacrifice His very life in order to extend eternal life to everyone. But, the rich ruler wanted to look good now. He wanted the comforts of the earth, even if it cost him Heaven. Unfortunately, this still happens today.

Verse 24-25: In a nation which consumes 95% of the world's resources, who can be saved? In a land where we feel cheated if our Supersized fries are cold, who can be saved? In a country where most homes have a car, television, and computer, who can be saved? In a place where what you have and how you look supposedly defines the person, who can be saved?

Verse 26-27: It is possible, but only by God.

DAY 1

Application

Bible study in itself does not produce change in our lives. We need to be willing to apply what we learn. Pray before you begin this section. Ask the Spirit to teach you right now. Be willing to listen.

What things or people do you hold onto and prioritize over God?

What keeps you hanging onto this world?

How can you let go of the world and grasp eternal life now?

Who can you ask to hold you up in prayer on this issue?

DAY 2

The Word

Today’s Scripture: Acts 5:1-11

Image is sometimes created when we compare ourselves to others. There are tragic consequences when we care more about what others think about us than God Himself. Today, we will see a couple pay the ultimate price for envying others.

1Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. 2With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet. 3Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? 4Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God." 5When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. 6Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him. 7About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" "Yes," she said, "that is the price." 9Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also." 10At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. 11Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

It seems like a weird horror flick! The Word of God can be more shocking than anything we can imagine. Let’s find out how these verses can teach us about ourselves.

Verse 1: What does it mean that they also sold property? We need to go back to

Acts 4:36-37.

36Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), 37sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

Barnabas sold land and gave all the money to the church. Obviously Annanias and Sapphira had heard about it. They must have seen the fuss made over Barnabas’ generous act and they wanted some of the praise heading their way. So they devised a scheme.

Verse 2: Deception. The plot is already thickening, and we have barely begun the story. They sold property and then pretended to give the entire profit to the Lord! But, they didn't get away with it.

Verse 3-4: Ananias was not wrong in keeping the money. It was his and he could do with it as he pleased. What was wrong was that he pretended to give all of it like Barnabas. He put on a big show for others so they would be impressed with him. The impression he left was not the one he had planned.

Verse 5-6: Ananias was not the only one who suffered with an image problem.

Verse 7-10: This couple is not remembered the way they desired. They became legacies in a negative way. It all started with the root of comparison and it blossomed into death. How did it go so wrong? First, their eyes were on what others were doing, not God. Second, they had no accountability. Sapphira never told her husband that his plan was wrong. Both kept their plan a secret so no one could confront their sin. Sadly, it was brought into the open when it was too late. Third, their hearts were calloused against sin. They desired to "outdo" Barnabas so badly, that they did not care who they stepped on even if it was God! The Lord had to take drastic measures to ensure His brand new family, the church, did not consider lying to the Spirit a light matter. I think the church got it.

Verse 11: Will that fear seize us today? Will we honor God and obey Him instead of deceiving others into thinking better of us? That means no more exaggerating success of ourselves or our families. Instead, let's be honest with one another.

DAY 2

Application

All of Scripture teaches us. Pray to God and ask Him to show you what He desires for you to learn from this tragic story.

Why is envy so destructive?

What are ways we try to show off to others?

Why do you think this sin was judged so harshly?

How can we be more real with others and less about image?

DAY 3

The Word

Today's Scripture: Luke 22:24-27

The verses we will study today are convicting. Please spend time in prayer before you begin. Ask God to speak to you through His Word. Be willing to listen, even if it is hard.

24Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. 25Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. 26But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. 27For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.

These verses sum up worldly thought versus Godly thought. They show the extreme difference between living for the "here and now" versus living for "the hereafter". Let us begin with the temporal train of thought.

