

# TEACHER'S ANSWER GUIDE

This section provides comprehensive answers to the discussion questions, along with additional teaching notes, historical context, and application suggestions. Use this guide to facilitate deeper conversations and help participants connect the ancient stories to their modern lives.

## STEPHEN - THE FIRST TO DIE FOR THE NAME

**QUESTION 1:** Stephen was chosen to serve food to widows, but God used him in much bigger ways. Have you ever been in a role that seemed small or insignificant, but God used it for something greater? How did that change your perspective on "small" tasks?

**ANSWER:** Stephen's story teaches us the principle of "faithfulness in small things." Jesus taught this in the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30), where the master commends those who were faithful with what they were given, regardless of the amount. Stephen didn't view serving widows as beneath him or as a distraction from "real ministry." He served with excellence, and God noticed.

### TEACHING NOTES:

- Emphasize that there are no "small" tasks in God's kingdom. Everything done in obedience to God and in service to others matters.
- Discuss how our culture values visibility and recognition, but God values faithfulness and character.
- Share examples of people who started in "small" roles and were eventually promoted by God (like David shepherding sheep before becoming king, or Joseph serving in prison before leading Egypt).

**APPLICATION:** Ask participants to identify one "small" task in their current life (a church commitment, a household responsibility, serving behind the scenes) and commit to doing it with excellence this week as an act of worship.

**QUESTION 2:** Stephen's opponents couldn't defeat his arguments, so they attacked his character with lies. Have you ever been falsely accused or misunderstood? How did you respond? How does Stephen's example challenge or encourage you?

**ANSWER:** Stephen's response to false accusations was remarkable. He didn't defend himself personally; instead, he told the truth about God's faithfulness and Israel's history. When we're falsely accused, our natural instinct is to defend ourselves, prove our innocence, and attack back. Stephen shows us a different way—trusting God with our reputation while focusing on the truth that needs to be said.



## TEACHING NOTES:

- Discuss the difference between defending the truth and defending yourself. Stephen defended the gospel; he didn't waste energy defending his reputation.
- Note that Jesus also faced false accusations (Matthew 26:59-61) and responded with silence, trusting God to vindicate Him.
- Acknowledge that being falsely accused is painful and unjust, and it's okay to feel hurt. But we can choose how we respond.

**APPLICATION:** If participants are currently facing false accusations, encourage them to: (1) Pray for their accusers, (2) Speak the truth when appropriate, but (3) Trust God with their reputation rather than obsessively defending themselves.

**QUESTION 3:** Stephen's face "was like the face of an angel" even as he faced false accusations. What do you think it means to have the peace of God so visible that others can see it? Have you ever met someone like that?

**ANSWER:** Stephen's angelic face wasn't about physical beauty—it was about the presence of God radiating through him. When we're filled with the Holy Spirit and at peace with God, it shows. Our countenance reflects our spiritual state. Moses' face glowed after encountering God (Exodus 34:29-35), and Stephen experienced something similar.

## TEACHING NOTES:

- This peace comes from being right with God, not from having easy circumstances. Stephen's circumstances were terrible, but his spirit was at peace.
- Discuss the difference between "putting on a happy face" (fake) and genuinely experiencing God's peace (authentic). People can tell the difference.
- The Holy Spirit produces peace as one of His fruits (Galatians 5:22-23).

**APPLICATION:** Challenge participants to examine their own countenance. Do others see stress, bitterness, and anxiety? Or do they see peace? What needs to change in your relationship with God to reflect more of His peace?

**QUESTION 4:** In his final moments, Stephen prayed for his killers to be forgiven. Who in your life do you need to forgive? What makes that difficult? What would it look like to pray for them the way Stephen prayed for his accusers?

**ANSWER:** Stephen's forgiveness was modeled directly on Jesus' example. Forgiveness doesn't mean what someone did was okay; it means releasing them to God and refusing to hold their sin against them. True forgiveness is costly—it requires us to absorb the pain rather than passing it on.



## TEACHING NOTES:

- Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation. Forgiveness is a one-way street (you can forgive someone who never apologizes). Reconciliation requires both parties.
- Forgiveness doesn't mean there are no consequences. Stephen forgave, but his killers still had to answer to God.
- Unforgiveness is like drinking poison and hoping the other person dies. It only hurts you.

**APPLICATION:** Guide participants through a prayer exercise: (1) Name the person who hurt you, (2) Acknowledge the pain they caused, (3) Choose to release them to God, (4) Pray for God's blessing on them (even if it feels impossible).

**QUESTION 5:** Stephen never knew that his death would impact Saul (Paul). How does this encourage you when you feel like your witness or testimony isn't making a difference?

**ANSWER:** We rarely see the full impact of our obedience. Stephen died not knowing that Saul was watching, not knowing that his words would haunt Saul, not knowing that Saul would one day become Paul and write half the New Testament. We plant seeds; God grows them. We may never see the harvest, but that doesn't mean there isn't one.

## TEACHING NOTES:

- Discuss the concept of "legacy"—the impact we have that outlives us.
- Share examples of people who influenced your faith (teachers, mentors, pastors) who may never have known the full impact they had on you.
- Emphasize that God wastes nothing. Every act of obedience, every word of testimony, every moment of faithfulness matters in ways we can't see.

**APPLICATION:** Encourage participants to think about one person they can share their testimony with this week, trusting God with the results rather than trying to control the outcome.

**QUESTION 6 (DISCIPLESHIP FOCUS):** Stephen was faithful in serving widows before he was given a platform to preach. In our discipleship journey, we often want to skip to the "important" ministry. How can Stephen's example encourage you to be faithful in the seemingly small or behind-the-scenes areas of service?

**ANSWER:** Discipleship is built on small, daily choices - daily prayer, Bible reading, serving in small ways, being faithful in relationships. None of these feel glamorous or impressive. But they're the foundation of spiritual maturity. Stephen's willingness to faithfully serve widows positioned him for greater ministry. Your willingness to faithfully practice spiritual disciplines—even when they're routine or hard—positions you for the life God has for you.



## TEACHING NOTES:

- Emphasize that discipleship has no shortcuts. Every step matters.
- Discuss the danger of wanting spiritual maturity without doing the daily work. Many people want to be "used by God" without developing character through faithfulness in small things.
- Celebrate small spiritual victories. Every day of prayer, every act of service, every moment of obedience is building spiritual muscle.

**APPLICATION:** Challenge participants to identify one "small" spiritual discipline they've been neglecting (daily prayer, Scripture reading, serving in a specific ministry) and commit to doing it consistently for one week.

## Closing Prayer:

Gracious Father,

Thank You for the powerful example of Stephen, who showed us what it means to be filled with Your Spirit and faithful unto death. We are humbled by his courage to stand for truth, his boldness to proclaim Your Word even in the face of opposition, and his Christ-like love that enabled him to forgive even as he was being killed.

Lord, we confess that we often lack Stephen's courage. We stay silent when we should speak. We compromise when we should stand firm. We hold grudges when we should forgive. Forgive us, and fill us afresh with Your Holy Spirit, just as You filled Stephen.

Help us to see Jesus as Stephen did - standing at Your right hand, ready to receive us and strengthen us in our own trials. Give us grace to live as faithful witnesses in our homes, workplaces, schools, and communities, Lord. When we face opposition for our faith, remind us, Lord, that You are with us and that our witness may plant seeds that bear fruit we'll never see on this side of heaven.

Father transform our hearts to reflect Stephen's compassion. When we are wronged, help us to pray for those who hurt us. When we are misunderstood, help us to respond with Your love. When we are afraid, Lord, help us to trust in Your presence.

May the story of Stephen's life and death not just inspire us but change us. Use these truths we've discussed today to make us more like Jesus.

In Jesus' name we pray,  
Amen.



## JAMES - A QUIET COURAGE

**QUESTION 1:** James is only mentioned briefly in Acts 12, yet he was one of Jesus' closest disciples. How does this challenge our culture's obsession with fame and recognition? What does it mean to be faithful even when no one notices?

**ANSWER:** James' story is a powerful reminder that God doesn't measure success the way we do. Our culture values visibility, recognition, and influence. But God values faithfulness, obedience, and character. James served faithfully for over a decade, and his reward was martyrdom—no fanfare, no dramatic story, just a brief mention in Scripture. Yet his faithfulness mattered eternally.

### TEACHING NOTES:

- Discuss how social media has intensified our desire for recognition. We want people to see and validate our work.
- Jesus taught that much of our reward comes in secret (Matthew 6:1-6). God sees what others don't.
- The most important work often happens in obscurity—parenting, mentoring, serving behind the scenes.

**APPLICATION:** Challenge participants to do one act of service this week that no one will ever know about except God. Then discuss how it felt to serve without recognition.

**QUESTION 2:** James and John asked Jesus if they could call down fire on a Samaritan village. How do you see your own personality and passions being transformed as you follow Jesus? What "fiery" parts of you need to be redirected?

**ANSWER:** James and John had intense, passionate personalities—hence the nickname "Sons of Thunder." But Jesus didn't remove their passion; He redirected it. The same fiery zeal that wanted to destroy a village would later fuel their boldness in preaching the gospel. God doesn't erase our personality; He redeems it.

### TEACHING NOTES:

- Every personality trait has a shadow side and a redeemed side. Boldness can become arrogance or courage. Gentleness can become weakness or strength. Passion can become destructiveness or zeal for justice.
- God created you with your personality on purpose. The goal of discipleship isn't to become someone else; it's to become the best version of yourself.
- Jesus doesn't crush our spirit; He shapes it.

**APPLICATION:** Ask participants to identify one aspect of their personality that has caused problems in the past. How might God want to redeem and redirect that trait for His purposes?



**QUESTION 3:** James and John boldly said they could "drink the cup" Jesus drank, even though they didn't fully understand what that meant. Have you ever made a commitment to God without fully understanding what it would cost? How did that play out?

**ANSWER:** When we commit our lives to Jesus, we rarely understand the full cost. We say yes with sincerity but limited knowledge. James and John had no idea that "drinking the cup" would mean martyrdom for James and exile for John. But their yes was still valid. God honors our willingness to follow Him, even when we don't know where it will lead.

**TEACHING NOTES:**

- Discipleship is a journey. We learn as we go. God doesn't reveal the entire path at once because we'd probably run away.
- Discuss Abraham's call in Genesis 12:1—"Go to the land I will show you." God didn't give him the full GPS coordinates; He just said, "Follow me."
- Every major decision in life involves stepping into the unknown. Marriage, parenthood, career changes—we commit before we fully understand what we're signing up for.

**APPLICATION:** Ask participants to reflect on their initial decision to follow Jesus. What did they think it would be like? How has it been different? How has God been faithful even when the journey was harder than expected?

**QUESTION 4:** God rescued Peter from prison but allowed James to be executed. How do you reconcile this? Have you ever felt like God showed up for someone else but not for you? How do you process that?

**ANSWER:** This is one of the hardest questions in Christianity. Why does God intervene sometimes and not others? We don't have a complete answer, but we know this: God's love isn't measured by whether He rescues us from hardship. He loved James just as much as He loved Peter. The difference was in God's timing and purposes for each of them.

**TEACHING NOTES:**

- God's plan for every person is different. Some are called to suffer; some are called to deliverance. Both are loved.
- For James, death was not defeat—it was graduation. He went from persecution to paradise in an instant.
- Discuss Job's response to suffering: "Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him" (Job 13:15). Trust isn't based on getting what we want; it's based on God's character.

