

INITIATE
INCLUDE
INVITE
IMPACT

**PREPARED TO REACH THE "MISSION FIELD"
OUTSIDE YOUR DOOR WITH YOUR STORY**

FEBRUARY LEADER GUIDE

INITIATE INCLUDE INVITE IMPACT

FEB 6 The WHY

FEB 13 The HOW

FEB 20 Your Story

FEB 27 Tough Questions

Statistics tell us that the average person living in a neighborhood knows (by name) one other home owner within the eight closest homes around them. As a culture, we have lost the art of knowing our neighbors and caring for them. If we are going to reach the next generation with the Gospel of Jesus, we (the body of Christ) need to change that narrative.

Pastor Kenneth will begin a sermon series through the book of Acts called "Sent". The whole book of Acts is about spreading the message of Jesus to a lost world.

So, when Jesus says in Matt 9, "... The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord for the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field", is he speaking to us? The obvious answer is yes.

The mission field is no longer just in a third world country, it is no longer just in the prison systems or in cities where we see lots of unrighteousness. The mission field is right here in the deep south. It is our neighbors, school friends, teammates, co-workers and family.

The truth of the Gospel is as real today as it was during the days of the apostles as they spread the word of Christ wherever they went. Ultimate freedom and ultimate peace can only come from the "author and perfecter" of our Faith, Jesus Christ. Let's encourage each other to be prepared to share our own story of faith and the story of Christ who has set us free and gave us an abundant and eternal life.

Our mission statement reads, "**Investing in people who will impact their world for Jesus.**" Let's use the month of February to equip the people of God to be ambassadors of the goodness of Jesus!

INITIATE opportunities and conversations to know those right around you and to be praying for them.

INCLUDE them by having them over for a meal, sitting with them at school lunch or simply inviting your next door neighbor to take a walk.

INVITE those you have gotten to know by asking them if they would go to church with you (and sit with you).

IMPACT by being available to share YOUR STORY of faith to those God has already put in your path.

Let's be intentional and prepared to share the hope we have in Jesus!

"But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. **Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.** But do this with gentleness and respect." 1 Peter 3:15

LESSON 1: THE WHY

THE STORY OF PHILIP (the evangelist) and the ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH

ACTS 8:4-8, 26-40



INTRO

- What do you think of when you hear the word “evangelist”?
- Do you see yourself as an evangelist?

It's amazing to think about God's plan to reach the nations is with his people. This is a task carried out by Christians way back at the beginning of the early church in Acts and is still the method which God uses to advance and grow His kingdom today. Every believer in Jesus at some point in their life was not, someone told them the Gospel good news. Maybe it was a parent, a co-worker, a friend or family member but in God's sovereignty they were obedient to share.



CONTEXT

In the days of the early church Satan had a plan of persecution to all who believed. This plan however had the opposite effect to what he intended. Instead of smothering the gospel, persecution only lead to spreading it.

Where we will pick up in Acts 8, Stephen has just been stoned and Saul has began his quest to destroy the church. This hostility scattered faithful Christ followers who preached the gospel wherever they went. So in the midst of persecution, wonderful things happened. The Holy Spirit revealed himself in mighty and miraculous ways. Specifically, we are going to look at the Spirit's work in Philip, who was called away from “where the action was” to share the good news about Jesus to one individual - an Ethiopian.

READ ACTS 8:4-8

- Isn't it easy to share the gospel when people are eager, willing, and ready to listen?
- Have you ever experienced something or a situation like this?
- How significant is it that Philip, a Jew, went to Samaria?
- Where are you called to go? Is there any place you would be unwilling to go?

READ ACTS 8:26-40

- Where in this story do we see obedience from Philip?
- What would it have been like for Philip to leave a place where so many exciting things were happening to go down a desert road?
- What were the factors involved in the Ethiopian becoming a Christian?
- What role did scripture play in the Ethiopian's conversion?
- How was Philip's ministering to the eunuch the beginning of witnessing to the ends of the earth?

APPLY

In this story we see Philip share the gospel with people of different ranks, different races, and different classes. Philip is ready with proper preparation all while depending on the power and sovereign work of the Spirit.