Verse 24: Let me set the scene for you. This is during the Last Supper. It is called, "The Lord's Supper" due to the fact that this is the last time Jesus would eat with His disciples before His arrest and crucifixion. Jesus knew all that. He was getting ready to suffer betrayal, torture, injustice, death. In the last few hours of freedom, He wanted to be near His disciples, His friends, His brothers, the very men He was willing to die for. In the midst of this poignant scene, what are the disciples doing? Are they worshipping Jesus? No. Encouraging one another? Serving others? No. They are arguing about who is the greatest! They are in the room with God Himself, yet they are debating if a fisherman, like Peter, is better than a tax collector, like Matthew. In the midst of this chaos, Jesus breaks in with the Heavenly point of view.

Verse 25-27: We do anything we can to get ahead in the corporate world. The title CEO holds prestige and honor. The media gloats over Hollywood stars. The rich, or those whose houses are huge, who have expensive cars and jewelry, and who have paid staff taking care of their every need are idolized. We think "making it" is when we are at the top looking down at others. Yet, Jesus paints a different view of success. He calls us to be servants. We need to be looking up to others and pondering ways to help them, not to use them, or bring them down. A definition for servant in the Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary explains the occupation as, "One under another's authority." That just sends chills up most people's spines. In a nation where everyone wants to be the boss and "no one tells me what to do", how can we be servants? We must quit arguing amongst ourselves about who is the greatest. None of us are. We must place our thoughts on Christ. He was the ruler of the universe (no CEO can claim that), yet he, "did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:6-8) We need to follow the ways of Heaven and humble ourselves. Only then can we experience greatness from God's point of view.

DAY 3

Application

We often view the disciples as superhuman. We forget that they model ourselves. These men struggled just as we do. We can learn from their victories, but we can also learn from their defeats.

How does America define greatness? How does God define it?

Define humility.

How do we humble ourselves?

Why is humility so difficult?

DAY 4

The Word

Today’s Scripture: The Book of Ecclesiastes

King Solomon had it all. In fact, no one in all of history can even be compared to this man who was the King of Israel thousands of years before the truth of Christ was revealed. Everything he had was given to him by God. In fact, the Lord says to him…”I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both riches and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings.” (I Kings 3:12-13) Solomon literally was in a league of his own. He may have had the original version of M.C. Hammer’s song, “Can’t Touch This”. Yet, in a book that he most likely authored, Ecclesiastes, we see that all he had was meaningless to him. Our study today will scan the first two chapters in the book of Ecclesiastes, which is in the Old Testament, just after the book of Proverbs. This short book reminds us of how temporary life on earth is.

Chapter 1-2: What a way to begin. This was Solomon’s summary on life. All of what the world claimed would make him happy left him empty. He pursued everything possible, yet everything left Solomon with the same answer: Meaningless. So, what had he pursued?

Work: Ecclesiastes 1:3-5 3 What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun? 4 Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. 5 The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises.

Wisdom: Ecclesiastes 1:13, 16-18

13 I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on men!

16 I thought to myself, "Look, I have grown and increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge." 17 Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind.18 For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.

Pleasure: Ecclesiastes 2:1-2

1 I thought in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good." But that also proved to be meaningless. 2 "Laughter," I said, "is foolish. And what does pleasure accomplish?"

Drunkenness: Ecclesiastes 2:3

3 I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives.

Building Projects: Ecclesiastes 2:4-5

4 I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. 5 I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them.

Accumulated Wealth: Ecclesiastes 2:8a

8 I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces.

Promiscuity: Ecclesiastes 2:8b

I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well—the delights of the heart of man.

Greatness: Ecclesiastes 2:9

9 I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me.

Pleasure: Ecclesiastes 2:10 10 I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor.

His Conclusion: Ecclesiastes 2:11

11 Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.

Solomon indulged in everything the world had to offer. These are what we are told to pursue today. Advertisers tell us that we need these things to be better than what we are. Sometimes even in the church we falsely equate running after pleasures and prestige to the blessing of God. Yes, God gives us gifts, but we are to pursue Him, not the objects He created.

