

FOR YOUR YOUTH GROUP OR SMALL GROUP MEETINGS
WEEKS #7 - #14

2017



All this year, we will be examining different kinds of reformation in people of the Bible, and seeking to apply what we learn to our own lives.

STARTER KIT



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*The root of reformation is the Latin word reformare,
which means to form again or to change.*

Read EGW's book, *The Great Controversy*, chapter 7

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INTRODUCTION

UNDERSTANDING THIS STARTER KIT

Five hundred years ago, on October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses disagreeing fundamentally with the Catholicism of the time to the door of the cathedral in Wittenberg, Germany. This act is generally seen as the real start to the Protestant Reformation. In honor of that brave act, General Conference Youth Ministries has chosen Reformation as the theme for the whole year of 2017.

We will study Luther and other reformers, but most importantly, we will study all the varying meanings of this word, what it meant to many people throughout the Bible, and what it means to us. If what we study at church, in Sabbath school, and in youth meetings does not change our lives, then it is useless.

So what does “reformation” really mean? Looking more closely, we see that the word is based on “form,” which just means to make. God formed Adam from dirt. You can form things from clay or pipe cleaners.

Re-form takes another step. It takes something that has been formed and forms it differently. It is usually necessary to take apart the original thing to make something new of it.

When we use “reformed” about a person, we usually mean someone who was “bad” is now “good.” A drug addict becomes a loving mother. A murderer becomes a Christian and shares the Good News of the gospel with other prisoners.

But reformed doesn’t necessarily mean from bad to good. It can just mean re-formed. My mother used to make dresses for me out of my father’s old shirts. She cut up the shirts into pieces of cloth and cut new pieces to be put together into a little girl’s dress.

All this year, we will be examining different kinds of reformation in people of the Bible, and seeking to apply what we learn to our own lives.

What did Martin Luther reform?

First of all, it is very important to understand that there are millions of Catholics, both priests and laypeople, who are godly, loving Christians. It is the system, also called the papacy, which has a lot to answer to God for.

Luther had no intention of starting a whole new church or church movement. He hoped the church he loved could be reformed. And though he worried that he was not the right one to do something, he also knew God calls each of us to stand for truth wherever we are.

For several hundred years, the Catholic Church, or rather, the highest authorities in that church, including popes, the highest priests, called cardinals, and local archbishops and bishops, had most of Europe in a choke hold. They claimed that the pope stood in the place of Christ on earth, and that he had the power to determine not just if you lived or died, but whether you went to heaven or hell. (Or purgatory, which was an in-between place where supposedly a person was tortured until he or she had paid for all the sins of his or her life and could then go to heaven.)

In Luther's time, a decree had been made that people could be forgiven for all their sins and get to go straight to heaven when they died, if they bought an "indulgence." The pope was literally saying, "Give me money, and I will indulge your sinfulness. You don't have to actually change."

For centuries, people had been so heavily trained to obey the church in all things that they gave up, in some cases, their entire life savings. You could buy indulgences for people who had already died, too, getting them out of purgatory early. Can you imagine? If your mother had died, and you believed her spirit was spending years, or even centuries, in purgatory being tortured for everything she had ever done wrong (as determined by a strict, authoritarian church) wouldn't you give or do anything to get her out? People did—and they grew poorer and poorer while the pope, cardinals, priests, and churches grew richer and richer.

Martin Luther had been trained to obey the church, too. In fact, he became a monk—a man who gave up all possessions to the church and gave over his entire life to live only for God—no wife, no family, no job except whatever the abbot (the leader of the monks) told him to do. He loved his church.

But Luther was educated, able to read Latin, and could read God's word for himself. And he didn't see a God who indulged sin in that Bible. He also didn't see a God who tortured people to make them pay for their sins. He preached about the God he found in the Bible—a God who loved people so much He gave Himself up for them. A God who sent His Son to die so that people wouldn't have to. People loved to listen to Dr. Luther. But as time went on, he started to say some shocking things. The church leaders started to try to make him back down.

Then he posted those 95 theses.

The first four said that repentance should be from the heart and should lead to real change. If there was no change, then there was no repentance.

In theses # 5 and 6, Luther said the pope didn't have the power to forgive anything except the breaking of rules he made himself. He said the pope could "declare and show" to the people that God had forgiven their sins, but he couldn't do it himself. Only God could.

In # 27 and 28, Luther said that when people preach "as soon as the money clinks into the money chest, the soul flies out of purgatory" were only preaching human doctrines, not God's. Instead, he added, "It is certain that when the money clinks in the money chest, greed and avarice can be increased; but when the church intercedes, the result is in the hands of God alone."

You can imagine what the church authorities thought. Luther was arrested more than once, and they did their utmost to make him "recant," that is, give up his beliefs.

Luther was tempted. What if he was wrong? He had always been taught to love and obey his church. He wrote that he was almost in despair as he thought of himself in opposition to this powerful organization. What if God had not sent him to try to change things?

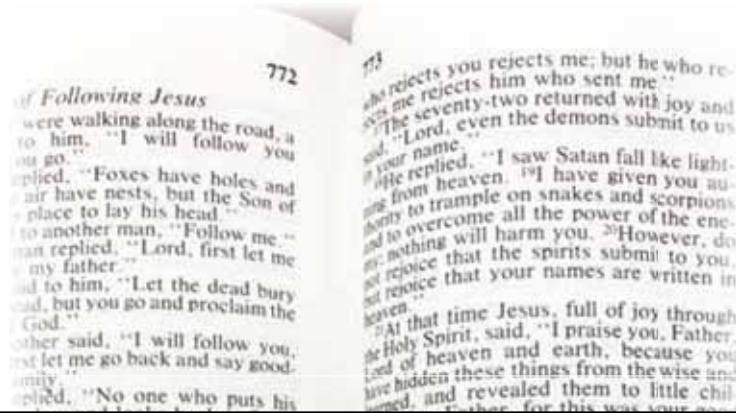
But he kept falling back on what had become his favorite Bible verse: "The just shall live by faith" Romans 1:17. God alone was to be obeyed, above all earthly powers. Luther would stand on the Word of God alone.

