

SHARING

OUR



FAITH

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KEY SCRIPTURES:

MATTHEW 28:16-20, JOHN 4:39-42

DISCIPLESHIP FOCUS: SERVING HIS WORLD

OVERVIEW:

Jesus' last words on this earth make sharing the Gospel a central undertaking of the Christian life. Those who follow Jesus are called to share their faith, also known as evangelism. How do we fulfill this call in a world that seems like it's moving further from Jesus? What does it look like to live out the Great Commission when you're not in vocational ministry? This series will explore how Jesus and the Apostles taught, and how we might share our faith more effectively in a post-Christian world.

BIG IDEA:

Evangelism can feel like a loaded word, even to a seasoned believer. Cultural trends and a decline in church attendance can leave one feeling discouraged. How can we possibly share our faith in a post-Christian world? Let's start at the beginning and rediscover the simple Gospel that is for everyone.

KEY PASSAGES: John 4:39-42, John 9:1-25

TEACHING/DEVOTIONAL: When you think of evangelism, what image pops into your mind? Maybe you think of Billy Graham at the height of his televangelism, or your local pastor who preaches the word every Sunday, or even Tim Tebow on ESPN. Perhaps you recall the conversation you had about God or spirituality that came out of nowhere, between yourself and a coworker, or your family member. Maybe you had a grandmother who brought you with her to church, or you went to a Christian summer camp, or your little league coach talked about his faith. Despite our varied evangelical influences, today's culture has become increasingly disinterested in the topic of Christianity. While it seems as though everyone has heard of Jesus, fewer people are choosing to follow Him.

As Christine Wood, author of *Character Witness*, puts it, "The tragedy is that it appears the essence of God's grace has not penetrated the hearts of those who have heard about him. And the even greater tragedy is that there are more people still looking for God than there are Christians pointing the way" (16). This statement is confirmed by Barna Group research, "Almost four in ten Americans (38%) are active churchgoers...[with] great variations among American cities" (*Church Attendance Trends Around the Country*, 2017). Further, the Bay Area [San Francisco, Oakland, and San Jose] topped both lists of the most 'unchurched' and 'de-churched' cities in the United States. 'Unchurched' refers to people who have not attended a church service in the last six months. 'De-churched' refers to people who were previously engaged in a church in some capacity but who have not attended a service in the last six months. When faced with these odds, how can we possibly make a difference?

Let's start by considering the story of the Samaritan woman from John 4. Everything we learn about this woman from scripture indicates that she would be the last person a Jewish rabbi would use to announce their savior's arrival. She was Samaritan (a bitter enemy to the Hebrews), a woman (not a trustworthy witness), and she was alone at the well at midday (she wasn't welcomed by her community). Yet her encounter with Jesus equipped her to become the greatest evangelist for her community. She experienced life change, and a sharing of her experience flowed out of her much like the living water Jesus offered her. Her simple, passionate testimony worked, "Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in [Jesus] because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I ever did.'" (39).

The testimony of the Samaritan woman offers a great illustration of evangelism. According to Christine Wood, "If we are to evangelize, we must be intentional about developing the kind of character that yields the inviting fragrance of grace. The first step is to begin to understand the people around us" (17). Jesus brought the fragrance of grace to the Samaritan woman, which compelled her to bring that same grace to those in her community. By her actions, her neighbors placed their faith in Jesus and begged Him to stay with them. The more time they spent with Jesus, the more members of her community came to faith. In one of the most beautiful descriptions of successful evangelism, her neighbors tell her, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world." (42).

Our greatest gift in a post-Christian world is our character and our testimony – our own experience with the life-changing power of Jesus. Consider the compelling statement of life change delivered by a blind man Jesus heals in John 9. After being brought in by some religious leaders for investigation, the blind man says of Jesus, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" (25). Our individual actions and testimonies speak to where Jesus changed everything for us. It roots our faith tradition in the modern world. It declares that the God of scripture is the God of the here and now. May these downward trends inspire us to act, not give up hope. As Paul declares to the Romans, "What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?" (31).

SHARING LIFE:

When you hear "share your faith", who or what do you think of?
When you think about sharing your faith with others, what concerns you most?
Take time to encourage one another.