DAY 4

Application

Solomon’s life had such a tragic ending. His pursuit of the world left him with nothing but a meaningless existence. In order to escape the trap that ensnared Solomon, we must be willing to be honest with God and ourselves.

What messages are given by the world concerning what to pursue in life?

What do you pursue in this world?

How can you avoid being caught in the above mentioned worldly pursuit?

What do you think about Solomon’s summary of life as “meaningless”?

How can we reach out to others who feel like their life is meaningless?

DAY 5

The Word

Today’s Scripture: The Book of Ruth

We have studied this week different people who were more concerned about this world than Heaven. They each walked across our page with different “fashions”. The rich young ruler was wearing temporal riches. Ananias and Sapphira showcased comparison to others and desires for accolades from people not God, the disciples all walked down the runway with arguments of greatness. And, who could forget Solomon, decked out with every pursuit of pleasure and image possible?

Today we will study someone who has her priorities straight. She is not concerned what others think about her, she just does what is right. She humbles herself to a servant and receives rewards. She recognizes her low position and is amazed by any kindness shown to her. She pursues helping others, and in the end, she receives honor from those she helped. Who is she? Her name is Ruth. What is so surprising about her is that she is a foreigner, a Moabite. Everyone else we studied this week were “people of God”. They should have known better. Yet, this woman, raised in a land that worshipped idols, comes to Israel and shows a town the heart of God.

For those not familiar with this Old Testament story, let me set the scene. Ruth’s mother-in-law, Naomi, had arrived in the land of Moab with her husband and two sons. They had left Israel due to famine. Naomi’s sons both married Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah. Sadly, all three men died, so now only Naomi and her two daughter-in-laws remain. Naomi decided to return to Israel.

Ruth 1:8-10; 14-18

8 Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's
home. May the LORD show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me. 9
May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband." Then
she kissed them and they wept aloud 10 and said to her, "We will go back with you to your
people."

14 At this they wept again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-by, but Ruth clung to
her. 15 "Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go
back with her." 16 But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you.
Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your
God my God. 17 Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with
me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me." 18 When Naomi

realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

Ruth and Naomi returned to Israel and settled in a town called Bethlehem. Neither had any source of income. So, Ruth went to a field owned by a farmer named Boaz.

Ruth 2:3

3 So she went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech.

This practice was allowed for the poor, widow, foreigners, and the orphans to pick up leftovers so they could glean food for their needs. Ruth humbled herself to provide for Naomi and herself. She was such a hard worker that she impressed the landowner, Boaz. He told her that she was welcome to glean food in his field, and he commanded his workers not to harass her.

Ruth 2:10-12

10 At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She exclaimed, "Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?" 11 Boaz replied, "I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. 12 May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge."

Ruth humbles herself into a servant’s position in order to honor Boaz. She was not concerned what others thought about her. She just wanted to show her appreciation for the kindness given. Ruth continued to work in the field. Boaz and Ruth eventually married, and then had a son named Obed.

Ruth 4:14-15

14 The women said to Naomi: "Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! 15 He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth."

What a compliment! The Word of God testifies to the amazing character of Ruth. She had thrown off the ways of the world and lived for God alone. Her life was blessed by the God she served. Throughout time, she is honored. How will your life be remembered? Will you be known as the one who ran after the world and hid behind all it’s image with a plastic smile, but a heart that felt meaningless? Or, will you be known in eternity as the one who ran after God and felt the fullness of life, of being real with Him and with others?

DAY 5

Application

God is full of grace. He did not hold Ruth’s pagan past against her. In fact, she became a part of the lineage of Christ! This week you may have discovered some sin in your life. Confess it to God and move on. His plan for your life is marvelous, better than anything this world can offer!

What most impressed you about Ruth?