**APPLICATION:** If participants are struggling with unanswered prayers or feeling like God has abandoned them, validate their pain. Then gently remind them that God's silence or seeming absence doesn't mean He doesn't care. Sometimes His greatest work happens in the waiting.



**QUESTION 5:** James was faithful in obscurity for over a decade before his martyrdom. How can you remain faithful when your life feels ordinary or hidden?

**ANSWER:** Most of life is ordinary. Most of our days are not dramatic or Instagram-worthy. But faithfulness in the mundane is what shapes our character and prepares us for the moments that matter. James didn't become a martyr overnight; he became a martyr because he'd spent years faithfully following Jesus, serving the church, and growing in his faith.

**TEACHING NOTES:**

- Discuss the concept of "faithful in little, faithful in much" (Luke 16:10).
- Character is built in the hidden moments—how you treat your family when no one is watching, how you respond to frustration in traffic, how you handle tedious tasks.
- God is more concerned with who you're becoming than what you're accomplishing.

**APPLICATION:** Challenge participants to identify one area of their life that feels mundane or insignificant. Commit to approaching that area with renewed faithfulness this week, trusting that God sees and values your obedience.

**QUESTION 6 (DISCIPLESHIP FOCUS):** In our walk with Christ, we often want immediate answers to prayer and quick solutions to our problems. James' story reminds us that God's timeline isn't always our timeline. How can you trust God and remain faithful even when He doesn't answer your prayers the way you expected?

**ANSWER:** Spiritual maturity is a process, not an event. We want instant transformation, but God often works slowly, shaping us day by day. Trust isn't about getting what we want when we want it; it's about believing that God is good and faithful even when circumstances are difficult.

**TEACHING NOTES:**

- Discuss the difference between deliverance (God removes the problem) and perseverance (God gives us strength to endure the problem). Both are acts of grace.
- Share testimonies of people who grew stronger through their struggles rather than being rescued from them.
- Remind participants that God's ultimate plan is not just answered prayers but spiritual transformation. Sometimes the struggle itself is what shapes us into who we need to become.

**APPLICATION:** Ask participants to identify one area where they've been praying for God's intervention. Invite them to pray a new prayer: "God, whether you deliver me quickly or give me strength to endure, I trust you. Help me grow through this."



## **Closing Prayer - James (brother of Jesus) -**

Lord Jesus,

Thank You for James, who grew from a skeptic to a servant, from doubting his brother to leading Your church. Thank You for his humility - he could have boasted of being Your earthly brother but instead called himself simply Your slave. Thank You, Lord for his wisdom that bridged divisions and his practical faith that insisted true belief must show itself in action.

Father, forgive us when we use family connections, positions, or privileges for our own glory rather than Yours. Forgive us when our faith is all words and no works, when we hear Your Word but fail to do it. Lord, Give us James's wisdom to navigate difficult situations and bring peace where there is conflict. Help us to be bridge - builders in a divided world, standing firm on truth while extending grace. Teach us that genuine faith transforms how we treat the poor, control our tongues, and live out our beliefs in practical, everyday ways. Father God, help us to live with the humility of James - serving rather than being served, pointing others to You Lord rather than to ourselves. May our lives demonstrate that we truly believe what we claim with our lips. Lord, show us where our faith needs feet today.

In Your holy name we pray,  
Amen.



## PHILIP - TAKING THE GOSPEL BEYOND JERUSALEM

**QUESTION 1:** Philip left Jerusalem during persecution and went to Samaria—a place most Jews avoided. Have you ever felt God calling you to go somewhere or do something that made you uncomfortable? How did you respond?

**ANSWER:** Philip's willingness to go to Samaria demonstrated radical obedience. Jews despised Samaritans, yet Philip didn't let cultural prejudice or personal comfort dictate his obedience. When God calls us outside our comfort zones, He's often positioning us for breakthrough—both in our lives and in the lives of others.

### TEACHING NOTES:

- Discuss the difference between discomfort that comes from God's leading versus discomfort that comes from sin or foolishness.
- God often calls us to cross cultural, social, or economic boundaries to reach people with the gospel.
- The Samaritan mission was preparation for the greater mission to the Gentiles. God uses our acts of obedience as training ground for greater assignments.

**APPLICATION:** Ask participants to identify one group of people or one area of ministry that makes them uncomfortable. Could God be calling them to step into that discomfort?

**QUESTION 2:** Philip was in the middle of a successful revival in Samaria when God told him to leave and go to a desert road. How would you have responded to that instruction? What does this teach us about God's priorities?

**ANSWER:** Most of us would have resisted leaving a successful ministry. But Philip understood that God values obedience over results. God's priorities aren't always about the crowds or the visible success. Sometimes His greatest work happens in one-on-one encounters with people who are hungry for truth.

### TEACHING NOTES:

- Discuss the tension between ministry momentum and God's specific direction. Sometimes God asks us to leave what's working to pursue what He's calling us to.
- The Ethiopian eunuch story reminds us that every individual matters to God. We can't get so focused on the masses that we miss the one.
- Philip's obedience had ripple effects he never saw—the gospel spreading to Africa through one man.

**APPLICATION:** Ask participants if there's something "successful" in their life that God might be asking them to lay down in order to pursue His specific calling. What would it take to obey?



**QUESTION 3:** The Ethiopian eunuch was searching for truth but needed someone to explain the Scriptures to him. Have you ever been that person for someone else? Have you ever needed someone to explain the gospel to you?

**ANSWER:** This question highlights the importance of both evangelism and discipleship. The eunuch had access to Scripture but not understanding. Philip provided the missing piece—explanation and context that helped him see Jesus in the Old Testament prophecies.

**TEACHING NOTES:**

- Many people today have Bibles but don't understand them. We need people like Philip who can explain Scripture clearly.
- Discuss the role of the Holy Spirit in opening people's hearts (like with Lydia) and the role of human explanation (like with the eunuch). Both are necessary.

**APPLICATION:** Encourage participants to identify one person in their life who might be searching for spiritual truth. How can they create an opportunity to have a conversation about Jesus?

**QUESTION 4:** Simon the Sorcerer believed and was baptized, but his heart wasn't right. What's the difference between believing in Jesus and truly following Him with a pure heart?

**ANSWER:** Simon's story is a sobering reminder that not everyone who professes faith has genuine faith. Simon wanted the power of God without the transformation of God. He wanted the gifts without the Giver. True faith involves repentance, submission, and a desire for God Himself—not just what He can do for us.

**TEACHING NOTES:**

- Discuss the difference between intellectual assent (believing facts about Jesus) and saving faith (trusting Jesus as Lord and Savior).
- Simon's problem was his motive. He wanted to use God rather than worship God.
- Peter's harsh rebuke shows that false faith within the church is dangerous and must be addressed.

**APPLICATION:** Invite participants to examine their own hearts. Are there areas where they're more interested in what God can do for them than in knowing God Himself?

**QUESTION 5:** Philip raised four daughters who all prophesied. What does this tell us about the importance of discipling the next generation? How can you invest in others, especially young believers?

**ANSWER:** Philip's greatest legacy may not have been his evangelistic campaigns but the four daughters he raised to love God and use their spiritual gifts. This shows that discipleship begins at home. Parents have a unique opportunity to shape the next generation of believers.



## TEACHING NOTES:

- Discuss the importance of family discipleship. Children should see authentic faith lived out in the home.
- Note that Philip's daughters were prophets—women who spoke God's word with authority. This challenges cultural restrictions on women's ministry.
- Philip didn't just evangelize strangers; he invested in his own family. Both are important.

**APPLICATION:** If participants have children, ask them to identify one specific way they can disciple their kids this week. If they don't have children, ask them to identify one younger believer they can invest in.

**QUESTION 6 (DISCIPLESHIP FOCUS):** Philip obeyed God even when it didn't make sense—leaving a successful ministry to go to a desert road. In discipleship, we often have to take steps of faith that seem counterintuitive. How can Philip's example encourage you to obey God's voice even when you don't understand the "why"?

**ANSWER:** Discipleship requires faith—trusting God even when His instructions don't make logical sense. Philip had no way of knowing that one conversation with an Ethiopian official would impact an entire continent. He simply obeyed and let God handle the results.

## TEACHING NOTES:

- Discuss other biblical examples of counterintuitive obedience: Abraham leaving his homeland, Noah building an ark, Joshua marching around Jericho.
- God often asks us to obey before we see the outcome. That's what makes it faith.
- The hardest part of obedience is not knowing what will happen. But that's exactly where trust is built.

**APPLICATION:** Ask participants to identify one area where God is asking them to take a step of faith that doesn't make sense logically. What's holding them back from obeying?

Closing Prayer:

Heavenly Father,  
Thank You for Philip's example of radical obedience. Lord, He followed Your Spirit's leading even when it didn't make sense to human wisdom. Father, forgive us when we ignore Your promptings because they seem inconvenient or illogical. Forgive us when we value our comfort over Your call. Help us to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's direction, willing to leave the crowd to minister to the one, ready to share Jesus with anyone You place in our path. Lord, give us Philip's heart for evangelism - his passion for sharing the good news and his ability to clearly explain the Scriptures. Help us see divine appointments in everyday encounters. Whether You send us across the street or across the world, may we respond with immediate obedience. Teach us that faithfulness in small things qualifies us for greater things. May we be found faithful wherever You plant us today, trusting that You are orchestrating every divine encounter. In Jesus' name,  
Amen.



## BARNABAS - THE SON OF ENCOURAGEMENT

**QUESTION 1:** Barnabas was nicknamed "the son of encouragement." If people gave you a nickname based on your character, what would it be? What would you want it to be?

**ANSWER:** This question invites honest self-reflection. Our reputations are built through consistent patterns of behavior. Barnabas earned his nickname through a pattern of encouraging, believing in, and investing in others. What patterns define us?

### TEACHING NOTES:

- Discuss the power of identity. Names in Scripture often reflected character or calling. Being renamed was significant.
- Encouragement is a spiritual gift (Romans 12:8) but also a character quality all believers should cultivate.
- Ask participants to think about what they want to be known for. Then ask what they're currently known for. Is there a gap?

**APPLICATION:** Encourage participants to ask a trusted friend or family member: "If you had to give me a nickname based on my character, what would it be?" Use that feedback to identify areas for growth.

**QUESTION 2:** Barnabas vouched for Paul when no one else believed in him. Have you ever had someone take a risk on you like that? How did it change your life?

**ANSWER:** Most of us can point to someone who believed in us when others didn't. These "Barnabas moments" are often turning points in our lives. Barnabas' willingness to vouch for Paul literally changed the course of Christian history.

### TEACHING NOTES:

- Discuss the risk Barnabas took. If he was wrong about Paul, his own reputation would be damaged.
- Sometimes the greatest gift we can give someone is belief in their potential.
- Share stories (personal or biblical) of people who were transformed because someone believed in them.

**APPLICATION:** Ask participants to identify one person in their life who needs someone to believe in them. How can they be a Barnabas to that person this week?

**QUESTION 3:** Barnabas could have stayed in Antioch and built his own ministry, but instead he went and found Paul to partner with him. How do you respond when someone else gets more recognition than you? What does Barnabas' example teach us about humility and teamwork?

**ANSWER:** Barnabas' security in his identity allowed him to share the spotlight without feeling threatened. He genuinely wanted to see the work of God advance, even if that meant someone else got the credit. This kind of humility is rare and beautiful.