His story is a long and dramatic one. If you want to read the whole story, there are many, many resources online, but a good telling of the whole story can be found in *The Great Controversy*, chapter 7.

In the end, Luther was excommunicated and so were thousands of those who believed he was telling the truth. People in those days believed excommunication meant one would burn in hell forever. It was a scary time. But Luther found peace, satisfaction, joy in the Lord, and even a family! Luther later married a woman who had been a nun. He had to break his monk's vows, and she her nun's vows in order to marry. We can only imagine how difficult that was—and how joyful it made them once they realized it was God's will. Luther later wrote, "There is no more lovely, friendly, and charming relationship, communion, or company than a good marriage."

His whole life had been taken apart and re-formed.

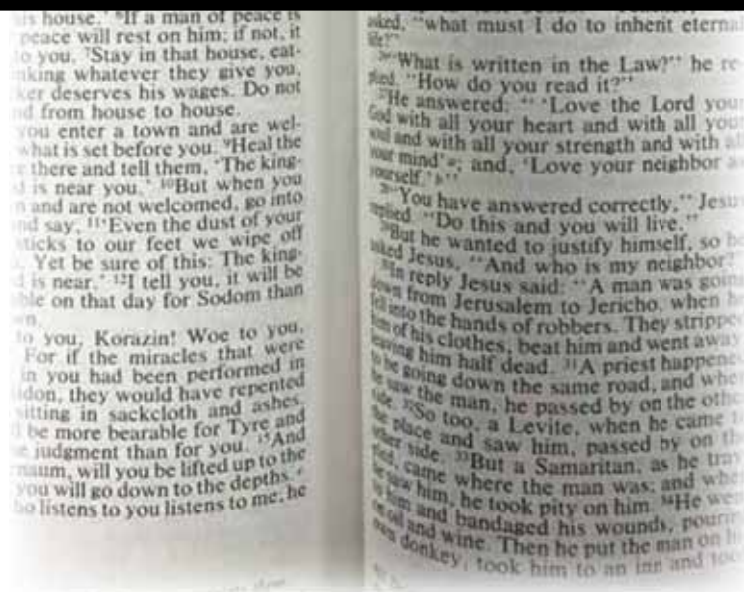
A whole new church movement began and hasn't ended yet. The Seventh-day Adventist denomination, formed officially in 1863, is one of those who are still protesting church leaders (and not just Catholic ones) who insist on taking to themselves powers that belong to God alone. No one—not your teacher or pastor, not even your parents—is to be your conscience for you, once you have reached an age where you can read and understand the Bible for yourself. All of these persons are meant to be leaders and mentors and good sources of education and faith for you, but your conscience is between you and God.



2017 STARTER KIT WEEK 7

UNFORMED • FORMED • DEFORMED • REFORMED

FOR YOUR YOUTH GROUP OR SMALL GROUP MEETINGS



HERE IS WHAT WE PROVIDE IN EACH SESSION:

1. A brief reading on the topic. This can be read, but of course should be shared instead in the leader's own words, adding or subtracting details that fit your group. Usually, there are Bible readings and questions worked into the text.
2. A short devotion that brings home the principles of the topic of the week. This is intended to be shared with the whole group.
3. An activity suggestion. These are simple, requiring few, if any, materials, but we all learn and retain better if we do something physical with what we've heard and seen.
4. A short skit. If you have time to rehearse and learn, these can be done on different weeks, or even for other meetings such as church services. But they can also be and done in impromptu fashion, each person reading his/her part expressively. Always allow time to discuss people's reactions after skits.
5. Very important: Each week's starter kit includes a page called "7 Days of Soul Food." Print these out and give copies to each person, or give each person the link if they have online access. These are personal applications that will carry the devotion through the whole week. It is highly recommended that each person begin some sort of prayer journal and use it all year. We general think of journals as being full of writing, but if you don't like to write, you can draw, doodle, paste in pictures that bring the lessons of the week to mind—anything that helps you draw closer to God.

INTRODUCTION

UNFORMED

In the beginning, God. Always. Everywhere. The “formless and void” earth described in Genesis 1:2 was also created by God.

FORMED

He took that formlessness and gave it form, brought order out of chaos, separated and named darkness and light, dry land and sea, created moss and flowers and vines and trees, made creatures innumerable in gorgeous variety. By His word, he shaped the whole world into a form that He defined as *good*. Last of all, God formed human beings who could live in community and choose to love, just as God did.

People were formed “in the image of God.” But not necessarily, physically, or at least there was much more to this form of life. God and those astonishing beings we name angels (oh, yes, they were formed by God, too) walked with our first parents and taught them to shape their lives after Him, which is to say, around Love. Love was what made everything, and love was to be the center and wellspring of their lives. They didn’t, of course, know that love, by definition, is the willingness to sacrifice all for the beloved. There was nothing to sacrifice—not yet. But as they walked with God, it is certain that each put the other’s desires and needs before their own. It’s hard to imagine what their lives were like, but we can safely say that each—no doubt—offered the other the choice of which work to do first on a given day, or deferred to the other’s wishes in the matter of where to explore next. Each gave the other the first bite of some newly discovered fruit.

Well...until that one time...

When Eve stood before the *Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil* and listened to the serpent, the battle for the souls of the whole universe, begun in the very throne room of heaven well before this day, suddenly heated up sickeningly. Unseen angels begged silently, *Say no! Say no!*

God—the whole Godhead, all together as always—drew on her heart as only God knows how to do. And she *knew* God, personally, in a way we can’t even fathom. So, what she did next is a mystery. How could she have simply taken the serpent’s words for it that the God who made her with His own hands, who walked and talked with her, who loved her...had deceived her? Why would she...?

But she did. She ate. Then offered it to Adam.

DEFORMED

And so God's formation of this world, the form of *good* and *love*, was shattered. Those beings God loved chose to break the mold. They gave their allegiance to themselves and their own desires rather than to their Maker. Or so they thought. In fact, they had given their allegiance to another. They turned over the rule of their bright new world to the unformer, the deformer, the devil.

Was God caught off balance, at a loss as to what to do? Not for a second. "Before" this (whatever "before" means when there is no time) God had already planned a way to win us back. God immediately went after His erring children and promised them a Messiah, the ultimate Reformer, who would rescue and remake them and at last, the world.