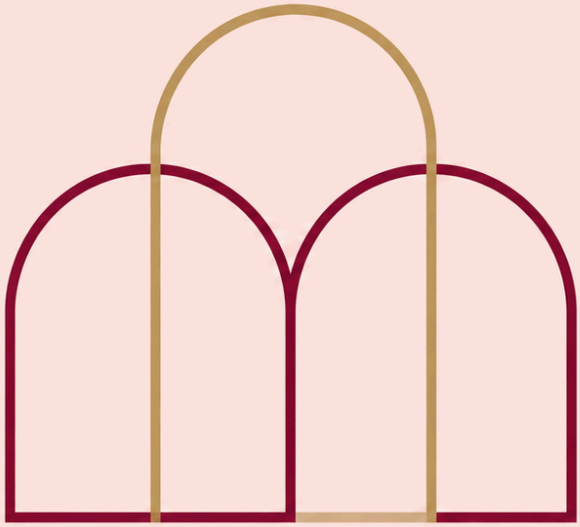
What character traits do you have that are most like Ruth’s?

What character traits do you want that Ruth portrayed?

How did Ruth model the opposite of the fairytale: Church is a fashion show?

BIBLE STUDY

The Church



RESONATE

The Church is a

Fortress

This week we will study further in depth the “Fairytale of the Church – The Church is a Fortress”. We will look at how the church was created to function in this world. It may be time for all of us to walk out of our bubbles and reach out to this hurting world.

DAY 1 / DAY 2 / DAY 3 / DAY 4 / DAY 5

DAY 1

The Word

Today's Scripture: John 1:1-2, 10, 14

1In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was with God in the beginning.

10He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.

14The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

We are going to study the greatest invasion in history. This, of course, was not your typical battle. I am not talking about warfare over land. This was about reclaiming the human heart.

Verse 1-2: The Word is Jesus. He was with God in heaven. Try to picture heaven. It is more beautiful than any tropical setting. Angels continually worship God is all His glory. There is no pain, no tears, no sin, no regrets. It is perfect in everyway. That is where Jesus lived.

Verse 10, 14: God decided to create the world. They made the universe. The earth was formed out of nothing. Only by the Word was everything we see created. Amazing power. The pinnacle of creation came when man was made in the image of God. Yet the relationship formed between man and God was destroyed when Adam and Eve, the first created people, sinned. The perfect relationship was now marred. A perfect God could not allow imperfect people into His presence. But the heart of God could not bear the separation. He had a plan to redeem His people back into His presence. The battle plan? Sending the perfect Son of God into this evil world. Jesus left heaven to come to the world. We complain about leaving air conditioning to walk to the mailbox. The One who formed the universe at His own command, who held the stars in a hand, was wrapped in confining, limiting, flesh. Jesus came to earth. But the world did not recognize Him. How painful to give love and receive none in return. God Himself sacrificed all of heaven to reach out to us and we were too busy to notice He was there. Knowing people would sin, Jesus still made us. Knowing people would reject Him, Jesus still came. Knowing that we would not love Him as He loved us, Jesus still loved us. He made the intentional effort, though is cost Him everything, to reach out and save us. He did not stay in the fortress of heaven. The King left His throne and joined the paupers and in His poverty showed us how we might have eternal riches. That is the battle plan of love.



DAY 1

Application

Jesus is the ultimate example of intentional effort in reaching out to others. Our sacrifice is so small compared to what He did. Ask God to show you how you can follow the example of Christ and reach out to others.

Why did Jesus come to earth?

What pain did Jesus' suffering because He reached out in love to us?

What sacrifice would you have to make in order to intentionally love others?

Pray and ask God to bring specific people to mind that you can reach out to. Write their names here.

Strategize a plan to intentionally reach out to them.

DAY 2

The Word

Today’s Scripture: Luke 8:1-3

We will go in depth on verses that are often skipped over. Behind these verses, however, reveal the intensity of reaching out to others to lead them to God.