## TEACHING NOTES:

- Discuss the sin of envy and how it destroys ministries and relationships.
- Barnabas could celebrate Paul's gifts without feeling diminished by them. That's mature Christian community.
- The goal is the advancement of the gospel, not our own advancement. When we lose sight of that, we become competitive rather than collaborative.

**APPLICATION:** Ask participants to identify one person whose success they struggle to celebrate. What does that reveal about their own heart? How can they choose to genuinely rejoice with that person?

**QUESTION 4:** Paul and Barnabas had a sharp disagreement over whether to give Mark a second chance. Who do you think was right? How do you balance high standards with grace for people who fail?

**ANSWER:** This is a great question because both Paul and Barnabas were right from different perspectives. Paul prioritized the mission and team reliability. Barnabas prioritized restoration and second chances. God used both approaches—Paul's team went one direction, Barnabas' team went another, and the gospel spread further as a result.

## TEACHING NOTES:

- Discuss how the church needs both the "Paul perspective" (high standards, accountability) and the "Barnabas perspective" (grace, restoration).
- The key is wisdom to know when each approach is needed.
- The beautiful ending is that Paul later acknowledged Mark's value, showing that Barnabas' investment paid off.

**APPLICATION:** Ask participants to think about a situation where someone has let them down. Do they need to prioritize accountability (Paul) or restoration (Barnabas)? How can they know which is appropriate?

**QUESTION 5:** Barnabas invested in Mark, and years later, Mark became one of Paul's most trusted companions and wrote one of the Gospels. Have you ever invested in someone who didn't seem to deserve it? What happened?

**ANSWER:** Barnabas saw past Mark's failure to his potential. This long-term investment required patience, belief, and mentorship. The fruit wasn't immediate, but it was eternal—Mark wrote one of the four Gospels.



## TEACHING NOTES:

- Discuss the difference between enabling and encouraging. Barnabas didn't excuse Mark's failure; he helped him grow past it.
- Mentorship takes time. We live in an instant-results culture, but discipleship is a long game.
- Sometimes the people who seem least promising become the most fruitful when someone believes in them.

**APPLICATION:** Challenge participants to identify one person who needs mentorship and investment. Commit to investing in that person for the next three months, regardless of immediate results.

**QUESTION 6 (DISCIPLESHIP FOCUS):** Barnabas believed in people's potential, not just their past. In the Christian community, we often carry shame about who we used to be. How can Barnabas' example help you see yourself (and others) through the lens of grace rather than past mistakes?

**ANSWER:** We are not defined by our past but by God's grace and our future in Christ. Barnabas looked at Paul's violent history and saw a future apostle. He looked at Mark's desertion and saw a future Gospel writer. God specializes in redemption stories.

## TEACHING NOTES:

- Discuss 2 Corinthians 5:17: "If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"
- The enemy uses shame to keep us stuck in the past. God uses grace to propel us into the future.
- We need to extend to ourselves the same grace we're called to extend to others.

**APPLICATION:** Ask participants to write down one thing they're ashamed of from their past. Then pray together, asking God to help them see themselves through His eyes—as forgiven, redeemed, and full of potential.



Gracious God,

Thank You for Barnabas, whose very name means "Son of Encouragement." Thank You for his generous spirit that held possessions loosely and gave freely. Thank You for his ability to see potential in people others had given up on—in Saul the persecutor, in John Mark the quitter.

Father, we confess that we are often quick to judge and slow to encourage. We see people's failures rather than their potential. We hold grudges rather than offer second chances. We compete rather than champion others' success.

Give us Barnabas's heart—eyes that see what people can become in You, a spirit that builds up rather than tears down, hands that are quick to help and slow to point fingers. Help us to be encouragers in a world full of critics.

Show us someone today who needs our encouragement. Help us to invest in people others overlook. Give us wisdom to mentor, courage to stand with the unpopular, and grace to believe the best in others.

Make us good finders, Lord—people who look for and celebrate what You are doing in others' lives.

In Christ's name,  
Amen.



## CHAPTER 5: SILAS - THE PARTNER IN CHAINS

**QUESTION 1:** Silas was described as a leader and a prophet who had "risked his life for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." What does it mean to risk everything for Jesus? Have you ever had to make a costly decision to follow Him?

**ANSWER:** To risk everything for Jesus means being willing to sacrifice comfort, reputation, relationships, safety, or even life itself for the sake of the gospel. For Silas, this meant leaving the security of Jerusalem to travel dangerous roads, face violent mobs, and endure imprisonment. It meant choosing obedience to Christ over personal safety. In our context, it might mean being willing to lose friendships, job opportunities, social standing, or family approval to follow Jesus faithfully.

### TEACHING NOTES:

- Discuss the difference between reckless foolishness and Spirit-led risk-taking. God doesn't call us to be stupid, but He does call us to be willing to sacrifice for His kingdom.
- In the first century, following Christ often meant literal life-or-death risks. In most Western contexts today, the risks are different but still real—social rejection, career limitations, family division.
- Ask participants to consider: What are you unwilling to risk for Jesus? That reveals what you value more than Him.

**APPLICATION:** Challenge participants to identify one area where following Jesus might cost them something (a relationship, a compromise they're asked to make at work, popularity). Are they willing to pay that price?

**QUESTION 2:** Paul chose Silas as his ministry partner after parting ways with Barnabas. What qualities do you think Paul saw in Silas that made him the right choice? What qualities make someone a good ministry partner or discipleship partner?

**ANSWER:** Paul likely saw in Silas: reliability, spiritual maturity, proven faithfulness under pressure, prophetic gifting, Roman citizenship (practical for their mission), and alignment with Paul's theological convictions. Silas was a leader in Jerusalem, respected by the apostles, and had already demonstrated willingness to sacrifice for the gospel. Good ministry partners share core convictions, complement each other's strengths and weaknesses, remain faithful under pressure, and prioritize the mission over personal preference.

### TEACHING NOTES:

- Contrast Silas with John Mark. Mark was young and unproven; Silas was mature and tested. Both were valuable, but for different assignments at different times.
- Discuss the importance of chemistry in ministry partnerships. Paul and Silas worked well together because they shared values, work ethic, and calling.
- Not everyone is called to partner with everyone. That's okay. The key is finding the right fit for the assignment God has given you.



**APPLICATION:** If participants are in ministry partnerships (marriage, small group co-leadership, serving together), ask them to evaluate: Do we share core convictions? Do we complement each other? Do we prioritize the mission over our preferences?

**QUESTION 3:** Paul and Silas were beaten and imprisoned in Philippi for casting a demon out of a slave girl—for doing good. Have you ever suffered for doing the right thing? How did you respond?

**ANSWER:** This question addresses the hard reality that sometimes obedience to God leads to suffering, not blessing. Paul and Silas did exactly what Jesus would have done—they freed a girl from demonic oppression. Their reward? Severe beating and imprisonment. This reminds us that we live in a fallen world where doing right often provokes opposition. How we respond to unjust suffering reveals the depth of our faith.

**TEACHING NOTES:**

- Distinguish between suffering for righteousness (1 Peter 3:14) and suffering for foolishness. Paul and Silas suffered because they confronted evil; that's different from suffering because we were unnecessarily offensive or unwise.
- Jesus promised His followers would face persecution (John 15:18-20). We shouldn't be surprised when it happens.
- The key question is: How do you respond when you suffer for doing good? With bitterness and complaint, or with worship and trust?

**APPLICATION:** Share examples of modern believers who've suffered for doing good (Christians fired for their convictions, students mocked for their faith, missionaries persecuted for preaching). How can we support and pray for them?

**QUESTION 4:** At midnight, in prison, with their feet in stocks, Paul and Silas sang hymns. How is that even possible? What do you think was going through their minds?

**ANSWER:** This is one of the most countercultural moments in Scripture. Normal human response to such circumstances would be anger, despair, or complaint. But Paul and Silas worshiped. How? They had: (1) A perspective bigger than their circumstances—they saw beyond the immediate suffering to God's sovereignty, (2) A joy rooted in relationship with God, not in comfortable circumstances, (3) A confidence that God was still in control even when everything seemed out of control, (4) A habit of worship that wasn't dependent on their feelings. They likely remembered God's faithfulness in past trials and chose to trust Him in this one.

**TEACHING NOTES:**

- This wasn't fake joy or denial of pain. They'd been severely beaten. They were locked in stocks in the darkest part of a Roman prison. The pain was real.
- But they made a choice: Will I focus on my circumstances or on my God? Will I let this moment define me, or will I let God's character define this moment?
- Worship is always a choice. It's easiest on the mountaintop, but most powerful in the valley.



**APPLICATION:** Challenge participants to create a "crisis worship plan." When the next trial hits—and it will—what will you do? Have a playlist ready. Have verses memorized. Have a prayer you can pray when you can't think of words. Don't wait until you're in the dark to figure out how to worship in the dark.

**QUESTION 5:** The jailer heard Paul and Silas singing and ultimately came to faith. Who might be listening to how you respond to suffering? How can your response to hardship become a witness to others?

**ANSWER:** We often forget that we have an audience. The jailer wasn't just guarding prisoners—he was watching them. He saw how they responded to injustice. He heard them worship in the darkness. And when the earthquake happened, their integrity (staying put when they could have escaped) convinced him that their God was real. Our response to suffering is one of the most powerful witnesses we have. People can debate theology, but they can't argue with genuine joy in the midst of pain.

#### **TEACHING NOTES:**

- Discuss the difference between authentic Christian joy and toxic positivity. We don't pretend everything is fine; we acknowledge the pain while choosing to trust God in it.
- Your children are watching how you respond to hardship. Your coworkers are watching. Your neighbors are watching. What are they learning about your God?
- Sometimes our greatest evangelistic opportunity comes not in what we say, but in how we suffer.

**APPLICATION:** Ask participants to think about the non-Christians in their lives. What have those people seen when trials come? Do they see complaining and despair, or faith and worship? What needs to change?

**QUESTION 6 (DISCIPLESHIP FOCUS):** Silas remained steady and faithful through extreme circumstances. In our walk with Christ, consistency is essential. How can you cultivate the kind of steady faithfulness Silas demonstrated, even when following Jesus is costly or difficult?

**ANSWER:** Steady faithfulness isn't something you manufacture in the moment of crisis—it's built through small acts of obedience over time. Silas was steady in prison because he'd been steady in Jerusalem, steady on the road, steady in success and in failure. Cultivating this kind of faithfulness requires: (1) Daily spiritual disciplines that keep you connected to God, (2) A long-term perspective that looks beyond immediate circumstances, (3) Community that encourages you when you want to quit, (4) Remembering God's past faithfulness, (5) Making choices based on truth rather than feelings.



## TEACHING NOTES:

- Use the metaphor of training for a marathon. You don't show up on race day without preparation. Similarly, you don't suddenly become faithful under pressure without practicing faithfulness in the everyday.
- Consistency is built through habit. What habits are you building that will sustain you in hard times?
- The goal isn't perfection—Silas wasn't perfect. The goal is faithful presence. Showing up. Staying when others quit. Worshiping when others complain.

**APPLICATION:** Challenge participants to identify one area where they struggle with consistency (prayer, Bible reading, church attendance, serving). Commit to practicing faithfulness in that area for 30 days, recognizing that you're building spiritual muscle for future trials.

Faithful Father,

Thank You for Silas, the steady companion who stood beside Paul through beatings, imprisonment, and hardship. Thank You that even in the darkest prison, at midnight, with bleeding backs, Silas and Paul sang hymns of praise to You. Thank You for his example of worship in suffering and faithfulness in obscurity.