- What are the excuses we make to not share the gospel?
- How does reading this story encourage you?
- Why do you think God chooses to use his people to advance his gospel?
- What have you learned from this passage that might help you in your witness?
- Who in your life do you know is lost and needs to hear the gospel?

PRAY

- For obedience like Philip.
- For help in seeing other people like God sees them.
- For recognizing our purpose as believers and for opportunities to share the gospel with the lost.

GOSPEL SCRIPTURES

Romans 3:23, “For all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God.”

Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Romans 5:8, “But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us!”

Romans 10:9, “If you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

LEADER NOTES: It is important that at the end of the lesson we begin to make a transition to next week’s lesson on “The How”. Next week we will talk through the power of someone’s Story (testimony) and how they came to know Jesus. You don’t have to be a Bible scholar like Philip to let people know the Truth of Jesus and His Gospel.

Being PREPARED to share your STORY is the simplest way to share the Good News of Jesus. Next week we will talk through a method of developing your story in 3 minutes or less.

LESSON 2: THE HOW

HOW DO I COMMUNICATE MY STORY?

ACTS 22:1-21 (PAUL'S STORY)

LEADER NOTES: Be prepared to share your own story of faith after reading the text to the class. Your story needs to be no more than 3 or 4 minutes in length and contain the same elements (method) that we see in Paul's story (as described below)

1.

Paul's life before meeting Jesus

22 “Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense before you.” **2** When they heard that he was addressing them in Aramaic, they became even quieter. **3** He continued, “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strictness of our ancestral law. I was zealous for God, just as all of you are today. **4** I persecuted this Way to the death, arresting and putting both men and women in jail, **5** as both the high priest and the whole council of elders can testify about me. After I received letters from them to the brothers, I traveled to Damascus to arrest those who were there and bring them to Jerusalem to be punished.

2.

How Paul met Jesus

(the circumstances that led you to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior)

Paul's Testimony

6 “As I was traveling and approaching Damascus, about noon an intense light from heaven suddenly flashed around me. **7** I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ **8** “I answered, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ “He said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, the one you are persecuting.’ **9** Now those who were with me saw the light, but they did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. **10** “I said, ‘What should I do, Lord?’

“The Lord told me, ‘Get up and go into Damascus, and there you will be told everything that you have been assigned to do.’

11 “Since I couldn’t see because of the brightness of the light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and went into Damascus. **12** Someone named Ananias, a devout man according to the law, who had a good reputation with all the Jews living there, **13** came and stood by me and said, ‘Brother Saul, regain your sight.’ And in that very hour I looked up and saw him. **14** And he said, ‘The God of our ancestors has appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One, and to hear the words from his mouth, **15** since you will be a witness for him to all people of what you have seen and heard. **16** And now, why are you delaying? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name.’

3.

Paul's life after he met Jesus

17 “After I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance **18** and saw him telling me, ‘Hurry and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.’ **19** “But I said, ‘Lord, they know that in synagogue after synagogue I had those who believed in you imprisoned and beaten. **20** And when the blood of your witness Stephen was being shed, I stood there giving approval and guarding the clothes of those who killed him.’

21 “He said to me, ‘Go, because I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”

Our natural tendency is to be fearful of getting into faith conversations, because we sometimes think that we don't know enough about the Bible, or what if someone asks me a question that I don't know the answer to. This is common, but that is why YOUR STORY is so great. It is your story, it is how you came to know Jesus and what He has done for you.

Paul's story is no different. His life was a mess before he met Jesus on that road to Damascus. Jesus met him right where he was...sin and all. After receiving the forgiveness that comes from Jesus, Jesus put Paul on a new course of life that would Glorify God.

THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUR STORY

You should be able to share your story in about 3 minutes. It should be personal and point towards the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus. Remember, you heard the Gospel message from someone and it changed your life forever. Your testimony of victory in Christ is a Gospel message someone needs to hear! Be prepared.

1 Peter 3:15, "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. **Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.** But do this with gentleness and respect,"

Be sure to pray before you write out your story of how you came to know Jesus. The power of the Holy Spirit is greater than your words and you want everyone who hears your story to hear the Holy Spirit as He points them to the cross of Christ.

Special Note: It is NOT your job to save anyone. That is the role of the Holy Spirit. Our job is to be a messenger of the hope we have found in Jesus and invite people to believe. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me."