For the following millennia, the deformation of the planet proceeded in an ever-downward spiral. Brother killed brother. Men began to take more than one wife, showing that already, the value of the women God had formed in His own image was dropping to that of possessions. The Flood came.

Talk about deformation! The whole planet nearly fell apart. And the whole population, save only eight individuals, died. God started over.

And they immediately began a tower to take over heaven.

More millennia, more destruction.

The fullness of time arrived, and an immortal, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent Being became a mortal, unknowing, helpless Baby, present in just one place at a time, beginning with the womb of a young girl, and coming into the world in a little stable.

REFORMED

And so Creation, still groaning, was brought back under the dominion of the God who made it. And how? By this God/Man *giving Himself up to the dark deformation!* How could that reform everything? Again, it's a mystery. We only know it is so.

We know it because of the witness of millions, first in New Testament times, and continuing through to our day. We know because we see the reforming of lives all over the world, lives in our countries, in our towns, in our homes. We know because we feel the reforming begin in our own souls, the minute we turn to God.

It's not finished. The plan of Salvation is complete, but the reformation isn't. We still live in a world that seems even more deformed. Together with a groaning creation, we wait for the day when all will be made new—reformed, re-shaped into what God still calls *good*—a world shaped by and centered on His self-sacrificing Love.

And then, at long last, we and our world will be...

Transformed!

DEVOTION

Note to leader: Because there was less opportunity for interaction in the reading, there is extra interaction in this devotion. Bible texts in this section are all taken from the —New King James Version (NKJV)

Think about your own personal life. We can't, of course, remember the time we were yet unformed. But we can imagine it. Try to picture a time before you came to be. Now imagine your first forming into the beginnings of a little human.

READ OR HAVE SOMEONE READ PSALM 139:13-16

For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;[a] Marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them. —New King James Version (NKJV)

Ask questions and allow time for discussion.

1. How does this make you feel?
2. What are your reactions to this passage?

NOW HAVE SOMEONE READ JEREMIAH 1:5

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations."

Ask questions and allow time for a little discussion and sharing.

1. This says the same thing, but from God's point of view.
2. Do you believe He knew you and had plans for you before you were even born?
3. Do you know yet what some of those plans are? Allow sharing.

Once you were formed and completed, you were born.

1. But were you really complete yet?
2. What are some of the things that have formed you, physically and otherwise, since your birth?
3. Do you feel "grown-up" yet? *Discuss.*

HOW ABOUT DEFORMATION?

1. Are there ways you feel your life has been deformed, either physically or otherwise? If you are willing, share some.

Reformation, of course, is our theme, and is what we most want to concentrate on. We can rejoice at our forming, and trust God to carry us through any deforming, or forgive us for any that is because of our own sinful choices. But most of all, we want to emphasize His reforming of us.

1. How has God begun the reformation of your life?
2. Are there things you rejoice in and would like to share?
3. Are there things you privately want to offer for God's reforming touch?

Pray for each other.

ACTIVITY SUGGESTION

1. Divide into pairs.
2. Give each pair some clay or dough, or pipe cleaners or something that is malleable and shapeable.
3. One person creates a shape with the material and the other destroys it.
4. Then they switch and the other makes something which the first person destroys.
5. Within each pair discuss what feelings are raised by the other's destruction of what they made.
6. Next, work together to make something, and discuss how that feels.
7. Share insights with the whole group.

SEVEN DAYS OF SOUL FOOD

SEVEN DAYS' WORTH OF DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

You must love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind (Luke 10:27). To put it another way, body + heart + mind = one living soul.

We can't really divide ourselves into different sections, but it's useful to look at these different aspects of ourselves and be sure we have a well-balanced faith that uses all the avenues of a soul. Each of these starter kits will include a week's worth of food for your soul in each of these four methods of understanding and expression.

Write about each of the following in your prayer journal this week. Strive to use language of emotions, thought, physical health and strength, or spirit.

DAY ONE: Remember the four categories we have considered: unformed, formed, deformed, and reformed. "Unformed" can mean more than simply not yet made. Young children have unformed ideas and incomplete learning, for example. Some of your opinions as a young person are still unformed, or not completely formed. Bear this in mind as you study this week. Choose a favorite Bible character, look that person up, and read about him or her in your Bible. Write about how the four categories were revealed in that person's life.

DAY TWO: *Heart:* Which of the four categories would you say most characterizes your emotions at this point in your life, and why? Read all of Psalm 139 and pray about what you think God wants to do with your heart this week.

DAY THREE: *Mind:* Which of the four categories would you say most characterizes your thinking and intellect at this point in your life, and why? Read James 3:13-18 and ask God how He wants to work in your mind this week.

DAY FOUR: *Strength/body:* Which of the four categories would you say most characterizes your body at this point in your life, and why? Read 1 Cor. 6:12-20. Some parts of this passage may not apply to you, but you can still think about them.

You are at the perfect age to consider purity in your life. How can you devote your body and strength to God's formation and reformation this week?

DAY FIVE: *Soul/spirit:* Taking into consideration your answers above, which of the four categories would you say most characterizes your whole soul/self at this point in your life, and why?

Read Ephesians 4:10-16. Can you find yourself here, or has God not yet made it clear where He wants you to fit into the mature body of Christ? As you prayerfully ponder the heart/mind/body insights God has given you so far this week, ask Him where you can work for Him right now.

DAY SIX: Bearing in mind our four categories, consider prayerfully your family, community, and church. Where do you see the different categories at work? Pray about how God would have you work to help everyone around you be a part of the reformation, not the deformation.

DAY SEVEN: Use day 7 to create something beautiful that reflects what you have learned.

- Write a poem or song or story.
- Create a poster.
- Write a letter.
- Paint or draw a picture.
- Make a sign.
- Do some sidewalk chalk art or writings.
- Build something.
- Create a podcast or blog post or Twitter post(s).
- Make food and give it to someone in need.

Use whatever creativity God has given *you*. We all have something.