Lord, we confess that we often complain in small discomforts and question You in minor trials. We want to serve You only when it's convenient, comfortable, and recognized. Forgive us for our conditional commitment.

Give us Silas's steadfast faith that doesn't waver when circumstances become difficult. Teach us to worship You not just when life is good, but especially when it's hard. Help us to be faithful friends and reliable companions who don't abandon others when the going gets tough.

Remind us that You see our service even when no one else does, that You honor faithfulness even when it's never applauded. Help us to be content as supporting players in Your kingdom, knowing that every role matters and that faithful service—seen or unseen—brings You glory.

May we sing Your praises at midnight, trust You in the dark, and remain faithful wherever You place us.

In Jesus' name,  
Amen.



## CHAPTER 6: TIMOTHY - THE FAITHFUL SON

**QUESTION 1:** Timothy had a complicated family background—half-Jewish, half-Gentile. How did his unique background position him for ministry? How has your background (even the painful parts) prepared you for what God has called you to do?

**ANSWER:** Timothy's mixed heritage could have been a liability—he didn't fully fit in either Jewish or Gentile communities. But God used it as an asset. Timothy could relate to both groups. He understood cultural tension. He knew what it felt like to be an outsider. This positioned him perfectly for ministry in the early church, which was navigating the integration of Jews and Gentiles. Similarly, our unique backgrounds—including the painful parts—often prepare us for ministry we couldn't have anticipated. The things we think disqualify us are often the very things God wants to use.

### TEACHING NOTES:

- Romans 8:28 promises that God works all things together for good for those who love Him. "All things" includes family dysfunction, cultural complexity, and painful experiences.
- Discuss how Joseph's slavery and imprisonment prepared him to lead Egypt, how Moses' time in the wilderness prepared him to lead Israel, how Paul's rabbinical training prepared him to write the Epistles.
- The question isn't "Why did this happen to me?" but "How can God use this?"

**APPLICATION:** Guide participants through a reflection exercise: What aspects of your background have been painful or complicated? How might God want to use those experiences to minister to others? Who needs someone who understands what you've been through?**QUESTION 2:** Paul circumcised Timothy not because it was required for salvation, but to remove barriers to ministry. When is it appropriate to make sacrifices or compromises for the sake of reaching others? When is it not?

**ANSWER:** This question touches on Paul's principle from 1 Corinthians 9:19-23: "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some." Timothy's circumcision was a strategic decision—it removed an unnecessary obstacle to the gospel. But there's a crucial distinction: We can be flexible on matters of preference and culture, but we must never compromise on matters of truth and doctrine. Timothy's circumcision didn't violate the gospel; it actually demonstrated that salvation isn't by circumcision. We must know the difference between essential truths we die for and preferences we hold loosely.

### TEACHING NOTES:

- Contrast Timothy's circumcision (acceptable) with the false teachers in Galatia demanding circumcision for salvation (unacceptable). Context and motivation matter.
- Discuss contemporary applications: adapting worship styles to reach different cultures vs. compromising biblical truth to gain acceptance.
- The key question: "Does this compromise the gospel or just my comfort?"



**APPLICATION:** Ask participants to identify one area where they might need to be more flexible for the sake of reaching others (music preferences, meeting times, ministry methods). Then identify one area where they must stand firm regardless of pressure (biblical authority, the exclusivity of Christ, moral standards).

**QUESTION 3:** Timothy struggled with fear and timidity, yet Paul trusted him with major responsibilities. How does Timothy's example encourage those who don't feel naturally bold or confident?

**ANSWER:** Timothy's story is proof that God doesn't only use the naturally gifted and confident. He uses willing, faithful people—even when they're scared. In fact, Timothy's weakness may have made him more effective because it kept him dependent on God. Paul didn't choose Timothy despite his timidity; God used Timothy through his timidity. This should massively encourage those who feel inadequate. Your weakness isn't disqualifying—it's your invitation to rely on God's strength.

#### **TEACHING NOTES:**

- Read 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, where Paul celebrates his weaknesses because they display God's power.
- Discuss the difference between personality and character. Timothy's timid personality didn't prevent him from demonstrating godly character (faithfulness, integrity, perseverance).
- Some of the most effective ministers are introverts, naturally timid people, or those who wrestle with anxiety. Why? Because they know they can't do it in their own strength.

**APPLICATION:** For those who struggle with confidence: What "thorn in the flesh" might God want to use to display His power through you? For naturally confident people: How can you learn from Timothy's dependence on God rather than self-confidence

**QUESTION 4:** Paul told Timothy to "fan into flame the gift of God." What do you think causes spiritual gifts to fade or go dormant? What does it mean to "fan them into flame"?

**ANSWER:** Spiritual gifts can fade due to: fear (like Timothy's timidity), discouragement from criticism, busyness that crowds out ministry, comparison with others' gifts, lack of use (gifts atrophy when not exercised), or spiritual drift from God. To "fan into flame" means to actively cultivate your gifts through practice, prayer, and obedience. It means pushing past fear to use your gifts. It means not letting criticism silence what God has called you to do. It means creating space in your life to exercise your gifts regularly.

#### **TEACHING NOTES:**

- Gifts are both given by God and developed through use. God gives the seed; we cultivate the plant.
- Use the metaphor of a fire: Embers can seem dead but still contain heat. With the right attention—adding fuel, blowing on them, creating airflow—they burst into flame again.
- Timothy needed Paul's reminder. We all need people in our lives who call out our gifts and encourage us to use them.



**APPLICATION:** Ask participants: (1) What spiritual gift has God given you? (2) Is it being actively used or has it gone dormant? (3) What's one specific step you can take this week to "fan it into flame"?

**QUESTION 5:** Even in his final days, Paul called for Timothy. What does this say about the power of faithful friendship and partnership in ministry?

**ANSWER:** Paul's final letter to Timothy reveals the depth of their relationship. When Paul faced execution, cold and alone, he didn't call for a famous apostle or a powerful leader—he called for Timothy, his faithful son in the faith. This shows that: (1) Ministry partnerships that last decades are built on more than shared tasks—they're built on genuine love and mutual trust, (2) Faithfulness matters more than talent, (3) The greatest legacy we can leave is people we've invested in who will carry on the work after we're gone, (4) Deep Christian friendship sustains us in our darkest hours.

**TEACHING NOTES:**

- Discuss the epidemic of loneliness, even in Christian leadership. Many pastors and ministry leaders have no close friends.
- Paul and Timothy's relationship models what Proverbs 27:17 describes: "Iron sharpens iron."
- The goal of discipleship isn't just information transfer—it's relationship that produces transformation.

**APPLICATION:** Challenge participants to evaluate their relationships: (1) Do you have a "Paul" in your life—someone more mature who's investing in you? (2) Do you have a "Timothy"—someone you're pouring into? (3) What steps can you take to develop these kinds of relationships?

**QUESTION 6 (DISCIPLESHIP FOCUS):** Timothy had to overcome fear and insecurity to fulfill his calling. What fears or insecurities are holding you back from fully embracing your calling as a disciple? How can God use those weaknesses to display His strength?

**ANSWER:** This question invites vulnerable self-examination. Common fears include: fear of failure, fear of rejection, fear of inadequacy, fear of what others think, fear of being exposed as a fraud (imposter syndrome). These fears often paralyze us from stepping into what God has called us to do. But God doesn't waste our weaknesses—He uses them. When we step forward despite our fears, God's power is magnified. Our weakness becomes the canvas on which He displays His strength.

**TEACHING NOTES:**

- Distinguish between healthy caution and paralyzing fear. Wisdom says, "I need to prepare and pray." Fear says, "I can't do this so I won't try."
- Every person God used in Scripture felt inadequate: Moses ("I can't speak"), Gideon ("My family is weak"), Jeremiah ("I'm too young"), Peter ("I'm a sinful man"). God didn't wait until they felt confident—He used them despite their insecurity.
- Faith isn't the absence of fear; it's obedience in the presence of fear.



**APPLICATION:** Have participants complete this sentence: "If I weren't afraid, I would \_\_\_\_\_." Then ask: "What if God is calling you to do that very thing, fear and all?" Encourage them to take one small step toward that calling this week, fear and all, trusting God to provide the strength.

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank You for Timothy's example—a young man who didn't let his youth be a stumbling block but instead became an example to believers in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity. Thank You for his genuine faith, learned first from his grandmother Lois and mother Eunice, and then lived out faithfully in Your service.

Forgive us when we make excuses for why we can't serve You—too young, too old, too inexperienced, too fearful. Forgive us when we let insecurity keep us from using the gifts You've given us. Forgive us when we lack Timothy's teachable spirit and sincere devotion.

Lord, raise up Timothys in our generation—young people who will serve You wholeheartedly, who will stand firm in sound doctrine, who will endure hardship for the sake of the gospel. Give parents and mentors Paul-like hearts to invest in the next generation.

Whether we are young or old, help us to live as examples worth following. Give us Timothy's genuine concern for others, his willingness to be mentored, and his courage to stand for truth even when it costs us. Fan into flame the gifts You have given each of us.

May we be found faithful, sincere, and bold in our generation.

In Christ's name,  
Amen.



## CHAPTER 7: LYDIA - THE BUSINESSWOMAN WHO OPENED HER HOME

**QUESTION 1:** Lydia was a "worshiper of God" before she met Paul, which means she was already seeking truth. How does a heart that seeks God position us to recognize Him when we encounter the gospel?

**ANSWER:** Lydia's story demonstrates a crucial principle: God responds to seeking hearts. She was already worshiping the God of Israel, studying Scripture, and gathering with other God-fearers for prayer. When Paul arrived and explained the gospel, her heart was prepared soil. Jesus taught this in the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13)—the condition of the soil determines the response to the seed. A heart that seeks God through general revelation (creation, conscience, Scripture) is positioned to receive special revelation (the gospel of Jesus Christ). This doesn't mean she earned salvation by seeking—it means God honors genuine spiritual hunger.

### TEACHING NOTES:

- Distinguish between seeking God and earning salvation. Lydia's seeking didn't save her; faith in Christ saved her. But her seeking positioned her to hear and respond to the gospel.
- Acts 17:27 says God determined times and places for people "so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him." God orchestrates circumstances to bring seekers to the gospel.
- Discuss how apologetics, creation, conscience, and Scripture can prepare hearts for the gospel, but only the Holy Spirit can open hearts (as with Lydia).

**APPLICATION:** Encourage participants to pray for seeking people they know. Ask God to orchestrate divine appointments where gospel conversations can happen. Also, challenge believers to cultivate their own hunger for God through regular time in His Word and prayer—seeking hearts grow closer to God.

**QUESTION 2:** The Bible says "the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message." What does this teach us about how people come to faith? What is our role, and what is God's role?

**ANSWER:** This verse beautifully balances divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Paul preached (human role), but the Lord opened Lydia's heart (divine role). We can't open anyone's heart—only God can do that. Our role is to faithfully proclaim the gospel, live as witnesses, pray for the lost, and love people well. God's role is to convict, regenerate, draw, and save. This should humble us (we can't save anyone) and encourage us (the results are in God's hands, not ours). We're responsible for faithfulness, not results.



## TEACHING NOTES:

- Discuss the tension between evangelism as a human activity and salvation as a divine work. Both are biblical truths we hold simultaneously.
- Read John 6:44—"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them." Salvation is ultimately God's work.
- This truth should take pressure off us. We don't have to manipulate, coerce, or guilt people into faith. We proclaim; God opens hearts.