Questions

1. Why do you think your story of faith is important?

2. What is your greatest fear in sharing your faith and why?

3. Jesus says in Luke 10:2, "... The harvest is abundant but the workers are few. Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest." Who do you think He is asking to be workers and why would He ask you?

4. In our culture today (here in the deep south), who do we feel is responsible for making sure the Gospel of Jesus is shared? _____

If you put the pastor of the local church, what might be wrong with that answer?

5. Who was it that led you to the Lord? _____

3 PARTS TO YOUR STORY

1

YOUR LIFE BEFORE JESUS (Acts 22:1-5)

- You may be like me, there was not a lot of “mess” in my life prior to meeting Jesus. I was 7 years old when my uncle asked me if I wanted to ask Jesus into my heart and forgive me of my sins. But, there was so much that led up to me understanding my sin and why Jesus had to go to the cross and die for my sins. My grandparents and family took me to church at an early age, we sang hymns, we learned all the great Bible stories and we learned that Jesus died for my sin.
- You may have had a very difficult “pre-Jesus” and the conviction of the Holy Spirit in your life was big and it took someone caring enough about you to share the good news of hope we have in Jesus to overcome this world and everything in it.

Write down what life looked like prior to trusting in Jesus. Don't make it complicated and share what is appropriate. Some things don't need to be said, but a picture of your lostness is needed.



Question

Before accepting Jesus, what were the most important things to you?

2

HOW YOU CAME TO TRUST IN JESUS (Acts 22:6-16)

- Everyone's story is a little different, but the one thing we all have in common is that point in time where we said yes to Jesus and we were forgiven of our sin.
- Some came to trust in Jesus at a church camp and you felt the moving of the Holy Spirit on your life and you surrendered to Him. For some it may have been a church revival and you felt the word of God pierce your heart with truth and reveal your lostness. For some it was a gentle voice at home and God spoke to you and you knew you needed Him.

Write down what circumstances led you to an understanding that you needed a Savior to forgive you from your sins and give you eternal life.

Whatever that looks like for you, communicate the circumstances surrounding the conviction of the Holy Spirit in your life and your response to that conviction.



Question

What part of John 3:16 resonates the most with you trusting in Jesus?

3

YOUR LIFE SINCE MEETING JESUS (Acts 22:17-21)

- Paul's life took a 180 degree turn as he went from persecuting the church to planting churches. His change was evident and obvious. For some of you, that change may have been huge, for others, who got saved early in life and that change may not have been so huge.
- Your walk with Christ has all kinds of challenges that you could include with your story. Describe your trials and temptations and how Christ has helped you through them.

The important thing is that you talk about the goodness of Jesus in your life and how He has given you new perspectives and opportunities to impact the lives around you. We have a hope that cannot be taken away.

Rom 8:37-39, "... in all these things we are more than victorious through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that not even death or life, angels or rulers, things present or things to come, hostile powers, height or depth, **or any other created thing will have the power to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**"

Because of Christ living in our hearts, we have a hope and future that can never be taken.



Question

2 Cor 5:17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, old things have passed away, and look, new things have come." **What "things have passed away" and what things are new in your life?**



Homework: This is really key to NEXT WEEK

Write on paper YOUR STORY. Have the 3 parts we just walked through and keep it around 3 minutes. Don't worry if it is rough or unfinished, the important thing is to DO IT. Your STORY is important, because it tells the story of Jesus.

- * Bring your Homework to class next week!
- * Don't be afraid of coming next week. No one is going to put you on the spot
- * Life Groups should be a really "SAFE" place to share YOUR STORY.

LESSON 3: THE TELLING OF YOUR STORY

WE CALL THIS PRACTICE AND YES WE ARE TALKING ABOUT PRACTICE AND NOT A GAME! :-)

It doesn't have to be perfect...This is Role Playing

LEADER NOTE: The hard part about today's exercise is that it is purely practical. We are wanting people in the class to share their stories and they are going to be hesitant. You DON'T want to put people in front of the whole class. Break your class into groups of 2, 3 or 4. No more than 4. The smaller the better. It could be just a husband and wife sharing their stories with each other.