1After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, 2and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; 3Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

Verse 1a: Jesus is in the middle of preaching the good news. God Himself had come to earth to proclaim the truth about the kingdom of God. To say the least, God was on a mission. This was important work.

Verse 1b: The most amazing part of what Christ was doing was who He brought with Him as He traveled. First of all, He brought the Twelve. These were twelve men that Jesus chose to be His disciples. They varied in education, background, politics, socio- economics, in everything. Yet, Jesus chose this ragtag group to follow Him.

Verse 2-3: Not only were the Twelve with Jesus, but also a group of women. This is surprising within itself since women were not highly valued. They were considered property of their husbands, viewed inferior to men, and were considered cooks and baby carriers (all of you guys thinking of comments to say, just stop now). Yet, the Lord of all the universe asked these women to join His mission. One of them, Mary, had seven demons driven out of her. I have never seen a demon-possessed person (that I know of) but it is probably not a pretty picture. I would think one demon would be bad, much less seven. She was the perfect picture of tortured evil. I think she could top anyone’s stories about “baggage” from her past life. Yet, here she is, following Jesus. Another woman Joanna also was there. Her husband worked for Herod, an evil man who ruled in Israel under the Roman government. Imagine having the wife of an evil politician following the religious leader around. You would think that would give the “Preacher” bad press. Yet, He still allowed her to follow Him. Other women, including Susanna traveled from town to town supporting Jesus and the Twelve with their own money. (It sounds like these guys liked going Dutch). Those viewed as least in society were given the honor of being travel partners with God Himself. What does all of this have to do with us? Think about who Jesus was around: imperfect people. They had a variety of personalities: bossy, whiny, pessimistic, people-pleaser, obnoxious, self-centered, arrogant, non-confrontational, argumentative, the list could go on and on. Yet, Jesus invested



His time in these people. He, being perfect, did not stay removed from others. Instead, He spent time with them. They traveled together. They shared stories. They laughed and cried. They ate together. They were in fellowship. True fellowship. We are imperfect people surrounded by other imperfect people. They need to know how to “travel” with Jesus. Will you show them? There are some people right around you that need someone to spend time with them. Will you be that someone? It’s not easy. People can be difficult. People can be draining. People can be just like us. Yet, Jesus poured His life into a few people around Him and shared His life with them. He taught them how to share their lives with others. The chain of love continued. Christ is linked to you. Who will you link yourself to so that they may learn the fellowship of Jesus?

DAY 2

Application

Reaching out to others takes time, energy, and resources. But we cannot do it in our own strength. It is not a matter of doing “something”. Only God can help us to be the friend He has called us to be. Ask for His help and strength.

What surprises you most about the followers of Jesus?

What are ways we can invest in the lives of those around us?

What are the difficulties in building relationships with others?

What are the benefits for building relationship with others?

DAY 3

The Word

Today's Scripture: Luke 5:17-26

Have you ever prayed for a life to be changed? Maybe it was for family member to be healed, or a friend to find emotional healing, or possibly even a co-worker to find salvation. When we cry out to God on behalf of others, we share in their need. We join them in their time of pain. It is during this time that love is truly shown. It may not be so much in our words but in our actions. For when we meet others in their needs, we ourselves can see a miracle.

17One day as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick. 18Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. 19When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus. 20When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." 21The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" 22Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? 23Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? 24But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...." He said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." 25Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. 26Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."

Verse 17: The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were the big named preachers of their day. These were the guys everyone wanted to impress. They were the religious leaders and they were revered by the people. However, the power of the Lord was not upon them but it was on Jesus. We need to realize that when we are dealing with people, we are limited in what we can do. Only God alone can handle every need. And He is ready and willing.