**APPLICATION:** If participants are anxious about evangelism, this truth brings freedom. Your job isn't to save people—it's to share Jesus and trust God with the results. Practice giving your testimony or sharing a simple gospel presentation, then pray for opportunities and trust God to open hearts.

**QUESTION 3:** Lydia immediately invited Paul and his companions to stay at her house. Why is hospitality such an important part of Christian community? How can you practice hospitality, even if you don't have a lot of resources?

**ANSWER:** In the ancient world, hospitality wasn't optional—it was essential. There were no hotels or motels; travelers depended on hospitality. But beyond practical need, hospitality creates space for relationship, discipleship, and community. Romans 12:13 commands us to "practice hospitality." Hebrews 13:2 reminds us that some "have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it." Hospitality says, "You matter. You're welcome here. My home is your home." It's a tangible expression of Christ's welcome to us. And it doesn't require wealth—it requires willingness. You can practice hospitality with a small apartment, simple food, and a generous heart.

## TEACHING NOTES:

- Distinguish between entertaining and hospitality. Entertaining says, "I want to impress you." Hospitality says, "I want to bless you." Entertaining focuses on performance; hospitality focuses on people.
- In our individualistic culture, hospitality is countercultural. We guard our privacy and personal space. But biblical community requires opening our lives and homes.
- Lydia had resources, but hospitality isn't reserved for the wealthy. The widow who shared her last bit of food with Elijah (1 Kings 17) practiced hospitality. It's about generosity, not abundance.

**APPLICATION:** Challenge participants to practice hospitality this month: (1) Invite someone over for a simple meal, (2) Open your home for a small group or Bible study, (3) Host someone who needs a place to stay, (4) Have a "coffee and conversation" time with someone new to your church. Don't wait until your house is perfect or you feel ready—just do it.



**QUESTION 4:** Lydia was a businesswoman who used her wealth and influence for the gospel. How can Christians today use their careers, resources, and influence to further God's kingdom?

**ANSWER:** Lydia models "kingdom stewardship"—recognizing that everything we have belongs to God and should be used for His purposes. She didn't see her business and her faith as separate compartments. Her wealth funded Paul's ministry. Her home hosted the church. Her influence opened doors for the gospel. Every Christian, regardless of vocation, can ask: "How is God calling me to use my career, resources, and influence for His kingdom?" This might mean: financial giving, using your home for ministry, mentoring believers in your field, demonstrating Christian ethics in business, creating space in your schedule for service, or using your platform to point people to Jesus.

**TEACHING NOTES:**

- Challenge the sacred/secular divide. There's no "secular" work for a Christian—all work can be done for God's glory (Colossians 3:23).
- Discuss various ways people can steward their vocations for the kingdom: Lawyers can offer pro bono work to ministries or the poor. Teachers can mentor students spiritually. Business owners can create redemptive workplaces. Artists can create for God's glory. Retirees can use their time and wisdom to serve.
- Lydia's giving wasn't an afterthought—it was central to her identity as a believer. How we use our resources reveals what we truly worship.

**APPLICATION:** Ask participants: (1) How might God want to use your specific vocation for His kingdom? (2) What resources (time, money, skills, connections) has God given you? (3) What's one concrete way you can steward those resources for gospel purposes this quarter?

**QUESTION 5:** Lydia's home became the first church in Philippi. What does this teach us about the importance of opening our homes and our lives to Christian community?

**ANSWER:** The early church didn't have buildings—they met in homes. This wasn't just practical; it was theological. The church isn't a building; it's a people. And people need space to gather, share life, grow, and encourage one another. Lydia's hospitality created that space. When we open our homes, we're not just being nice—we're facilitating spiritual growth and community formation. Home-based ministry is intimate (you really get to know people), sustainable (doesn't require massive resources), and reproducible (anyone can do it). Acts 2:42-47 describes the early church meeting in homes daily—breaking bread, praying, learning, and sharing life together.



## TEACHING NOTES:

- The shift from house churches to church buildings brought gains (capacity, visibility, resources) and losses (intimacy, accessibility, every-member participation). We need both large gatherings and small, home-based community.
- Some people feel intimidated by the idea of hosting because their home isn't big or nice enough. But the early church met in all kinds of homes—rich and poor. What matters is willingness, not square footage.
- Opening your home requires vulnerability. People see the real you—the mess, the ordinary, the everyday. But that's where authentic community happens.

**APPLICATION:** If your church doesn't have a small group ministry, consider starting one in your home. If you're already in a small group, consider hosting it. If that feels overwhelming, start smaller: Invite one or two people over for coffee and conversation. Build from there.

**QUESTION 6 (DISCIPLESHIP FOCUS):** Lydia's hospitality created a space where people could encounter God and grow in their faith. In discipleship, community is essential. How can you create or contribute to a space where others feel welcomed and safe to grow spiritually?

**ANSWER:** Creating safe space for spiritual growth requires: (1) **Authenticity**—modeling vulnerability by sharing your own struggles and questions, not just your victories, (2) **Acceptance**—welcoming people wherever they are in their journey without judgment, (3) **Intentionality**—deliberately creating opportunities for spiritual conversations and growth, (4) **Consistency**—showing up regularly so people know they can count on you, (5) **Prayer**—asking God to work in people's hearts and inviting the Holy Spirit's presence. Safe spaces aren't about having all the answers—they're about creating an environment where questions are welcomed, struggles are normalized, and grace is abundant.

## TEACHING NOTES:

- Contrast "safe spaces" with "comfortable spaces." Safe spaces allow for challenge and growth; comfortable spaces avoid difficult truths. We need safety to be vulnerable, but also truth that transforms.
- Discipleship happens best in the context of relationship. You can't disciple someone from a distance. Life-on-life ministry requires access to each other's real lives.
- Different people create different kinds of spaces. Some are great at one-on-one discipleship. Others excel at hosting groups. Some create online communities. The method varies, but the principle remains: Make space for others to encounter God.

**APPLICATION:** Reflect on your current relationships: (1) Where do you feel safe to be spiritually vulnerable? (2) Who has created that space for you? Thank them. (3) For whom can you create that kind of space? Take one step this week to cultivate that environment—maybe a coffee date, a phone call, or an invitation to join you in something.



Gracious Father,

Thank You for Lydia, the businesswoman whose heart You opened to respond to the gospel. Thank You that she was the first believer in Europe, a woman of means who immediately used her resources and her home for Your kingdom. Thank You for her eagerness—she didn't hesitate to be baptized with her household or to insist that Paul's team stay in her home.

Lord, forgive us when our hearts are closed to Your Word and resistant to Your call. Forgive us when we hold our possessions, our homes, and our success tightly rather than holding them with open hands. Forgive us when we wait to serve You "someday" instead of responding with Lydia's immediate obedience.

Give us hearts that are open to Your truth and ready to respond. Help us to see our work, our resources, and our influence as gifts from You to be used for Your purposes. Teach us Lydia's generous hospitality—that our homes and our lives should be open to serve Your people and advance Your gospel.

Whether we have much or little, help us to steward it faithfully. Show us how to use our businesses, careers, and resources to support Your work. May we be known as people whose hearts are open to You and whose doors are open to others.

Make us eager responders like Lydia—quick to believe, quick to obey, and quick to share what we have been given.

In Christ's name,  
Amen.



## CHAPTER 8: PRISCILLA & AQUILA - THE POWER COUPLE OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

**QUESTION 1:** Priscilla and Aquila are always mentioned together, serving as a team. What does their partnership teach us about healthy relationships and ministry? How can couples serve God together?

**ANSWER:** Priscilla and Aquila model what it looks like when a marriage is centered on Christ and oriented toward mission. They weren't just married—they were ministry partners. Several principles emerge: (1) **Shared calling**—they both prioritized the gospel above personal ambition, (2) **Mutual respect**—Priscilla is often listed first, suggesting equal partnership, (3) **Complementary gifting**—they worked together, each bringing their strengths, (4) **Unified purpose**—their marriage served something bigger than themselves, (5) **Sacrificial service**—they risked their lives for Paul and hosted churches in multiple cities. Couples serve God together by making ministry a "we" pursuit, not separate "me" pursuits, by using their home as a ministry hub, and by modeling Christian marriage to the watching world.

### TEACHING NOTES:

- Not all couples are called to vocational ministry, but all Christian couples are called to make their marriage a platform for the gospel.
- Discuss the danger of spouses who are so busy with separate ministries that they never serve together. Ministry can become a wedge rather than a bond.
- For singles: You don't need a spouse to have meaningful ministry partnerships. Sibling relationships, friendships, and ministry teams can provide similar dynamics.

**APPLICATION:** For married couples: Discuss together—Are we serving God as a team or as individuals who happen to be married? What's one ministry we could do together? For singles: Who could you partner with in ministry? Identify someone with complementary gifts and explore serving together.

**QUESTION 2:** When they heard Apollos teaching incomplete theology, Priscilla and Aquila corrected him privately and graciously. How can we correct others without embarrassing or shaming them? Why is this important?

**ANSWER:** Priscilla and Aquila's approach to Apollos is a masterclass in gracious correction. They: (1) **Recognized his gifts**—they saw his potential and wanted to help him reach it, (2) **Acted privately**—they didn't call him out publicly, (3) **Invited him in**—they brought him to their home, creating a safe, relational context, (4) **Came as learners and teachers**—they "explained" more adequately, suggesting dialogue rather than lecture, (5) **Preserved his dignity**—Apollos didn't lose face or credibility. This matters because public humiliation creates defensiveness and damages relationships. Private, gracious correction preserves dignity and opens hearts to receive truth.



## TEACHING NOTES:

- Contrast this with the Pharisees, who corrected publicly to shame. Or with online culture, where people are "called out" for maximum humiliation.
- Matthew 18:15-17 gives Jesus' pattern: go privately first. Public correction is a last resort, not a first step.
- The goal of correction is restoration, not humiliation. If your heart is genuinely for the other person's good, it will show in your approach.

**APPLICATION:** Is there someone you need to correct or have a difficult conversation with? Before you speak: (1) Examine your heart—is your motive to help or to hurt? (2) Pray for wisdom and humility. (3) Initiate a private conversation. (4) Start with affirmation, then address the concern. (5) Listen as much as you speak.

**QUESTION 3:** Priscilla and Aquila opened their home for house churches in multiple cities. What would it look like for you to use your home (or your resources) to build Christian community?

**ANSWER:** Priscilla and Aquila's pattern was consistent: wherever they lived (Corinth, Ephesus, Rome), they hosted the church. Their home wasn't their private sanctuary—it was a ministry tool. For us, this might look like: hosting a small group or Bible study, opening your home for meals with church members or seekers, providing space for young adults or college students to gather, hosting missionaries or traveling ministers, creating a regular rhythm of hospitality (like "Sunday lunch is open to anyone"). The principle is: what God has given you isn't just for you—it's for His kingdom purposes.

## TEACHING NOTES:

- The biggest barrier isn't usually resources—it's willingness. We've made our homes so private that opening them feels invasive.
- Start small. You don't have to host 50 people. Start with one or two. Build from there.
- Consider what barriers you're putting up: "My house is too small/messy/not nice enough." The early church met in all kinds of homes. What matters is welcome, not Pinterest-perfect decor.

**APPLICATION:** Challenge participants to a 30-day hospitality experiment: Open your home at least once. Make it simple—pizza and conversation, coffee and Bible study, whatever feels doable. Then evaluate: What did God do? How did it feel? Could this become a regular rhythm?