If we are afraid of sharing our stories with people we know, we will never share our stories with people we barely know. That is why practice is so important. You may want to hand pick a few people in your group that you know would be willing to share their story and place them strategically in the groups. Once one person shares, it is easier for the next person.

Celebrate each story in the groups.

On this day, there will be people of all age groups sharing their stories throughout the church! How great is that!

A few things you can do to ease the anxiety!

- ✓ Pray the entire week that the Holy Spirit would go in front of everyone.
- ✓ Start the class off with a co-leader or someone that you have pre-selected to share their story, before breaking everyone up into smaller groups.
- ✓ If you have people who did not do the homework (which may be a lot), they may be willing to share the circumstances surrounding their accepting Christ. A simple Testimony!

The Objective of learning how to share your story.

We live in a time where we have a generation that don't go to church, simply because they never did. They don't see a need for Jesus or God in their lives. They literally don't know of Him.

Paul writes these words in Romans 10:13-15, "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how can they call on Him they have not believed in? And how can they believe without hearing about Him? and how can they hear without a preacher? And how can they preach unless they are sent?"

That word "preacher" in the Greek means; someone who is a herald or someone who makes a proclamation. In other words, that applies to us as "ambassadors". **We are the herald's proclaiming Jesus.**

Of all things a Christian could do, being prepared to share YOUR STORY of coming to know Jesus, should be near the TOP. It gives a follower of Christ, a major tool to IMPACT the world that God has placed them in. **It is practical, personal and powerful. Let's make it a priority!**

LESSON 4: STARTERS, OBJECTIONS & QUESTIONS

How do I even start a conversation, or what happens when someone asks me questions about my faith and I don't know the answer? What happens if they disagree with me? How do I respond?

LEADER NOTE: Take some time at the beginning of the class to review last week's sharing of the stories and celebrate them. You may have someone who would like to share this week.

Have members of your class read through these verses before talking through the lesson.

SCRIPTURE

1. *"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."* Isaiah 41:10
2. *"...For he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'"* Hebrews 13:5b-6
3. *"For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."* Timothy 1:7
4. *"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."* Psalm 23:4
5. *"Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you."* Deut. 31:6
6. *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."* John 14:27
7. *"The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"* Psalm 27:1
8. *"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling."* Psalm 46:1-3
9. *"Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken."* Psalm 55:22
10. *"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the LORD, 'My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.'"* Psalm 91:1-2

C O M M E N T A R Y

We can rest in the fact that nothing takes our sovereign God by surprise. Take your fears, worries, and anxieties before God because He cares about them and He desires to lead you through them (1 Peter 5:7; Romans 8:28).

The truth of God's Word and His promises bridge the gap between the fear you feel and what you know to be true about God and His love for you. Renewing your mind through the memorization of His Word is the best defense against the fears of this world.

As followers of Christ in today's world, we often let opportunities to share our faith with friends and neighbors slip by without saying a word. The missed chances might come during a backyard conversation with someone who is concerned about a relative's terminal illness, or during a mailbox discussion about a random shooting. We don't know what to say, so we say nothing at all. Or maybe we fail to mention how our relationship with Jesus impacts the way we view personal tragedies or current events because we are afraid of being rejected, of not having all the answers, or being dubbed a religious fanatic.

But it doesn't have to be that way. **Sharing your faith is not a cookie-cutter experience – what works for me might not work for you. But we all have one thing in common – we once were blind and now we see.** And we need to be able to share that in a way that is not confrontational, that is comfortable, that exalts Christ.

Spending time in prayer and Bible reading is the antidote to the fear that keeps many people from talking about Christ. The more time we spend in the Word, the more confident we will be going to our neighbors. If we were to summarize the Bible, we would summarize it in the word "relationship" – love God and love others.

We need to keep that vertical connection so we can go horizontal with confidence. Besides the fear factor, people also fail to share their faith at work because they have not made it a priority. They let schedules and projects crowd out relationships. They focus more on the risks like rejection, that accompany sharing their faith, rather than on the joy of helping someone receive the gift of eternal life.

Before you open your mouth to say one word about Christ, you must make sure your habits and lifestyle match what you're about to say. If, for example, you're consistently screaming at your spouse and kids in the backyard, anything you say about Jesus will fall on cynical ears. But if you are kind and humble and handle stress graciously (especially in the backyard) your words will be credible.