OPENING SCRIPTURE:

Read John 4:1-42

What do you think Jesus means when He says, "They are ripe for harvest"? How does that connect to His conversation with the Samaritan woman?

What is the response to the Samaritan woman's simple testimony?

Who can you share your simple testimony with this week?

Read John 9:1-25

How does Jesus talk about sin? Is sin responsible for this man's blindness?

Look at the responses to the blind man's healing – who responds well to this life-change?

PRAYER:

Take a moment to share prayer requests and pray for one another.

Pray for the Bay Area, that believers will share their faith with increased boldness.

Personal Prompt: Take a moment to ask God how He wants you to share your faith.

BIG IDEA: Our call as Christians is not to do the bare minimum for others. We are called to love our neighbors radically—and even more those who we consider “the other.” One of the most powerful ways we can share our faith is loving and serving our neighbors.

KEY PASSAGES: Matthew 5: 43-48, Luke 10:25-37, 1 John 4:7-21

Teaching/Devotional: When we remember our own testimonies where God has shown His great love towards us, we are better equipped to love others the way God loves us. And when we come to faith in Christ, loving others is a daily commitment for each and every one of us. Jesus even gave this as a new command, saying, “Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35). His followers took this command seriously. The apostle John asks us to check our own hearts, stating, “Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen” (1 John 4:20).

Jesus tells us to take love one step further. During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus states, “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,” (Matthew 5:43-44). What does that look like? We can understand caring for the hurting and broken, but our own enemies? Jesus makes this clear when discussing who our neighbor is with an expert in the law, He responds with the parable of the Good Samaritan. While three of his fellow kinsman pass by him, a wounded man lays dying on the side of the road. That is, until a Samaritan comes upon him. His title as a Samaritan is worth unpacking; this man originates from an enemy people group, and is a foreigner traveling on this road, which makes the wounded man his enemy and persecutor.

But how does the Samaritan man treat him? “He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have’” (Luke 10: 34-35). He greatly inconveniences himself in order to mercifully love his neighbor, with no concern for cost, safety, time, reputation, or money. So how does Jesus instruct us to care for our enemies and neighbors, “Go and do likewise” (37).

When we understand the idea of neighbor, in light of the Good Samaritan, we are compelled to love in a way that is contrary to our own best interest. We put others before ourselves (Philippians 2:3), live generously (Luke 6:37-38), and live peaceably with all people (Romans 12:18). All of this is the evidence of a life impacted by the love of Christ. As John succinctly puts it, “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:20).

SHARING LIFE:

Ask those in your group to share their testimony.
Take time to encourage one another.

OPENING SCRIPTURE:

Read Luke 10:25-37

What stands out to you in this account of loving your neighbor?
What action on the part of the Samaritan resonates most with you?

Read 1 John 4:7-21

Which verse stands out to you and why?
Which aspect of God’s love is difficult for you to accept?

PRAYER:

Take a moment to share prayer requests and pray for one another.

Personal Prompt: Pray and ask God to reveal to you who your neighbor is. Confess ways you have chosen to not love your neighbor.

BIG IDEA: Many Christians seek to remove all traces of non-Christian culture from their environment. Sharing the Gospel in a post-Christian world requires us to understand and engage in culture in healthy ways. Regardless of the outcome, engagement shows respect to fellow image-bearers and their journey toward Christ.

KEY PASSAGES: John 17, Acts 17, 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

TEACHING/DEVOTIONAL: When we think about our day to day lives, we don't often think about ourselves as ambassadors. However, the moment we make a decision to follow Jesus, Paul says, "Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20). Paul continues, "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:20). As ambassadors, we are tasked with representing Christ to the world, actively engaging with it, while we await our Savior.

The good news is, as ambassadors, we have access to Kingdom resources. Jesus promises His disciples the coming of the Holy Spirit, who "will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26). Christians today live on the other side of that promise. We have the Holy Spirit dwelling within each of us, reminding us of all that Jesus' taught. He also gives us gifts (Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:8-10), helps us in our weakness (Romans 8:26), cultivates good fruit in our lives (Galatians 5:22-23), and empowers us to live like Jesus did (Acts 1:8). When we come to faith, we are also called new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17), ones who renew our minds in God's Word and not the world (Romans 12:2). As Paul writes in Galatians, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free" (5:1). But what does that mean for us in our everyday lives? How are we to engage with an increasingly hostile world?