Share the love!

a short skit

REMINISCING - GRANDPA ADAM AND GRANDMA EVE

written by
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A SHORT SKIT (ABOUT 15 MINUTES)

We are going to imagine what it might have been like for Adam and Eve, when they were very old, to tell the stories of their youth to a group of their descendants. There will not be very many written lines; the characters may tell the stories as they think Adam and Eve might have told them. You may want to have Bibles open to **Genesis 1-3** to help be sure your memory is correct. Remember not to act weak and trembling, as very old people might be now. ***They were meant to live forever, and were still in their prime at hundreds of years old.***

CHARACTERS

1. Adam
2. Eve
3. As many of their descendants as you like. Several can have speaking parts. There are four given in this skit, but you can have more. Some can pretend to be children for some of the questions, if you wish. Use your imagination.

PROPS

1. Nothing necessary except chairs for Adam and Eve.
2. Descendants can be around them on the floor or on mats.

Adam: I am glad you have all gathered, my great-great...many times great-grandchildren. It saddens me deeply that so many of our descendants are choosing not to listen to the old stories, or the things that God taught us in the garden.

Eve: And even since then, my husband. God has continued to teach us throughout our long lives. (She looks sad.) Though, I admit, it's not at all the same as it was when we walked and talked together.

Eve: And even since then, my husband. God has continued to teach us throughout our long lives. (She looks sad.) Though, I admit, it's not at all the same as it was when we walked and talked together.

Descendant: Tell us about that, *Grandmother Eve!* What was it like in the Garden of Eden?

Eve: *(Here is where your imagination can come into play. Try to imagine what it would be like to be able to see God and angels and talk with them. Tell short stories, doing your best to act as if you really were there. Adam can join in, too. He can tell about when he first awoke, naming the animals, and God creating Eve.)*

Descendant: (sighs) I wish we still lived there!

Adam: Well, we probably wouldn't all live *in* the Garden. There are too many of us now. But if we had obeyed God, we would now be turning the whole earth into a garden of delights. We would still have access to the Tree of Life. (He looks away and is silent for a moment.) No one would be doing the things I hear about now...

Eve: Don't fret, my husband. God promised He would send a Redeemer.

Descendant: Yes, but what happened? Why did you—well, I don't want to be disrespectful, Grandfather and Grandmother, but...

Eve: Don't worry, my child. It is no disrespect to ask for the truth. It was all my fault. (Tells the story of the temptation.)

Adam: It was *not* all your fault, my wife! I should have immediately called to God, the minute you brought that fruit to me! I *know* He would have known what to do! (Both shake their heads sorrowfully, and all descendants look sad, too.)

Descendant: Yes, but Grandfather, God *does* know what to do! You said He promised a Redeemer, right?

Adam: Yes, thank the good Lord. But first, we had that terrible day...(He tells the story of their hiding from God and the expulsion from the Garden.)

Eve: Still, in the curses, I could hear the sorrow in God's voice, and see, through my tears, the love He still felt for us, despite everything. I don't believe God was cursing us Himself. He was only telling us what would happen now. That our sin had changed the earth. And we can see it, all around us. Every year it's worse. But there was that promise. God said the seed of that serpent would bruise the heel of my seed, but my seed would bruise the serpent's head. I believe that means somewhere, sometime, perhaps soon, a son of mine will destroy the power of the destroyer. (She pauses.) Each time I had a son, I wondered...

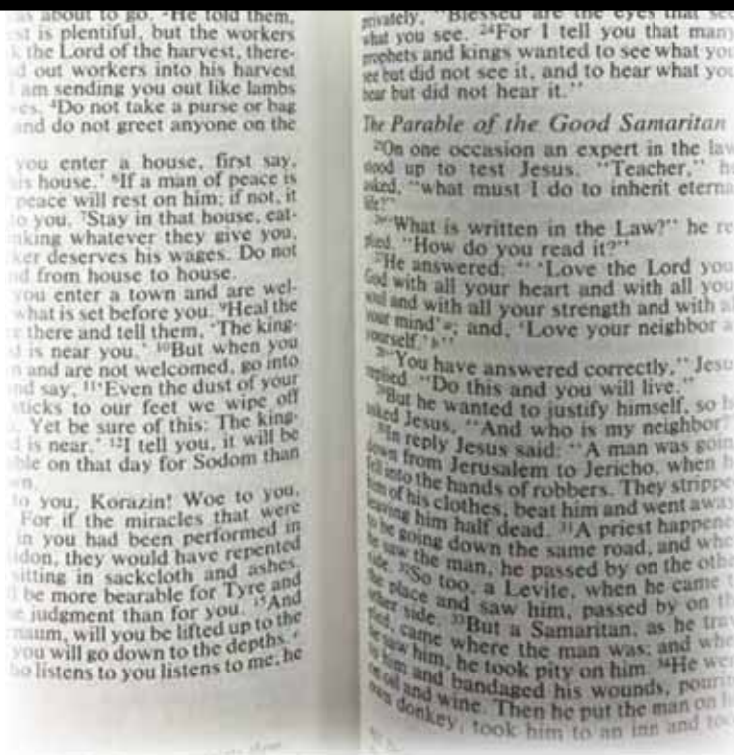
(Depending on time, you can tell any additional stories you like: Cain and Abel, Seth, etc. Be sure to end on an uplifting note, though. Talk last about the promised Redeemer, and perhaps have Adam and Eve lead the descendants in a song and a prayer of hope.)



2017 STARTER KIT WEEK 8

A LONGING TO SHARE

FOR YOUR YOUTH GROUP OR SMALL GROUP MEETINGS



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INTRODUCTION

One of the things that happened when Martin Luther discovered a loving and gracious God in the Bible was that he wanted to share his exciting discoveries with everyone else. As he shared and others began to see the truth, they shared it, too. Before long, much of Europe was bursting into a flame, not only of righteousness by faith, but also of disagreement and opposition.