**QUESTION 4:** Paul said Priscilla and Aquila "risked their lives" for him. What does it mean to be willing to risk everything for a brother or sister in Christ? Have you ever had to do that?

**ANSWER:** We don't know the specifics of how Priscilla and Aquila risked their lives for Paul, but we know they did—and Paul never forgot it. This kind of sacrificial love goes beyond casual friendship. It says, "Your well-being matters more than my safety." It echoes Jesus' words: "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13). For most of us, this won't mean literal martyrdom. But it might mean: risking reputation by standing with someone who's being slandered, risking resources by helping someone in financial crisis, risking convenience by dropping everything to help in an emergency, or risking comfort by entering into someone's suffering with them.



## TEACHING NOTES:

- Discuss the difference between foolish risk (unnecessary danger) and faithful risk (Spirit-led sacrifice).
- In the early church, association with Christians could be dangerous. Hiding Paul or standing with him publicly could result in arrest or death. They did it anyway.
- In our context, ask: Who would you risk something significant for? That reveals who you truly love.

**APPLICATION:** Think of one person in your church or small group. If they faced a crisis, would you be willing to sacrifice significantly to help them? If not, how can you deepen that relationship? If yes, have you told them you're there for them? Sometimes people need to hear it before the crisis comes.

**QUESTION 5:** Priscilla is often listed before Aquila in Scripture, which was unusual in the ancient world. What does this tell us about the value of women in ministry and leadership?

**ANSWER:** The consistent listing of Priscilla first is significant. In that patriarchal culture, this was unusual and deliberate. It suggests: (1) Priscilla may have been more prominent in ministry, (2) Paul and Luke wanted to honor her contributions specifically, (3) The early church valued women's ministry and leadership, (4) Gender wasn't a barrier to being recognized and respected in the church. This challenges both ancient and modern assumptions about women's roles. Priscilla wasn't silenced or sidelined—she disciplined Apollos, taught theology, and co-led house churches. She was a full partner in gospel ministry.

## TEACHING NOTES:

- This is a sensitive topic with various theological perspectives. Focus on what we can all agree on: Women like Priscilla, Phoebe, Lydia, and Philip's daughters played vital roles in the early church. The gospel honors and uses women.
- Distinguish between gifting and office. Regardless of views on women in certain church offices, all Christians should affirm that women are gifted by the Spirit for ministry and should use those gifts.
- The enemy wants to silence half the church. Whatever your theological position on gender roles, don't let women's voices and contributions be dismissed or ignored.

**APPLICATION:** For everyone: Who are the women in your church who are serving faithfully? Thank them. Honor their contributions. For women: Don't let anyone diminish your calling or gifting. Use what God has given you for His glory. For men: Champion and celebrate women's ministry. Don't just tolerate it—actively support it.



**QUESTION 6 (DISCIPLESHIP FOCUS):** Priscilla and Aquila modeled the power of partnership and teamwork. In discipleship, we often say "iron sharpens iron." Who are your partners in following Christ? How can you cultivate deeper partnerships that help you grow in faith and obedience?

**ANSWER:** "Iron sharpens iron" (Proverbs 27:17) happens through friction—the rubbing together that creates sharpness. Healthy partnerships involve: (1) **Mutual accountability**—permission to ask hard questions and speak truth, (2) **Shared mission**—working toward common goals, (3) **Honest feedback**—loving enough to say what needs to be said, (4) **Regular rhythm**—consistent contact, not just occasional check-ins, (5) **Spiritual investment**—praying for each other, studying Scripture together, processing life through a gospel lens. To cultivate these partnerships: be intentional (schedule regular meetings), be vulnerable (share your real struggles), be humble (receive feedback without defensiveness), and be faithful (show up consistently).

#### **TEACHING NOTES:**

- Many Christians are lonely in their discipleship journey. They attend church but have no one who really knows them and speaks into their life.
- These partnerships don't happen accidentally. You have to be intentional about creating space and depth in relationships.
- Different partnerships serve different purposes: peer accountability, mentor/mentee, ministry partnership, spiritual friendship. You probably need a few different types.

**APPLICATION:** If you don't have these partnerships: Identify 2-3 people you could pursue. Invite them to coffee and propose a regular meeting rhythm. If you have partnerships but they're superficial: Take them deeper. Next time you meet, share something you're really struggling with. Ask permission to ask hard questions. Model the vulnerability you want to receive.

Faithful Lord,

Thank You for Priscilla and Aquila, the husband and wife team who served You together with one heart. Thank You for their generous hospitality that opened their home to the church. Thank You for their courage that risked their lives for Paul. Thank You for their gentle wisdom that mentored Apollos. Thank You for their example of partnership in marriage, ministry, and mission. Father, forgive us when our homes are closed to others and when we value our comfort over kingdom hospitality. Forgive us when we sit silently rather than gently teaching those who need instruction. Forgive us for marriages and partnerships that are divided rather than unified in purpose.

Give us hearts like Priscilla and Aquila—willing to sacrifice, eager to serve, ready to invest in others. Help us to see our homes not just as private retreats but as ministry centers. Teach us to disciple others with patience and grace, correcting what needs correcting while building up and encouraging. For those who are married, help us to serve You together, supporting rather than competing, building up rather than tearing down. For all of us, help us to work well with others in kingdom partnerships. Show us who needs mentoring, who needs hospitality, and who needs our support. May our lives and homes be marked by generous, sacrificial love for You and others.

In Jesus' name,  
Amen.



## CHAPTER 9: PHOEBE - THE DEACON AND DELIVERER

**QUESTION 1:** Phoebe was entrusted with delivering the book of Romans—one of the most important letters in the New Testament. What does this tell us about Paul's trust in her leadership and ability?

**ANSWER:** Paul's trust in Phoebe speaks volumes. He didn't just hand off his theological masterpiece to anyone. Romans was his most comprehensive explanation of the gospel, his systematic theology, his magnum opus. And he entrusted it to Phoebe. This tells us: (1) She was reliable—Paul knew she'd get it there safely, (2) She was theologically competent—she'd need to explain and defend Paul's teaching, (3) She was respected—Paul commended her to the Roman church, knowing they'd receive her well, (4) She held significant authority—as a deacon, she had an official role in the church. Paul didn't see her gender as a barrier to leadership or responsibility.

### TEACHING NOTES:

- In the ancient world, delivering a letter wasn't passive. The courier was expected to read it aloud, answer questions, and represent the author. Phoebe was essentially Paul's ambassador to Rome.
- Paul's commendation in Romans 16:1-2 is significant. He tells them to receive her "in a way worthy of the saints" and help her with whatever she needs. He's giving her his full endorsement.
- This challenges any notion that women were excluded from significant ministry roles in the early church.

**APPLICATION:** How do you respond when women lead or teach? Do you receive their ministry with the same openness you'd receive from a man? If you're a woman, are you stepping into the ministry God has called you to, or are you holding back out of fear of criticism?

**QUESTION 2:** Paul calls Phoebe a "deacon" and a "benefactor." How did Phoebe use her resources and position to serve the church? How can you use your resources (time, money, influence) to serve others?

**ANSWER:** Phoebe held two significant roles: (1) **Deacon (diakonos)**—an official servant/leader in the church at Cenchreae, suggesting she had responsibilities for ministry and care, (2) **Benefactor (prostatis)**—a patron who financially supported others, including Paul. She used her wealth to fund gospel ministry and her position to serve the church. This models holistic stewardship—using both resources and influence for kingdom purposes. We all have something to steward: time, skills, money, platforms, connections, homes. The question is: Are we stewarding these for ourselves or for God's kingdom?



## TEACHING NOTES:

- In the Greco-Roman world, patrons played a crucial role. They funded public works, supported artists and philosophers, and helped advance causes. Phoebe redirected this cultural practice toward gospel purposes.
- Deacons in the early church served practical needs (like the seven in Acts 6) but also taught and led. It was a position of real authority and responsibility.
- Phoebe didn't see her resources as "hers"—she saw them as tools for ministry.

**APPLICATION:** Complete this inventory: What resources has God given me? (List: time, money, skills, connections, platforms, etc.) How am I currently using these? How might God want me to steward them differently? Identify one concrete change you can make this month.

**QUESTION 3:** Paul tells the Romans to "receive her in a way worthy of his people." Why do you think he felt the need to say this? What does this teach us about honoring and respecting leaders, especially women in ministry?

**ANSWER:** Paul's instruction suggests he anticipated potential resistance. Why might the Romans not receive Phoebe well? Perhaps: (1) She was a woman in a male-dominated culture, (2) She was from Cenchreae, not Rome—an outsider, (3) She was carrying a letter that would challenge some of their assumptions, (4) Cultural norms might make some hesitant to follow a woman's leadership. Paul preemptively addressed this: "Treat her with the honor she deserves. She's not just my messenger—she's a leader in her own right. Help her however she needs." This teaches us to honor everyone God has placed in leadership, regardless of gender, age, background, or our personal preferences.

## TEACHING NOTES:

- Paul doesn't just say "let her in the door." He says receive her "in a way worthy of the saints"—with full honor and respect.
- This same principle applies today. How we treat people in ministry matters. Do we honor their service? Support their work? Speak respectfully? Or do we criticize, gossip, and tear down?
- Special attention is needed when people face additional barriers (gender, race, age, background). Paul knew Phoebe might face resistance, so he elevated her specifically.

**APPLICATION:** Identify one ministry leader in your church (especially one who might not get much recognition—children's ministry workers, setup crew, women in leadership). Write them a note or tell them face-to-face how much you appreciate their service. Be specific about what they do that blesses you.

**QUESTION 4:** Phoebe made a dangerous, expensive journey to deliver Paul's letter. What does this teach us about sacrifice and commitment to the mission of the gospel?



**ANSWER:** Phoebe's journey from Corinth to Rome was no small undertaking. It required: (1) **Courage**—traveling alone (or with minimal company) as a woman was dangerous, (2) **Resources**—the trip was expensive; she likely funded it herself, (3) **Time**—weeks or months away from home and business, (4) **Commitment**—she could have sent someone else, but she went herself. This level of sacrifice reveals her heart: the gospel mattered more than comfort, safety, or convenience. She considered it a privilege to serve Paul and the Roman church, regardless of personal cost.

#### **TEACHING NOTES:**

- Contrast Phoebe's willingness with our modern reluctance. We often want ministry that's convenient, safe, and low-cost.
- Every advance of the gospel requires someone willing to sacrifice something. Someone has to go. Someone has to give. Someone has to risk.
- Phoebe probably never imagined that her name would be in Scripture for 2,000 years. She just did what needed to be done.

**APPLICATION:** What is God asking you to sacrifice for the gospel? Maybe it's comfort (serving in an uncomfortable ministry). Maybe it's resources (giving sacrificially). Maybe it's time (saying yes when it's inconvenient). Maybe it's safety (going on a mission trip or ministering in a difficult context). What's your "trip to Rome"?

**QUESTION 5:** Phoebe gets only two verses in the Bible, yet her legacy is tied to one of the most important books in Scripture. How does this encourage you when you feel like your contributions are small or unseen?

**ANSWER:** Phoebe's brevity in Scripture contrasts with her massive impact. Without her, would Romans have reached Rome safely? Would it have been read and distributed properly? We don't know. What we do know is that her "small" act of obedience preserved one of the most important documents in Christian history. This teaches us that: (1) God sees and values our unseen service, (2) Faithfulness matters more than visibility, (3) We often don't know the ripple effects of our obedience, (4) "Small" faithful acts can have enormous kingdom impact. Your service might feel insignificant, but you don't know how God might use it.