Verse 18: The power of the Lord to heal was present. However, at that time no one was there who was willing to be healed. God had provided a way before the need was perceived. However, if these men had not brought their friend to Jesus, the healing would not have occurred. We must bring our loved ones to Jesus through prayer, through friendship, through advice, through wisdom, through the Word, through invitation to service, through any means that will bring them to God. These men had a paralyzed friend and the only means they had was a mat and brute strength. They used what they had to get him to Jesus. It was not an

easy trip. It took four men to carry one. That involved teamwork. Everyone had to do his part while everyone headed in the same direction. If one guy had decided to quit, the paralyzed man could have received further injury by falling off the mat. If each man wanted to go his own way, they would have not been able to travel anywhere. Instead, they all knew they had to get to Jesus and that each one had an obligation to take their friend to Him. When we have this one goal in mind: to bring people to Jesus, we can all use our different talents, abilities, and strengths to bring people there and we can help others walking in the same direction. For we all hold the responsibility to do our part. Verse 19: The obstacles did not end on their journey. Once they arrived, they could not get in because of the crowd. Did they give up? No. It is never easy to bring someone to Jesus but we must persevere. It is too important. There is eternal matters involved. Verse 20: The four friends were praying for physical healing. Jesus saw past the temporal need and met the eternal one. The forgiveness of sins was truly what this man, every man and woman, needs. And Jesus freely offers it to anyone who will come before Him. Verse 21: The greatest miracle in the world, the forgiveness of sins, should be celebrated not scrutinized. These “religious men” had missed Jesus themselves so they could not understand how anyone could receive Him. Remember, just because someone claims to be religious does not make them a believer. But Jesus does not leave anyone with an excuse of not understanding Him. If you missed the first miracle, you could not fail to notice His second miracle. Verses 22-26: The man walked home carrying the mat his friends had brought him on. Can you imagine the celebration he had with his family and friends? That is what happens when we bring people to Jesus. We can witness miracles. But we must first bring them. They cannot walk themselves, they need our help.

DAY 3

Application

Jesus still performs miracles today. Ask God to increase your faith in believing that truth.

What are ways we can bring people to Jesus?

Who has brought you to Jesus at different times in your life?

DAY 4

The Word

Today's Scripture: Acts 9:3-6, 19-21, 26-28

Son of Sam was a name that drove fear in the heart of the people in New York in the late 1970's. This was the code name for a serial killer who was on the loose. Eventually, David Berkowitz was arrested and charged with the crimes. Yet, amazingly, in prison, David turned from a life of hatred to love. Ten years into his 365 year sentence, a fellow inmate told him about Jesus Christ. He gave David a Bible and eventually David confessed all of his sins and received forgiveness. Since that time, he has had multiple opportunities to testify to all God has done for him. He ministers to other inmates in his prison. And has witnessed others come to the Lord. Does it seem strange that a murderer became a believer and a witness for Christ? Would you feel safe around him if he now longer was behind bars? Deep down would you still wonder if he was capable of hurting someone again? Would you think it was all just a big ploy for attention? Then you can relate to the fear that the early believers had when a guy named Saul announce his conversion to Christ.

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. 20At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. 21All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?"

Verses 20-21: To feel the impact of these verses, you need to have an understanding of the person of Saul. He was a devout Jew who was threatening to murder anyone who followed Jesus. Saul decided to travel from Jerusalem to the city of Damascus so he could capture followers of Christ and bring these prisoners back to Jerusalem. If caught, these believers could have suffered the same fate as Stephen, a follower of Jesus who was stoned to death while Saul watched with approval. However, on the road to Damascus, the life of Saul would radically change.

3As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

5"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. 6"Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

Verses 3-5: Paul became a believer after this experience. He immediately began to showcase his new life in public.

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. 20At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.

Some people were amazed, yet others were frightened. After Saul left Damascus to return to Jerusalem, he was not accepted by anyone.

26When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple.

However, one person risked his life. One person risked his reputation in front of other believers. One person asked Saul the truth about his conversion. One person made all the difference.

27But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. 28So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.