The thing is, realizing the truth about the gospel is not like realizing the truth about a fact. You may feel a huge sense of relief and even joy when you figure out calculus, or begin to understand your physics lesson, and at first, the intellectual understanding of what the Bible says may be the same. But the minute that you accept *that* truth, something inward happens. The Holy Spirit lights up your soul and you realize, “It’s not just a fact or a truth that Luther (and others) figured out and that I agree with—it’s a whole different *life for me!*”

Let’s take a brief look at how Luther relates what happened to his own understanding. At the time, Catholic theologians preached that the phrase “God’s righteousness” in the New Testament meant the actual perfection of God, with which God punished sinners and rewarded the righteous—that is, those who succeeded in being perfect (which no human can do). So Luther hated that term. Here’s how he describes it:

“I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and said, “As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the Decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and by the gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!” Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience. Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted.” (*Luther’s Works*, Volume 34, P336-337).

Clearly, Luther longed to understand, and felt that there was something else here to understand; besides, the Holy Spirit was still working hard to keep him from giving up in despair.

“At last,” Luther writes, “by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, ‘In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, “He who through faith is righteous shall live.”’ *There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. ... (ibid. emphasis added.)*

And what was the result in Luther's heart?

"I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me." (*ibid.*)

From: <http://christianity.stackexchange.com/questions/8742/when-and-how-did-martin-luther-arrive-at-the-justification-by-faith>

Have you had such an experience, so that what you were taught of an angry and vengeful God was turned on its head? If so, you know how Luther felt. If, on the other hand, you have been blessed to be taught about God's love and salvation your whole life, then you can be deeply grateful to God. In either case, as soon as true, heart-deep understanding arrives, you want to tell the world.

We can see examples of this in the Bible, too. The first chapters of John, telling of the time when Jesus first began His earthly ministry, are full of this longing to share. Read or have read the following verses, and in each case, ask who wanted to tell the world, what they wanted to tell, and why.

John 1:29-34

John 1:40-41

John 1:45

John 2:3-5 (and the result, in v. 11.)

Take just a look at John 3. You know the story. Who is sharing here, and why?

John 4:28-30

We will conclude with verses 39-42, because they are a wonderful example of the principle we have been talking about. Those who accepted what the woman said were not yet in a relationship of faith, but they wanted to hear more. Read those verses and discuss what the steps were between hearing the truth and having it come to the heart, then wanting to share it.

Do you have that longing to share? Don't be misled—the longing to share the good news is not necessarily about preaching. It's about your life. It's about how you respond when your friends are in trouble. It's about how you share their joys. It's about simply living your life with your hand in Christ's.

Francis of Assisi is credited with saying, "Preach the gospel at all times. When necessary, use words."

DEVOTION

What if you don't have a longing to share, or you do have a longing, but you are afraid? Chances are, there are two likely reasons.

First, it's possible you have not yet had the truth settle into your own heart and make a real difference in your life. If this is so, do not despair or judge yourself negatively (see 1 John 3:20). The first step, after all, especially if you have been raised in a Christian home, is just learning the truth, with a small t. In other words, knowing facts about the Bible, about God, about Jesus and His work for us. But that's not the whole Truth, with a capital T. Read John 14:6. What did Jesus say was the truth? *He is!* So you don't know the whole Truth unless you personally know Jesus. And that's the easy part. Here are three steps (we will dig into them more deeply during our seven days of soul food):

1. **Ask.** Tell God you want to get to know Him better.
2. **Read your Bible,** especially stories about Jesus, every day.
3. **Pray.** Pray morning, noon, and night, pray all day, pray in trouble, pray in joy.

As your friendship grows, that desire to share will come. It's automatic.

Secondly, if you do have that relationship and want to share but are afraid, you may have misunderstood what sharing is all about. Far too often, we Christians speak from the pulpit about specific ways of sharing—preaching, giving Bible studies, giving out literature, inviting people to church. These are all good methods. You should definitely ask God if He wants you to do any of them. But you should also be careful.

Not everyone is called or skilled to preach, (including in ordinary conversation).

Bible studies that are created for the purpose of convincing someone of some particular set of facts may (or may not) convince someone, but it's the heart that needs to be touched, and only the Holy Spirit can do that. The Holy Spirit often does it by helping you to study the Bible with a friend just as if it's a love letter from the Creator. Try that, and leave the fact-finding to be led by the Spirit. You might be surprised.

Handing out literature is a good thing if it's hand-in-hand with friendship. God has been known to sometimes lead people to randomly pick up a pamphlet or book from some place and lead them to Him through their reading of the book/pamphlet. It is equally certain that He will then lead them to

human friends who will support their Christian walk. It's simpler if the book or pamphlet was given by a friend to a friend to begin with, in response to a particular question or crisis or need that friend expressed.

You are unique. So is your friendship with God. You'll share the way *you* are meant to.

Fact: you already do share *something* all the time, whenever another human can see you. Be sure what you share is love.

THINGS TO DO

AN ACTIVITY ABOUT GROWING A FRIENDSHIP.

1. Divide the group into pairs and have them sit back-to-back so they can't see or touch each other. They are not allowed to speak out loud, either.
2. Have each pair find creative ways to learn about each other without being able to see or hear the other.
3. Discuss whether you learn anything that could help you in your friendship with God. Of course, it is not the same, since, He can see and hear us and could speak aloud to us if He wishes; sometimes He does. But it could give some good insights.

AN ACTIVITY ABOUT SHARING.

1. Divide into either pairs or small groups of three or four.
2. Think of things in your ordinary daily life, not necessarily spiritual things, that you are excited to tell each other. Then think of a spiritual thing to share.
3. Discuss in the whole group what kinds of spiritual things were easier to share and what kinds were harder, and why.

SEVEN DAYS OF SOUL FOOD

SEVEN DAYS' WORTH OF DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

You must love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind (Luke 10:27). To put it another way, body + heart + mind = one living soul.

We can't divide ourselves into different sections, but it's useful to look at these different aspects of ourselves and be sure we have a well-balanced faith that uses all the avenues of a soul. Each of these starter kits will include a week's worth of food for your soul in each of these four methods of understanding and expression.

Write about each of the following in your prayer journal this week. Each day strive to use language of emotions, thought, physical health and strength, or spirit on the given days.

DAY ONE: *Strength/body:* **Day 1:** This week we will spend some time on the three steps to friendship with Jesus. Begin today by prayerfully reading Matt. 7:7. Spend some time thinking, praying, and writing about those three specifics Jesus mentions—what is the same or different about asking, seeking, and knocking? What does Jesus promise?