#### **TEACHING NOTES:**

- So much of what matters in God's kingdom happens in obscurity. The person who drives the church van. The one who sets up chairs. The intercessor who prays faithfully. The encourager who sends notes.
- We live in a "numbers and noise" culture—we want big, visible, impressive. But God often works through small, hidden, faithful.
- One day, in eternity, we'll see how God used things we thought didn't matter. We'll be surprised at what He counts as significant.

**APPLICATION:** What "small" thing is God asking you to do faithfully? Maybe it's praying for one person daily. Maybe it's greeting people at church every week. Maybe it's mentoring one teenager. Don't despise it because it seems small. Do it faithfully and trust God with the impact.



**QUESTION 6 (DISCIPLESHIP FOCUS):** Phoebe was faithful with what she had, and God used it in powerful ways. In discipleship, we often feel like our contributions are small or insignificant. How can Phoebe's example encourage you to be faithful with whatever God has given you, trusting Him to multiply your efforts?

**ANSWER:** Phoebe didn't have apostolic authority like Paul. She didn't plant churches or write Scripture. But she had: a servant's heart, financial resources, courage, and willingness. And she used all of it for kingdom purposes. God didn't need her to be an apostle—He needed her to be Phoebe. Similarly, God doesn't need you to be someone else. He needs you to be faithful with what He's given you. The principle is clear: **Faithfulness with what you have positions you for greater impact than you can imagine.** Start where you are. Use what you have. Trust God with the results.

**TEACHING NOTES:**

- Read the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30). The issue wasn't how much each servant was given, but what they did with it. The one-talent servant was condemned for burying what he had, not for having less than others.
- Comparison kills faithfulness. When we compare our gifts/resources to others', we either become proud (if we have more) or paralyzed (if we have less). Focus on faithful stewardship, not comparative assessment.
- God multiplies faithfulness. The feeding of the 5,000 started with one boy's lunch. Gideon's army was reduced to 300. David had five stones. God doesn't need much—He just needs willingness.

**APPLICATION:** Stop waiting for "more" before you start serving. More time, more money, more education, more confidence. Start now with what you have. Identify one specific way you can use your current resources for kingdom purposes this week. Then do it. Watch how God works through your faithfulness.



Faithful Lord,

Thank You for Phoebe, servant of the church and benefactor of many. Thank You that Paul trusted her with his most important letter, carrying the Book of Romans from Corinth to the believers in Rome. Thank You for her faithful service, her generous support of ministry, and her willingness to travel far to fulfill her calling.

Father, forgive us when we see service as beneath us or when we serve half-heartedly. Forgive us when we want recognition more than we want to be useful. Forgive us when we fail to support and help those who are laboring for the gospel.

Give us Phoebe's servant heart—willing to use our resources, time, and energy to support Your work and Your workers. Help us to be trustworthy people who can be counted on for important tasks. Teach us that there is no hierarchy of service in Your kingdom—that carrying a letter is as sacred as preaching a sermon when done for Your glory.

Show us who needs our help today. Give us eyes to see and meet practical needs. Whether we are called to serve behind the scenes or up front, may we do it with excellence and joy. Help us to be generous patrons and faithful helpers who make ministry possible for others.

May we serve without seeking credit, give without demanding recognition, and work without measuring our value by visibility.

In Jesus' name,  
Amen.



## CHAPTER 10: APOLLOS - THE ELOQUENT TEACHER

**QUESTION 1:** Apollos was intelligent and gifted, but his theology was incomplete. Have you ever been in a situation where you thought you knew the truth, but later realized you had more to learn? How did you respond?

**ANSWER:** Apollos' story is humbling for anyone who thinks they've "arrived" theologically. He had thorough knowledge of Scripture, he taught accurately about Jesus, and he was fervent in spirit. Yet he had a significant gap in his understanding—he knew only John's baptism, not Christian baptism or the full work of the Holy Spirit. This reminds us that we're all in process. No matter how much we know, there's more to learn. How we respond when our gaps are exposed reveals our character. Apollos could have been defensive or dismissive. Instead, he humbly received correction and grew. That's spiritual maturity.

### TEACHING NOTES:

- In our polarized culture, admitting you were wrong or incomplete in your understanding feels like defeat. But in God's kingdom, it's growth.
- Distinguish between essential doctrines (which we must get right) and secondary issues (where we have room to learn and grow). Apollos' gap was significant but not heretical—he just needed more complete teaching.
- The mark of wisdom isn't knowing everything; it's knowing what you don't know and being willing to learn.

**APPLICATION:** Reflect on a time when you discovered you were wrong about something you were confident about. How did you respond? With defensiveness and denial, or with humility and adjustment? Ask God to show you areas where your understanding might be incomplete and make you teachable in those areas.

**QUESTION 2:** When Priscilla and Aquila corrected Apollos, he humbled himself and received their teaching. How do you typically respond to correction? What makes it hard to accept correction graciously?

**ANSWER:** Most of us struggle with correction because: (1) **Pride**—we don't want to admit we're wrong, (2) **Shame**—being corrected feels like being told we're inadequate, (3) **Fear**—we worry about losing credibility or respect, (4) **Defensiveness**—our first instinct is to protect ourselves. Apollos had every reason to be defensive—he was educated, gifted, and effective. Priscilla and Aquila were tentmakers, not formally trained. Yet he received their correction. Why? Because he valued truth more than his ego. He cared more about getting it right than about being right. This is the heart God honors.



## TEACHING NOTES:

- Proverbs is full of wisdom about receiving correction: "Whoever heeds correction gains understanding" (15:32). "Rebuke the wise and they will love you" (9:8). Biblical wisdom welcomes correction.
- Create a "correction culture" in your teaching environment where questions and pushback are welcomed, not shut down. Model what it looks like to say, "You know, you're right. I was wrong about that."
- Distinguish between correction that's motivated by love (like Priscilla and Aquila) and criticism that's motivated by malice. We should receive the first and be discerning about the second.

**APPLICATION:** Think about recent feedback or correction you've received. Did you receive it graciously or defensively? If defensively, go back to that person and say, "I've been thinking about what you said. Thank you for caring enough to speak truth to me." Practice saying, "You might be right. Let me think about that" instead of immediately defending yourself.

**QUESTION 3:** The Corinthians formed factions around Paul, Apollos, and Peter. Why is it dangerous to idolize Christian leaders? How can we honor and learn from teachers without creating "celebrity culture" in the church?

**ANSWER:** The Corinthian factions reveal human tendency to elevate people above their proper place. Instead of following Jesus, they were following Jesus' messengers. This is dangerous because: (1) Leaders are flawed humans who will disappoint us, (2) It creates competition and division instead of unity, (3) It distracts from Jesus, who should be our focus, (4) It puts pressure on leaders they weren't meant to bear. We can honor teachers (1 Timothy 5:17) without idolizing them. We learn from them, but we follow Jesus. We appreciate their gifts, but we don't worship them. We respect their role, but we remember they're fellow servants, not saviors.

## TEACHING NOTES:

- Social media has intensified celebrity culture in the church. "Platform" and "influence" have become measures of spiritual success. But the kingdom doesn't work that way.
- Discuss the difference between honoring leaders (biblical) and idolizing them (destructive). Honor recognizes their service; idolatry depends on them for spiritual life.
- When leaders fall (morally, doctrinally, or otherwise), those who've idolized them are devastated. But if we've followed Jesus all along, we're grieved but not destroyed—our faith wasn't in that person.

**APPLICATION:** Do a heart check: Whose teaching do you follow? Are you learning from various sources, or are you dependent on one person? If that person fell tomorrow, would your faith be shaken? Make sure your foundation is Christ, not any human teacher—even excellent ones.

**QUESTION 4:** Apollos refused to go to Corinth when Paul asked him to, likely because he didn't want to fuel division. Have you ever had to say no to a good opportunity because it wasn't the right thing for the situation? How did you make that decision?



**ANSWER:** Apollos' refusal demonstrates spiritual wisdom and maturity. Paul urged him to go to Corinth, but Apollos "was quite unwilling" (1 Corinthians 16:12). Why? Probably because there was already an "Apollos faction" in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:12), and his presence might make it worse. Instead of enjoying the adulation of his "fans," Apollos prioritized the church's health. This shows: (1) Discernment—knowing when to act and when to refrain, (2) Humility—being willing to decline an opportunity that would feed his ego, (3) Church-first mentality—valuing unity over personal ministry success. Sometimes the most spiritual choice is to say no, even to good things.

#### **TEACHING NOTES:**

- Not every opportunity is God's will, even if it's a "ministry opportunity." Discernment requires asking: Is this God's timing? Will this serve the kingdom or just my reputation? What's best for the body of Christ?
- Apollos could have justified going: "Paul invited me. The Corinthians want me. I have good teaching to offer." But he looked deeper—at the situation's complexity and potential for harm.
- This is countercultural. We're taught to seize every opportunity, platform, and door that opens. But sometimes wisdom says, "Not now" or "Not me."

**APPLICATION:** Is there an opportunity you're currently considering? Walk through these questions: (1) Is this God's timing or just an open door? (2) Will this serve God's kingdom or primarily my ambition? (3) What might be the unintended consequences? (4) Have I sought wise counsel? (5) Do I have peace about this? Don't let FOMO (fear of missing out) drive your decisions.

**QUESTION 5:** Paul said, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow." What does this teach us about teamwork in ministry? How can we celebrate the success of others without feeling threatened?

**ANSWER:** Paul's agricultural metaphor demonstrates that kingdom work is collaborative, not competitive. Different people play different roles at different times, and all are necessary. Paul planted (evangelism), Apollos watered (teaching/discipleship), but God gave the growth (transformation). None of them could claim credit for the whole process. This teaches us: (1) We're all on the same team working toward the same goal, (2) Different roles have equal value—planting isn't superior to watering, (3) The results are God's work, not ours, (4) We can celebrate others' contributions because we're not in competition. Celebrating others' success is easy when you remember you're working together, not against each other.

#### **TEACHING NOTES:**

- The enemy loves to create competition among believers. When we're competing with each other, we're not advancing the kingdom.
- Read 1 Corinthians 3:5-9 in full. Paul emphasizes that he and Apollos are "one"—unified in purpose despite different functions.
- In a body, different parts don't compete (1 Corinthians 12). The eye doesn't envy the hand. Each part celebrates what the others contribute.



**APPLICATION:** Identify someone in your church whose ministry is "successful" (growing, visible, fruitful). Do you genuinely celebrate their success, or do you feel envious? If envious, repent and ask God to change your heart. Then deliberately encourage that person—tell them you're grateful for their ministry and you're cheering them on.

**QUESTION 6 (DISCIPLESHIP FOCUS):** Apollos was willing to be taught, even though he was already knowledgeable. In discipleship, staying teachable is essential. What are some ways you can remain humble and open to learning as you grow in your walk with Christ?

**ANSWER:** Staying teachable requires intentional practices: (1) **Cultivate humility** by regularly acknowledging what you don't know, (2) **Seek diverse input** by learning from people who are different from you (age, background, perspective), (3) **Read widely** beyond your favorite authors or theological tribe, (4) **Ask questions** more than you make statements, (5) **Welcome correction** by actually asking people to point out your blind spots, (6) **Stay in Scripture** where God continually reveals new truth, (7) **Maintain community** with people who will challenge you lovingly. The moment you think you've "arrived" theologically is the moment you stop growing.