Consider Paul's approach to the Greeks in Athens, in Acts 17. Even though he is uncomfortable, encountering their opposing religious practices, Paul continues to preach the Good News in the synagogue and in the marketplace. When philosophers, the wisest and most praised among the Greeks, begin to criticize Paul's teaching, he preaches the Gospel all the more boldly, but roots it in their environment. Once he delivers his powerful defense of the Gospel, "some of them sneered, but others said, 'We want to hear you again on this subject.'" (32). Paul's witness reminds us that sharing our faith as ambassadors is worthwhile, no matter the response of the crowd, because the Gospel of Jesus is for everyone.

This was Christ's prayer for His disciples the night before He was crucified, "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it" (John 17:15-16). Further, He includes His modern-day ambassadors, saying, "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you." (20-21). When we receive the Holy Spirit, Christ's prayer for us was fulfilled.

Paul took this promise seriously, as he followed in Jesus' footsteps, becoming a servant to the Gospel message. We can learn much from Paul's life and teachings, particularly how he interacts with his neighbors and his enemies. In his freedom, bought by the blood of Jesus, Paul shares, "To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings." (1 Corinthians 9:22-23). As ambassadors, we freely offer the gifts we've been freely given, speaking the language of the people we live alongside as we share the Good News of Jesus.

SHARING LIFE:

Share about the culture that surrounds you (i.e. workplace, school, neighborhood). What do you have in common with those around you?

Do you feel like an ambassador? Share your thoughts.

For those who haven't yet shared, ask those in your group to share their testimony.

Take time to encourage each other.

OPENING SCRIPTURE:

Read Acts 17

What stands out to you from this passage?

What can we learn about engaging with culture from Paul?

Read John 17: 6-26

What stands out to you from Jesus' prayer?

How does this impact your view of engaging with culture?

Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

What stands out to you from Paul's use of his freedom?

How does this impact your view of engaging with culture?

PRAYER:

Take a moment to share prayer requests and pray for one another.

Personal Prompt: Ask God to reveal to you how you can engage with the culture around you. Submit to Him any fears or concerns you may have.

BIG IDEA: Using your sphere of influence, where God has you right now, is the most personal and effective way to share the Gospel in a post-Christian world. Your willingness and commitment to build relationships and have conversations that point to Jesus have the power to impact eternity.

KEY PASSAGES: Acts 16:22-34, 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1, Colossians 4:5-6

TEACHING/DEVOTIONAL: While I was working on my master’s degree, I took a job at Starbucks. At the time, this felt like a step backwards for me. However, I needed flexible hours and lots of coffee to get through my grad program, and this job fit the bill. The longer I worked there, the more I got to know regular customers. I learned the names and orders of deliverymen and grocery store workers, nurses and EMTs, businessmen and single moms, middle school students and soccer coaches. I got to hear how their day was going, and they slowly began to share their stories. I mourned with the newly single mom, who had to move to a new neighborhood. I experienced joyful anticipation, as a regular customer planned his marriage proposal. I celebrated the accomplishment of graduation with an engineering student. This job that once felt like a defeat began to turn into a life-giving opportunity, because I learned to love and invest in my sphere.

When we start to love our neighbors and engage the world around us with hopeful confidence, people will start to take notice. We will naturally look different to those in our family, in our workplaces or schools, and friend groups. Doing the unexpected, going the extra mile, looking out for the good of others will become our practice. Though we may feel like the only Christians in our spheres, we are not abandoned as we live faithful to the Gospel. As Christine Wood puts it, “If we as Christians are willing to be intentionally about evangelizing the people God places within our sphere of influence, he will give us the tools we need to be unconditional, trusted friends to them” (23).