DAY TWO: *Heart: Ask:* With your whole heart (including doubts and questions if any—He already knows they're there, and you can't deal with them if you don't look them in the eye) tell Jesus you would like to have a friendship with Him. He has already promised He will come to all who ask. Rev. 3:20; John 6:37; and you can find many more if you look. Write about how this makes you feel.

DAY THREE: *Mind:* Commit to reading your Bible every day, but not as something to check off on your To-Do -List. Read it like a letter from your new Friend. Start with the gospels; that's where you'll learn the most about Jesus and what He is really like. Try to put yourself in the story. Be a disciple. Listen, watch, follow, and imitate. List some ways that you are now learning that expand your thinking.

DAY FOUR: *Strength/body:* If you were physically, in our earthly reality, walking with Jesus, you would be walking miles and miles every day. Since He is no longer visible to us, we “walk” with Him in our ordinary daily activities. But He does want as much as possible of that activity to be physical and outdoors, because that’s how we were created. What are some ways your ordinary activities can become mission and ministry this week?

DAY FIVE: *Soul/spirit: Pray.* This is the most important way that we grow our own, personal, unique friendship with Jesus. Just talk, exactly like you talk to your friends. Tell Him your joys, your burdens, your sorrows. Express your doubts and questions and ask Him to show you how to find answers, and also how to trust even when there are no simple answers. Be sure to listen! You wouldn’t have a very good friendship with your earthly best friend if you did all the talking.

DAY SIX: Today, write in your prayer journal what changes you are beginning to see in the way you relate to your family, community, and church. Do you find yourself wanting to share? What kinds of things are you sharing, and what results do you see? Don’t worry if the changes are small—God does mighty miracles with tiny things.

DAY SEVEN: Use day 7 to create something beautiful that reflects what you have learned. Write a poem or song or story. Create a poster. Write a letter. Paint or draw a picture. Make a sign. Do some sidewalk chalk art or writings. Build something. Create a podcast or blog post or Twitter post(s). Make food and give it to someone in need. Use whatever creativity God has given *you*. We all have something. Share the love!

a short skit

JESUS AND THE DEMONIACS

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A SHORT SKIT (ABOUT 10 MINUTES)

One of the first missionaries Jesus had was probably not a Jew. He was a demon-possessed man who lived in the Ten Cities area across the Sea of Galilee. This story is told three times, in Matt. 8:28-34, Mark 5:1-20, Luke 8:26-39. An interesting thing is that in Matthew, there are two demoniacs. This may mean that there were two men, but one became known for his sharing of his story, because the Matthew story does not mention either of them sharing. It only tells that the pig herders reported what had happened in the city, and the people came and told Jesus to go away. We'll try to imagine this story from the point of view of the main demoniac, and the points of view of the disciples.

CHARACTERS

1. Jesus
2. Disciples (you don't need all 12 if you don't have enough people)
3. Man possessed by demons
4. 2 herders
5. At least a few townspeople

PROPS

1. A raggedy cloak or mantle for the demoniac to wear over his clothes; and pieces of broken rope or chain hanging from his wrists. (These can be imaginary.)
2. Garment or mantle; one of the disciples has it over his/her clothes.
3. You could have sticks for the herders.

4. Designate one area as the water and one as land, with a space that represents the graveyard.
5. The town can be one corner of the room, or outside the door.
6. You can think of something to represent a boat if you like, or simply have Jesus and His followers sitting in a row of chairs and pretending to row.
7. The townspeople wait in the corner or outside the door.
8. To one side on land, the herders are watching over their pigs.
9. In the graveyard, the demoniac is prowling around acting tormented, perhaps crawling, or tearing at his skin or hair, trying to gash himself with a sharp stone, and growling or wailing.
10. When Jesus and His disciples "arrive" (by stepping from their chairs, or simply pretending to wade to land), he rushes at them.
11. The disciples run back to the boat in fear, and the herders also act frightened, but Jesus stands still, looking lovingly at the demoniac.

Jesus: (sternly) Come out of him, you unclean spirit!

Man: Falls to his knees at Jesus' feet—if this is acted well, the person can show by his face that he really wants Jesus' help, even while screaming in a strange voice, *What do you have to do with me, Jesus, Son of the most high God? I beg you by God's name, don't torment me?*

Jesus: (*still sternly*) What is your name?

Man: (writhing and still speaking in a strange, screaming voice) *My name is Legion, for we are many. Please don't send us away!* (Looks over at the pigs, where the herders are staring at the scene.) *Let us go into those pigs.*

Jesus: (looks over toward the herders) *All right, but get out of this man!*

Man: Writhes on the ground and screams, then falls limp.

Herders: Oh, no, oh no! They're jumping in! (Act out watching the pigs run into the water, trying to stop them, and so on. Turn on Jesus, waving their sticks.) *You've ruined our whole livelihood! You haven't heard the last of this!* (Run out of the room or to the town corner.)

Man: (*Gets up slowly to his knees and stares up with joy*) Thank you, thank you, Lord, how can I thank you?!

Jesus: (Takes man's hands and helps him up, smiling. The disciples are moving slowly nearer, stunned. Jesus looks at them) *"Bring this man something to wear."* (Jesus helps get the ropes off the man's wrists and takes off the ragged mantle. The disciple with the clean mantle takes it off and a couple of disciples help Jesus to get the man free and clothed. They sit down nearby and begin to talk together.)

Man: *I want to come with you, Lord! I want to be your follower!*

Just then the **herders** and **townspeople** run over. They stare at the newly healed man, but instead of being happy they shrink away in fear and shout at Jesus, *"Do you realize what you've done? You've lost this town a lot of money! Get away from here! And don't come back!"*

Jesus: **Jesus** stands up and looks sadly at them, then begins to turn back toward the boat.

Man: (jumping up and grabbing Jesus' arm)
Lord, please! Let me come with you!