Once your actions match your message, you can begin "raising the flag" about your faith. This includes things like praying before meals on the back deck, telling your next-door neighbor that you have peace about a serious illness because you know God is in control; or displaying a very humble and approachable spirit when going about your day.

These "flags" show your neighbors that your faith is important to you. They also open doors that could lead to your personal testimony. I recommend that all believers prepare a brief testimony that includes three key points – their lifestyle before they met Christ, how they found Jesus, and what it means to have Christ in their life today. **"People can debate religion all they want, but they can't debate your personal testimony."** Share it!

TIPS FOR SHARING YOUR FAITH

The following tips will help as you prepare to share with your neighbors

1. **Develop a list of people with whom you want to share your faith.**
2. *Look for common ground.*
3. **Look for God to open doors.**
4. *Encourage people to consider the risks and rewards of a personal relationship with Christ, rather than focusing on do's and don'ts.*
5. **Don't pretend to have all the answers.**
6. *Remember that you may be a seed-planter.*
7. **Immerse yourself in prayer and Bible study in preparation.**

NOTES

Internal Challenges in sharing the Gospel

Our feelings of inadequacy to share the gospel is found largely in the emotion of fear. Fear often suppresses the believers' zeal to let others know about Jesus.

What are we afraid of? Our fears customarily stem from the dread of rejection – due to our own insecurities.

Timothy was also in this situation when Paul wrote the second letter to him. Timothy was young and Paul, his mentor, was in prison. So, Paul, in his letter, wrote Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:7-8

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline. So never be ashamed to tell others about our Lord. And don't be ashamed of me, either, even though I'm in prison for him.”

You have the spirit of God in you, and He's not timid. Do not be afraid, this gospel message holds the key to liberate humankind. So, go and share it boldly.

Sharing the gospel message requires some basic communication skills. Though we rely on the Holy Spirit, it's prudent to arm yourself with the necessary tools for starting conversations.

Paul took advantage of an altar inscription in Athens to engage the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.

The Samaritan woman was engaged in a conversation that led to the salvation of a community by Jesus. Jesus found a common ground, and keyed into it.

You, too, can look for opportunities, or common grounds for sharing the gospel of Jesus. Such opportunities abound in public places, like your neighborhood.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes – the hope of the world hangs on it (Rom 1:16).

EXTERNAL CHALLENGES

The church, since the time of Paul, has had to confront philosophies that challenge God's existence, and deny Jesus as Deity. In the age of information (and knowledge), this is one major challenge to sharing the gospel of Christ.

It has become expedient for the believers to equip themselves with knowledge to confront this challenge.



Peter's Admonition

"But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect..." 1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)

In a 2018 report by *Open Doors USA*, a total of fifty countries were listed (identified) where it is most dangerous to be a follower of Jesus. Nations are becoming more and more hostile to the gospel.

With increasing exposure to torture, imprisonment, loss of home and assets, rape, and death, Christians remain one of the most persecuted religious groups.

Despite these, our resolve to share the gospel must be firm. Remember The Great Commission?



Commit to Share the Gospel with Your Neighbors

As daunting as the outlined challenges may be, they are offshoots of a bigger challenge. If our love for sinners is true, and your conviction in the gospel as the only means of salvation is real, nothing should hinder you from taking the time to walk across the street or talk across a fence. Do you love the world (unsaved people) as much as you've enjoyed God's love? What's your conviction about the gospel? Do you believe it is God's power unto salvation to everyone that believes?

*You will never share with someone who doesn't need salvation.

*You will never share with someone who God does not love.

*You will never share with someone who God has not already prepared.

*You will never share with someone who wouldn't be better off saved.

It's time to take it to the streets!

GREAT BIBLE VERSES ABOUT SHARING THE GOSPEL

Matthew 5:13-16

Matthew 28:16-20

Acts 1:1-8

Acts 20:35

Romans 1:15-17

Romans 10:15

Romans 15:1-21

1 Corinthians 1:10-31

1 Corinthians 9:16-23

2 Corinthians 9:12-14

Ephesians 6:15

2 Timothy 4:5

1 Peter 2:21

LEADER NOTES