Consider the story of Paul and Silas in prison, from Acts 16. After being attacked and beaten by a mob, chained within their prison cell, Paul and Silas sang and praised the Lord, and as verse 25 tells us, “the other prisoners were listening”. Then, in His great power and mercy, the Lord sends an earthquake and springs all the prisoners loose. Time to run, right? Not quite. Right before the prison guard is about to take his own life out of despair for losing his prisoners, Paul calls out, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!” (28). What follows is an incredible story of redemption, as the jailer and his entire family come to faith in the Lord (27-34). What always strikes me is the response of the other prisoners. After witnessing Paul and Silas worship, they too stay in their cells and contribute to the saving of the jailer’s entire family.

When we live out the Gospel in our daily lives, we give people a taste of the God’s goodness and faithfulness. Look at Paul’s encouragement in 1 Corinthians 11: 23-33. In this passage, we hear the popular verse, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (31). This call to action is deeply rooted in the desire to use our God-given freedom for the good of others, not for our own benefit. He goes on to say, “For I am not seeking my own good, but the good of many so that they may be saved.” (33). Sharing our faith in our spheres starts that simply; whether you’re making international business deals, pouring coffee, raising a family, or developing an app, “make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace” (Colossians 4:4-5). Our lives will open doors to share our testimony, offering hope to those who have taken notice. By bringing the Good News wherever we go, we gracefully invite others to, “follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 12:1).

SHARING LIFE:

Share about your sphere of influence. Who is someone that you can invest in?
For those who haven’t shared yet, ask a few people in your group to share their testimony.
Take time to encourage each other.

OPENING SCRIPTURE:

Read Acts 16:22-34
What stands out to you from Paul and Silas’ story?
Which character stood out to you and why?
How do Paul & Silas invest in their sphere while in prison?

Read 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1
What stands out to you from Paul’s message?
Again, Paul talks about the use of our freedom. How can you use your freedom to influence your sphere this week?

Read Colossians 4:5-6
What stands out to you from Paul’s encouragement?
How do we make the most of every opportunity? Share your thoughts.

PRAYER:

Take a moment to share prayer requests and pray for one another.

Personal Prayer: Take a moment to pray for your sphere (i.e. office, school, home, gym). Ask the Lord to reveal where you can be investing in your sphere.

BIG IDEA: The Gospel is for everyone. Over the last four weeks, we've seen different ways of sharing the love of Christ with our world. Now it's time to take the investment we've made in those around us and invite them to see Christian community in action.

KEY PASSAGES: Acts 2:42-47, John 13:34-35, 1 Corinthians 13

TEACHING/DEVOTIONAL: Now that you're engaging with someone in your sphere, investing in them relationally, and boldly asked them to join you for a church service. How are you feeling? I was nervous the first time I invited a friend to join me for church. How will they respond to my invitation? Will they still talk to me after I mention church? Once they say yes, another round of concern begun. Will they like the songs we sing? What passage will the pastor preach on? Please don't let it be a money week! I hope I'm able to introduce them to my community group. Will they feel welcomed? Ultimately, we all desire to introduce people to genuine Christian community as we introduce them to Jesus.

This desire is good, as it reflects the robust community in the Early Church, in Acts 2. After Pentecost, thousands of believers now comprise the church, and "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (42). Acts goes on to say, "All the believers were together and had everything in common." What a compelling environment that sounds like! We each desire a taste of that authenticity, for ourselves and for our neighbors. In fact, that was Christ's desire for us; look again at John 14:34-35. Christ followers are known for their love of one another.

Most of us crave the unity of the Early Church, even as we mourn over many ways the church feels divided. This is demonstrated in our concern or hesitation to invite our neighbors to church. Where can we find things in common with other believers, experience fellowship, break bread, and pray together? This is the gift and function of community groups. In fact, community groups are founded on these Acts 2 principles; share life (everything in common), open scripture (devoted to the apostle's teaching), and pray together.

Community groups thrive, much like the Acts 2 community, when they are mobilized. This vibrant community has experienced the life-changing love of Jesus and offers it freely to their neighbors. Consider the passage on love in 1 Corinthians 13. While many of us are familiar with this passage, often associating it with God's love for us, let's consider the context. Paul has just written about the importance of a unified church, calling it the body of Christ, and lists the gifts necessary for the building of the church (1 Corinthians 12). Then he says, "and yet I will show you the most excellent way," and describes how indispensable love is to the Christian community.