Jesus: (looks at him a moment, then smiles and shakes His head) *You can help me more right here. Go home and tell all your people what God has done for you, and how He showed you mercy.*

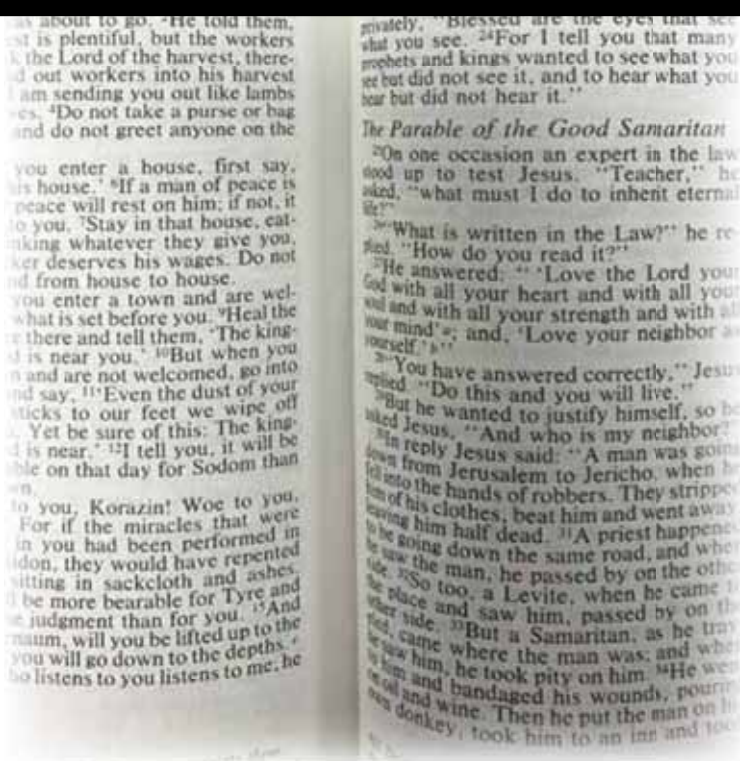
Man: (watches Jesus and disciples get into boat; looks disappointed, then holds up his head and turns to the townspeople with a smile) *You are not going to believe this!* (He gathers the townspeople together and they start toward the town, and his voice trails away, saying,) *I was so lost and hopeless! I can't even describe to you how terrible it was before Jesus came. All I wanted was to hurt myself..*



2017 STARTER KIT **WEEK 9**

ALL PRIESTS UNDER JESUS

FOR YOUR YOUTH GROUP OR SMALL GROUP MEETINGS



HERE IS WHAT WE PROVIDE IN EACH SESSION:

1. A brief reading on the topic. This can be read, but of course should be shared instead in the leader's own words, adding or subtracting details that fit your group. Usually, there are Bible readings and questions worked into the text.
2. A short devotion that brings home the principles of the topic of the week. This is intended to be shared with the whole group.
3. An activity suggestion. These are simple, requiring few, if any, materials, but we all learn and retain better if we do something physical with what we've heard and seen.
4. A short skit. If you have time to rehearse and learn, these can be done on different weeks, or even for other meetings such as church services. But they can also be done in impromptu fashion, each person reading his/her part expressively. Always allow time to discuss people's reactions after skits.
5. Very important: Each week's starter kit includes a page called "7 Days of Soul Food." Print these out and give copies to each person, or give each person the link if they have online access. These are personal applications that will carry the devotion through the whole week. It is highly recommended that each person begin some sort of prayer journal and use it all year. We generally think of journals as being full of writing, but if you don't like to write, you can draw, doodle, paste in pictures that bring the lessons of the week to mind—anything that helps you draw closer to God.

INTRODUCTION

The book of Hebrews is like a treasure chest full and overflowing with things that are both exciting and sometimes hard to understand. It would be a wonderful idea to read and study the whole book. This Bible study will focus mostly on chapters 9 and 10, which explain most fully Jesus' ministry as our heavenly High Priest.

We will also finish with a look at 1 Peter 2:5, in which the Apostle Peter says that we are *all* priests under Jesus. What might that mean?

FIRST: PRAYER

Always begin with prayer. Ask God to bless your study and discussion, and to help you to understand what it means that Jesus lives and ministers as your High Priest, and that you are a part of the priesthood of all believers.

PREPARATION

To understand Jesus' high priestly ministry in heaven, we must first understand the general outline of the earthly priesthood set up by God when the Israelites left Egypt after their long captivity there.

Up to that time, there was no official priesthood. The head of a family or clan was the one who led the family in worshiping the one true God. But now God wanted the people to have a more visible and symbolic system of worship. Since the time of Adam and Eve, they had known that a messiah was coming, and that a perfect lamb represented that messiah. Now sacrifices would be offered daily at a tabernacle made to represent heaven (for instance, angels were embroidered into the inner curtains to represent the angels in God's throne room—see Exodus 36:8).

God chose one tribe—the tribe of Levi to produce all the priests as well as other temple workers, and they sacrificed for the people evening and morning, plus extra times on high holy days. This continued until the day Jesus was sacrificed on the cross. Matt. 27:51 tells us that at the time He died, the veil in the temple was torn from top to bottom. The sacrificial system set in place to point the people to the true Lamb of God was over.

However, a strange thing happened when Jesus went back to heaven. He had been the sacrificial Lamb, which could truly take away sin, unlike the earthly lambs. But now, Jesus wasn't just the sacrifice—He became the High Priest!

That is what we will study in this lesson.

DEVOTIONAL

READING ONE

Before going to chapters 8 and 9, let's look at a few passages from earlier in the book of Hebrews which talk about Jesus as both sacrifice and High Priest.

Here is one over-arching question to take with you through this whole study, and discuss at the end: Have you ever thought of Jesus Himself as having been reformed? Obviously He never went from bad to good! But was His life changed? How? How many times? Why? Don't stop to discuss this now. Keep it in mind as you study, then it will be repeated at the end, and you can share the insights you may have had.

Note: If your group is too large to allow all to have a chance to share, divide into smaller groups here.

Let different people read the following passages, stopping to discuss each.