Barnabas had a hand in changing the world. For Saul is Paul, the greatest missionary in history. Paul established churches all over the Roman world. Paul wrote a majority of the New Testament of the Bible. Paul led countless numbers of men, women, and children to their Savior, Jesus Christ. Paul did miracles, including healings and raising the dead! I have heard it said that there might have never been a Paul if there had not been a Barnabas. When someone has a life changing experience, he needs others to share the joy with him. He does not need to be reminded of his past mistakes. Instead, someone should help him find hope for an amazing future. Once we come to the cross, we are washed clean from all we have done wrong. A murderer became a missionary. What could God do in the life of a person that you gave up on a long time ago? Don’t give up. You never know when he may walk his own “Damascus” road.

DAY 4

Application

Saul had been an enemy to believers, wanting them dead. Yet, one believer named Barnabas helped a former enemy to find his place in the church. Today, we still reap the benefits from Barnabas reaching out to Saul. Ask God for the courage to be like Barnabas.

Do you feel that someone you know is beyond hope?

Would you be willing to pray for that person to change? Write a prayer for him/her.

When a life does change, how can we be a “Barnabas” to the new believer?

How does God treat us like Barnabas treated Saul?

DAY 5

The Word

Today's Scripture: Colossians 4:14, 2 Timothy 4:9-10, Luke 15:11-24

We are called to reach out to this world. We are commanded by Christ Himself to present the gospel message to those around us. We have studied examples this week of how we can extend a hand to those who do not know Christ. However, we cannot leave this week without a word of warning. Building intentional relationships is not easy. It involves our time, energy, and resources. Often, it is very rewarding. There are times, though, when it is heartbreaking. Not everyone will accept the message. Moments will come when we will have to watch people revert back to their former way of life. We pray and hope they return to their fellowship with God and with us but it is not always a happy ending. It seems odd to end a week of study like this but we must realize the risk so we will be prepared. We must choose ahead of time to love those around us despite the choices they may make in their lives. For their decisions could hurt us. Paul experienced this feeling firsthand through a man names Demas. We first learn about him in the book of Colossians.

14Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings.

Verse 14: Demas was a fellow worker with Paul. We do not know fully how he helped Paul but was obviously known to Colossian believers. Most likely, Demas had traveled with Paul on at least part of his missionary journey. To travel with a missionary means you have a part in the kingdom work. Not only that, they would have spent considerable amounts of time together as they journeyed. Sadly, at some point, Demas changed. Their friendship, the missionary work, the God they loved somehow now meant nothing to him.

9Do your best to come to me quickly, 10for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica.

Verse 9: Paul was alone. He had been imprisoned in Rome for being a Christian. He was writing this letter to Timothy, a man that had also accompanied Paul on missionary journeys. Paul wanted company as his life was nearing the end. Unfortunately, someone who could have provided comfort was no longer around. Verse 10: Demas had left. This once former faithful friend had deserted Paul in his time of need. The world had wooed him back. He chose his past over his future. Paul's heart was broken. The pain was surely magnified due to the situation he was in, chained in a cold and dark dungeon. There will be times when we will feel the pain from watching people we love walk away from everything of God. When this happens, please realize that our Savior felt the same way. Remember, it was one of His Twelve, Judas, who betrayed Jesus to the people who would kill Him. Jesus can relate to your hurt. Talk to Him about it. He will be your comfort. But do not stop reaching out to others

because of the risk. Jesus reached out to you and to me knowing full well all the times we would walk away from Him. Yet, He considered us worth the pain. And He watched for us to return. May we do the same.

11Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. 12The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

13"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. 14After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. 15So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. 16He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

17"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! 18I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' 20So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. 21"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."

22"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. 24For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

DAY 5

Application

Relationships always cost us something. Thank the Lord that He gave His one and only Son in order to have a relationship with you.

What risks are involved in reaching out to others in the name of Christ?

What rewards are experienced when we reach out?

How can we choose to love people despite their choices?