When we invite our neighbors into authentic Christian community, we offer them the opportunity to experience true, genuine love. We each have the responsibility to love like our Creator, with patience and kindness, to inconvenience ourselves for the sake of others with humility and honesty. We are called to offer a love that, "always protect, always trust, always hopes, always perseveres" (7). And the greatest part of all? We don't have to do it alone.

SHARING LIFE:

Take a moment to share your skills with your group (think beyond work - i.e. practical, creative, hobbies).

Take a moment to reflect on how your group represents the variety of the body of Christ.

Where can you mobilize your gifts within the group? And as you share your faith?

For those who haven't shared yet, ask a few people in your group to share their testimony.

Take time to encourage each other.

OPENING SCRIPTURE:

Read Acts 2:42-47

What stands out to you from the description of the Early Church?

Which characteristic of that community do you long for most? Which seems most difficult?

Read 1 Corinthians 13

What stands out to you from the love passage?

Which characteristic of love do you identify with most? Which seems most difficult?

PRAYER:

Take a moment to share prayer requests and pray for one another.

Pray for your community, that it would look more and more like Christ.

Personal Prayer: Take a moment to confess the attribute(s) of love that are harder for you to give.

BIG IDEA: Jesus was sent to Earth to preach the Kingdom of God. So are we! While our actions need to match the faith we profess, we can't rely on deeds alone to share the truth of the Gospel.

KEY PASSAGES: 1 Peter 3:8-17, Romans 10:9-15 (cf: Deut. 30:14)

TEACHING/DEVOTIONAL: When asked, people are most hesitant about sharing their faith when they think about what they have to say. Many of us avoid ever being vocal about our faith, hoping our actions can speak for themselves. We might even equate sharing our faith to being on trial, where we are cast in the role of the witness in a contentious case. We think that others must know more than we do, like our pastors or community group leaders. If only they were here to share their response! We look at the incredible defense, given by Stephen in Acts 7, and feel the pressure to have a rich, theological rebuttal prepared at all times.

At the same time, think about how you naturally respond to hearing good news; the tests came back all clear, a new baby is born, you got the job, the house is yours! We are quick to thank God, often vocally, when we receive such good news. Look now at Peter's encouragement in 1 Peter 3; while we may fear rejection or persecution, Peter emboldens us to, "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" (15). The word for 'hope' can also be translated to 'expectation of good'. Peter reminds us that we don't need to have all the answers, just a willingness to share our testimony.

When we refocus on the opportunity to introduce others to Jesus by sharing our testimony, we agree with two fundamental truths; we are all called to share the Gospel message, and we are all given unique testimonies that will impact others differently. As Christine Wood states, "Our responsibility is to be obedient in response to our calling, in accordance with our personality and using His gifts in the circumstances He provides us. That we get to be involved in something so important should cause our minds to reel!" (46). We share good news every time we take the opportunity to share our faith. When we witness to others, we have the opportunity to bear witness to life change. What incredibly good news!

Let's look at Paul's letter to the Roman church. Paul makes it clear; it is absolutely essential for Christians to vocalize their faith. As he says, "it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved" (10). Once again, this witness is not just for us personally, because the Gospel message is for everyone. He continues by asking, "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (14). There is great cost and great joy attached to sharing our faith. On the other side is of courage is life transformation.

SHARING LIFE:

Are you hesitant to use your words when it comes to sharing your faith?

For those who haven't shared yet, ask a few people in your group to share their testimony.

Take time to encourage each other.

OPENING SCRIPTURE:

Read 1 Peter 3:8-17

What stands out to you from Peter's encouragement?

Now that many of you have shared your testimony, how do you feeling about sharing your faith with others? How can you share the hope you have within you?

Read Romans 10:9-15

What stands out to you from Paul's teaching?

What are we called to do as we share our faith?

PRAYER:

Take a moment to share prayer requests and pray for one another.