#### **TEACHING NOTES:**

- The Pharisees were knowledgeable but unteachable—they rejected Jesus because they thought they already knew everything. Knowledge without humility leads to pride, not wisdom.
- Some of the most dangerous people in the church are those who "know just enough to be dangerous"—they have some biblical knowledge but aren't humble enough to keep learning.
- Contrast "childlike faith" (humble, teachable, trusting) with "childish faith" (immature, simplistic, refusing to grow).

**APPLICATION:** Implement one of these practices this month: (1) Read a Christian book by someone from a different tradition than yours, (2) Ask a mature believer, "What's one area where you think I could grow?" and actually listen to their answer, (3) In your next Bible study or sermon, deliberately look for one thing you've never noticed before, (4) Find a mentor or small group where you can ask "dumb questions" without judgment.



Heavenly Father,

Thank You for Apollos—eloquent, knowledgeable, fervent in spirit, and yet humble enough to be taught. Thank You that when Priscilla and Aquila gently corrected his incomplete understanding, he received their instruction with grace. Thank You for his example of using his gifts powerfully while remaining teachable and humble.

Lord, forgive us when we think we've learned enough and close our hearts to correction. Forgive us when we use our gifts for our own glory rather than Yours. Forgive us when pride makes us unteachable and when insecurity keeps us from using our gifts at all.

Give us Apollos's combination of confidence and humility—bold in proclaiming what we know to be true, yet humble enough to admit what we don't know. Help us to develop our gifts and abilities, not for applause, but to serve You more effectively. Teach us to receive correction graciously and to be lifelong learners of Your Word.

Show us that being teachable is not weakness but wisdom, that growing in understanding is not shameful but commendable. Help us to speak persuasively about You while remaining humble before You.

Use our gifts, whatever they may be, for Your kingdom and Your glory alone.

In Christ's name,  
Amen.



## CHAPTER 11: TITUS - THE TROUBLESHOOTER

**QUESTION 1:** Titus was Paul's "troubleshooter"—the person he sent when things were difficult or complicated. What qualities do you think made Titus effective in this role?

**ANSWER:** Titus was effective as a troubleshooter because he possessed: (1) **Reliability**—Paul could count on him to follow through, (2) **Maturity**—he could handle complex, messy situations without being overwhelmed, (3) **Diplomatic skill**—he restored the relationship between Paul and the Corinthians, showing he could navigate conflict, (4) **Theological clarity**—his presence at the Jerusalem Council showed he understood the gospel, (5) **Toughness**—he could deliver hard messages and confront difficult issues (like in Crete), (6) **Perseverance**—he didn't quit when things got hard. Troubleshooters need thick skin, clear thinking, and deep faithfulness.

### TEACHING NOTES:

- Every organization needs troubleshooters—people who run toward problems instead of away from them.
- Contrast Titus with people who avoid conflict or create drama. Titus brought resolution, not escalation.
- Troubleshooting isn't glamorous. Titus dealt with church conflict, false teaching, and disorganization. But it was essential work.

**APPLICATION:** Are you the kind of person people turn to when things are hard? Or do people avoid bringing you problems because they know you'll make them worse? Ask someone who knows you well: "When there's conflict or difficulty, do I help or hurt?" Listen to their honest answer.

**QUESTION 2:** Titus was used as a "test case" for the gospel during the Jerusalem Council. How did his presence prove that salvation is by grace alone? Why was this so important for the early church?

**ANSWER:** Titus, a Greek (Gentile), was living proof that the gospel works. He hadn't been circumcised, hadn't followed Jewish law, yet he was clearly saved, Spirit-filled, and serving faithfully. Paul brought him to Jerusalem deliberately—he was a walking argument that you don't need to become Jewish to become Christian. If Titus had to be circumcised to be accepted, it would have communicated that Jesus' work wasn't sufficient—you needed Jesus plus the law. But the apostles didn't compel his circumcision, affirming that salvation is by grace through faith alone. This was crucial because if the church had required Gentiles to keep the law, Christianity would have remained a Jewish sect instead of becoming a global movement.



## TEACHING NOTES:

- Read Galatians 2:1-5. Paul calls the issue "the truth of the gospel"—this wasn't a minor disagreement; it was fundamental.
- The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) was a pivotal moment. The decision to not burden Gentiles with the law opened the door for gospel expansion.
- This issue still matters today when churches or teachers add requirements to the gospel: "You must be baptized/speak in tongues/dress a certain way/keep certain rules to be really saved." That's a different gospel (Galatians 1:6-9).

**APPLICATION:** Do a gospel-clarity check in your own life: Have you added anything to "faith in Jesus" as a requirement for salvation? Do you treat certain people as "less Christian" because they don't meet your standards? Repent of any gospel-additions and recommit to salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

**QUESTION 3:** Titus successfully restored the relationship between Paul and the Corinthians. How did he do this? What does this teach us about conflict resolution and reconciliation?

**ANSWER:** Titus succeeded where others might have failed because he: (1) **Delivered hard truth**—he didn't sugarcoat Paul's concerns, (2) **Communicated love**—he made sure the Corinthians knew Paul's heart, not just his words, (3) **Remained neutral**—he didn't take sides or escalate conflict, (4) **Facilitated understanding**—he helped both parties see each other's perspective, (5) **Stayed until resolution came**—he didn't just drop a letter and leave; he remained present through the process. This teaches us that reconciliation requires truth, love, patience, and a commitment to both parties' good.

## TEACHING NOTES:

- Reconciliation is hard work. It's easier to take sides, assign blame, or walk away. Titus did none of those things.
- Effective mediators are rare and valuable. They combine empathy with honesty, listening with speaking, patience with persistence.
- Read 2 Corinthians 7:5-16 to see Paul's relief and joy when Titus brought good news. Restored relationships bring joy to everyone involved.

**APPLICATION:** Is there a broken relationship in your life where you could serve as a peacemaker (between two friends, family members, church members)? Don't take sides or gossip—instead, pray for wisdom, speak truth in love to both parties, and work toward reconciliation. Or, if you're personally in conflict with someone, could you invite a "Titus" to help you work through it?



**QUESTION 4:** Paul sent Titus to Crete—a notoriously difficult place—to organize the churches. Have you ever been given a difficult assignment that felt overwhelming? How did you handle it?

**ANSWER:** Crete was hard for multiple reasons: disorganized churches, false teachers, a reputation for dishonesty (even their own prophets said Cretans were liars!), and no established leadership structure. Titus could have refused or complained. Instead, he went and got to work. This teaches us: (1) God often calls us to hard places because that's where the work needs to be done, (2) Difficulty doesn't equal disobedience—sometimes the hardest assignments are the most faithful, (3) We don't have to feel qualified; we just have to be obedient, (4) God equips those He calls—He wouldn't send Titus without enabling him to succeed.

#### **TEACHING NOTES:**

- Many people avoid hard ministry assignments, preferring comfortable, successful contexts. But often the greatest growth and impact happen in difficult places.
- Titus shows us that faithfulness isn't about easy assignments—it's about obedience regardless of difficulty.
- Paul's letter to Titus (the book of Titus) is essentially a "how-to manual" for difficult ministry contexts. Paul didn't leave him unsupported.

**APPLICATION:** Reflect on assignments or callings that feel overwhelming. Are you avoiding them because they're hard? Or are you stepping into them trusting God to equip you? If you're in a difficult ministry situation right now, remember Titus. Ask God for strength, wisdom, and perseverance. And don't try to do it alone—seek counsel, prayer support, and encouragement.

**QUESTION 5:** Titus was reliable and consistent, even when the work was unglamorous. How does reliability and faithfulness build trust in relationships and ministry?

**ANSWER:** Trust is built through consistency over time. Titus proved himself reliable again and again—delivering letters, reconciling relationships, organizing churches, confronting problems. People knew they could count on him. This built trust with Paul (who sent him on crucial missions), with churches (who received him well), and with God (who entrusted him with significant responsibility). Reliability means: (1) **You show up** when you say you will, (2) **You follow through** on commitments, (3) **You remain steady** when others quit, (4) **You produce quality work** regardless of recognition. This consistency creates a track record that earns trust.

#### **TEACHING NOTES:**

- In our flaky culture, reliability is countercultural. People cancel plans, ghost conversations, and quit when things get hard. Reliability stands out.
- Trust is fragile—it takes years to build and moments to destroy. Every time you follow through, you make a deposit. Every time you fail to follow through, you make a withdrawal.
- Churches desperately need reliable people. Not necessarily talented people, but people who show up consistently and do what they say they'll do.



**APPLICATION:** Do a reliability audit: (1) What commitments have you made (to God, to people, to ministry)? (2) Are you keeping them? (3) Where have you been unreliable? (4) What needs to change? Identify one area where you've been flaky and commit to becoming consistently faithful in that area for the next 60 days. Build a track record.

**QUESTION 6 (DISCIPLESHIP FOCUS):** Titus was known for doing the hard work that others avoided. In discipleship, there are often difficult steps we need to take—having hard conversations, addressing sin, serving in unglamorous ways. How can Titus' example inspire you to do the hard work of following Christ, even when it's uncomfortable?

**ANSWER:** Following Jesus isn't always comfortable or convenient. Sometimes it requires: confronting sin in your life or others', having difficult conversations about boundaries or reconciliation, serving in ways that feel beneath you, persevering through dry seasons, making costly sacrifices. Titus shows us that faithful disciples don't avoid hard work—they embrace it as part of their calling. The hard work builds character, deepens faith, and often produces the greatest kingdom fruit. We grow more through difficulty than through ease.

**TEACHING NOTES:**

- Discipleship includes both mountaintop experiences and valley work. Much of spiritual growth happens in the valleys—the unsexy, unglamorous, difficult seasons.
- Jesus modeled this: He washed feet, confronted sin, endured opposition, and ultimately went to the cross. Following Him means doing hard things.
- The easy path is wide and leads to destruction. The narrow path requires effort, perseverance, and sometimes suffering (Matthew 7:13-14).

**APPLICATION:** Identify one hard thing God is calling you to do that you've been avoiding: (1) A conversation you need to have, (2) A sin you need to address, (3) A service opportunity that feels uncomfortable, (4) A sacrifice God is asking for. Don't wait for it to feel easy. Take the next step in obedience this week, trusting God to give you what you need to follow through.



Gracious Lord,

Thank You for Titus, the reliable troubleshooter who could be trusted with the hardest assignments. Thank You for his ability to bring order to chaos, reconciliation to broken relationships, and maturity to struggling churches. Thank You that he didn't shrink from difficult tasks but fulfilled them with grace and wisdom.

Father, forgive us when we avoid hard conversations and difficult assignments. Forgive us when we create more problems than we solve, when we stir up conflict rather than bring peace. Forgive us for being unreliable when others need us most.

Give us Titus's character—trustworthy, mature, and capable. Help us to be peacemakers and problem-solvers in our families, churches, and communities. Give us wisdom to handle sensitive situations with grace and truth. Make us people others can depend on when things get tough.

Help us to see difficult assignments not as burdens but as opportunities to serve You and grow in faith. Give us courage to speak truth in love, even when it's uncomfortable. May we be instruments of Your reconciliation and restoration in broken places.

Make us reliable, Lord—people of integrity who finish what we start and can be trusted with what matters most.

In Jesus' name,  
Amen.