Pray for boldness, and the time you've spent investing in your sphere will lead to sharing the hope you have within you.

Personal Prayer: Pray for those you feel lead to be more intentional with, that the Lord would be working in their hearts even before you engage in conversation.

BIG IDEA: In one of the most famous passages in the Bible, Jesus tells us to go and make disciples. This doesn't only mean going overseas. In the Silicon Valley, the world has come to us. We can bring the Gospel to the nations in our workplaces, our neighborhoods, our schools, our gyms, and to the very ends of the earth.

KEY PASSAGES: Matthew 28:16-20, Hebrews 12:1-3

TEACHING/DEVOTIONAL: Let's take a moment to reflect on the lessons of the past six weeks. Each of us are called to share our faith with a broken world, one who has heard of Jesus, but does not know Him. We started by recognizing who our neighbor is and choosing to submit our selfish ambition in order to love others like Christ does. We acknowledged our role as ambassadors of God's Kingdom, which requires us to intentionally engage with our culture. We offered up our spheres of influence as fertile ground for the Gospel and saw how our life circumstances can ultimately be seen as opportunities to share our faith. We were reminded of how compelling authentic, Christian community is, and identified our own important role within that community. And finally, we were reminded of how crucial it is for us to share our faith with words.

The discussion about sharing our faith and hearing each other's testimonies, took time and intentional effort. We can be sure that sharing our faith with our neighbors will often take even more time and effort. As Christine Wood encourages, "Evangelism is not possible without buoyancy. I wouldn't be writing this book and you wouldn't be reading it if the earliest Christians had not been buoyant. They didn't go under when the going got tough. They didn't surrender to despair when people they loved walked away from faith. Unsinkable in hope, they kept on, and many of those who first refused the Good News eventually turned to Christ" (74). Sharing our faith will ultimately be our life's work.

Let's look at Jesus' final words to His disciples in Matthew 28. He had conquered death, risen from the dead, and was about to ascend to heaven, just as it was prophesied throughout scripture. Before that, He tells His disciples, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (18-19). There is so much that can be said about the Great Commission, so let's focus on making disciples for now.

Jesus tasks the disciples with continuing His ministry on earth, to 'make disciples'. Think through that for a moment - telling disciples to make disciples. Jesus has spent His entire three-year ministry with these men, teaching them, encouraging them, correcting them when necessary; all to prepare them for this moment. In the same way, sharing our faith and making disciples is a long-term commitment. While not everyone you share your faith with will choose to become a disciple, we are still called to speak. Likewise, we are commissioned to make disciples. The Greek word for 'make' can also be interpreted as 'teach or instruct'. Similarly, while not everyone we teach or instruct will become a disciple, we are still called to make disciples. Ultimately, God is interested more in our obedience than our results. He's the one who saves, after all.

Consider another commission of Jesus, this time of the twelve disciples back in Matthew 10. He gives His disciples great authority, telling them who to pursue, how to receive persecution, and delivers this convicting, yet reassuring statement. He says, "Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven" (32-33). This statement summarizes why we need to take the Great Commission seriously: to have faith is to share our faith. As Paul says, "If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me" (Philippians 1:22).

Much like the Great Commission, this closing is simply the beginning. May the words from Hebrews be your benediction, as you live out the call to share your faith and make disciples; "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Hebrews 12:1-3). Amen!

SHARING LIFE:

Make sure each group member has been given the opportunity to share their testimony.
Take time to encourage each other.
Share action steps you plan to take after going through this study.

OPENING SCRIPTURE:

Read Matthew 28:16-20
What stands out to you from the Great Commission?
What is your experience in making disciples? In being disciplined?

Read Matthew 10
What stands out to you from the commissioning of the twelve disciples?
Consider that we are also disciples being sent out. What are the implications?
How are Christ-followers to handle hardship or persecution?

PRAYER:

Take a moment to share prayer requests and pray for one another.
Pray Hebrews 12:1-3 as a benediction over your group.

Personal Prayer: Continue to pray that the Lord would prepare the way before your witness. Seek obedience over results in your prayers and actions.

FURTHER READING: Character Witness by Christine Wood