Hebrews 2:17-18

1. What do you find reassuring about this passage?
2. Do you have questions about it?

Heb. 4:14-16

1. This is one of the most beautiful and treasured passages in the Bible. Why do you think that is?
2. How do we "hold fast our confession"?
3. When you have sinned, have you been aware of Jesus leaning close, sympathizing with your weaknesses? Why or why not? Is there something you can do to help remind yourself (and each other) of that understanding and love?
4. What does it mean to "draw near with confidence to the throne of grace"?
5. Share a time when you did this, and what happened.

Heb. 6:19

1. What do you think it means to "enter within the veil"?
2. How is this an anchor for our souls?

Heb. 7:14

1. This is an interesting note—Jesus was not from the tribe of Levi, so how could He become an eternal High Priest? *Hint: Take a look at verse 16.*

Heb. 7:26-28

1. Why is Jesus the best and most perfect high priest?
2. Make a list of the attributes this passage describes.

READING TWO

1. **Chapter 8** begins to concentrate more closely on Jesus as High Priest.
2. **Verses 1 and 2** give the “main point” of the whole book so far. What is it?
3. The rest of this chapter, which (like all of Hebrews) quotes a great deal from the Old Testament, the only Bible they had at the time, speaks mainly of the fact that besides a new High Priest, we also now had a New Covenant. Let different people read the following passages. Together, let the group come up with a definition of the New Covenant formed here.
4. **Verse 6**
 - Why is Jesus’ ministry “more excellent?”
 - What does this verse give as the reason the New Covenant is better?

5. **Verses 8-11**

What Old Testament passages are quoted here? (*Someone should have cross references which show this; if not, the answer is Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Isaiah 54:13. If you have time, you might let people look those up and read them, comparing them with the version given in Hebrews.*)

6. What are some things that are different about this New Covenant?
7. Have each person share his or her favorite verse in this passage, and why.

Important point: Is it really *new*, or was it God’s plan all along, from the foundation of the world, to have His children following Him *from their hearts*?

READING THREE

Now we come to *Hebrews 9*, the centerpiece of the Bible's teaching about Jesus' ministry in heaven.

1. First, in *verses 1-5* (people can silently scan this), the writer describes the earthly tabernacle and its services.
2. In *verses 6-7*, the writer points out that priests entered the Holy Place daily, but only went into the Most Holy Place once a year, on the Day of Atonement.
3. *Verses 8-10* show that the earthly tabernacle services were just shadows; that the rituals had no power to "make the worshiper perfect in conscience" (v. 9). Now read together and discuss the following passages:
4. *Verses 11-12*. If Jesus lived as a physical man on this physical earth, what do you think this passage means when it says he "entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation"?
 - What is the wonderful promise in verse 12?
 - Can you think of any Bible promise that is greater than this one?
5. *Verse 14*
 - Here is something startling. This verse does not say our conscience is cleansed from sin (though of course it is) but cleansed from "dead works"! What do you think that means?
 - What are the ways that you can serve the living God?
6. *Verses 15 through 22* explain that, like our legal wills, death has to happen before covenants of this kind take place.

Remember—in this case, the death should have been ours!
But Jesus died instead, and we are the benefactors of His will—receivers of eternal life!
7. *Verses 27-28*. How does this make you feel?

THE CONCLUSION

Note: If you divided into smaller groups, bring everyone back together.

Take some time to share the main insights from the smaller groups. Then read the following passage together:

1. **Hebrews 13:15**
2. What is a sacrifice of praise?
3. Share some times when choosing to praise might be a sacrificial act.
4. Let's conclude by reading **1 Peter 2:4-10**. Here, the imagery changes. Jesus was the sacrificial Lamb, then He was the High Priest, now He is the temple itself—its foundation stone.
 - What do you think it means to be “living stones”?
 - How many descriptions does Peter give for believers?
 - What does it mean to be a holy priesthood?
5. Now let's consider this. We no longer need a High Priest to stand between us and God, Jesus is our mediator, our High Priest. But we are also priests, we are responsible, to a large extent, for our own spiritual health. We present ourselves before God each day.
6. Finish by discussing what it does and does not mean to be priests, all of us together, under the High Priesthood of Jesus Himself.

ACTIVITY SUGGESTION

1. Use stones to build an altar outside (or some kind of building blocks inside). Let each person write down sins and other things he or she would like to have deleted from their lives and lay them on the altar. If you are outside, you can burn these papers on your stone altar. If you are inside, be sure each person folds or wads up the paper so others do not see.
2. Now divide into pairs and have each person give a priestly prayer for the other, asking God's forgiveness and cleansing for the person's sins and praying a blessing upon their lives.
3. Finish by singing a praise song together as a "sacrifice of praise."

CLOSING PRAYER

1. Praise God for sending Jesus to become our Sacrifice, our High Priest, and the Temple in which we live.
2. Be specific in asking Him to bless each person with wisdom in following, and acting as a royal priest for Jesus.

SEVEN DAYS OF SOUL FOOD

SEVEN DAYS' WORTH OF DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

DAY ONE: The book of Hebrews contains 13 chapters. If you read two chapters a day, you can read the whole book this week during your personal devotions. If you only want to concentrate on the teaching about the universal priesthood, read chapters 8 and 9 again. In what ways do these chapters resonate with your life right now? Each day choose one verse to pray over and claim.

DAY TWO: *Heart.* Look through the chapters again, finding the verses that you think particularly speak to the heart and emotion of human beings. Prayerfully connect with these emotional themes and consider how God wants to work in your heart this week.

DAY THREE: *Mind.* Look through the passages a third time, finding the verses that appeal to your mind, the logical, thinking part of you. Do you perhaps have questions about the historic context or the original language of some of the words? You can look these up in concordances, commentaries, or online. How does God want to work in your mind this week?

DAY FOUR: *Strength/body.* Look through the chapters a fourth time, finding the verses that speak of the body, its actions, or perhaps its treatment. Are there ways you can use your body as a priest for God this week?

DAY FIVE: *Soul/spirit.* Soul or spirit, of course, is not a part of you. It's your whole self. But it's your whole self with a spiritual twist. It's your whole self, choosing to be godly. Look through the book a fifth time, finding the verses that appeal to your spirit, that encourage your faith and trust and make you want to be a true priest for God. Can you find a promise or promises that will help you do this?

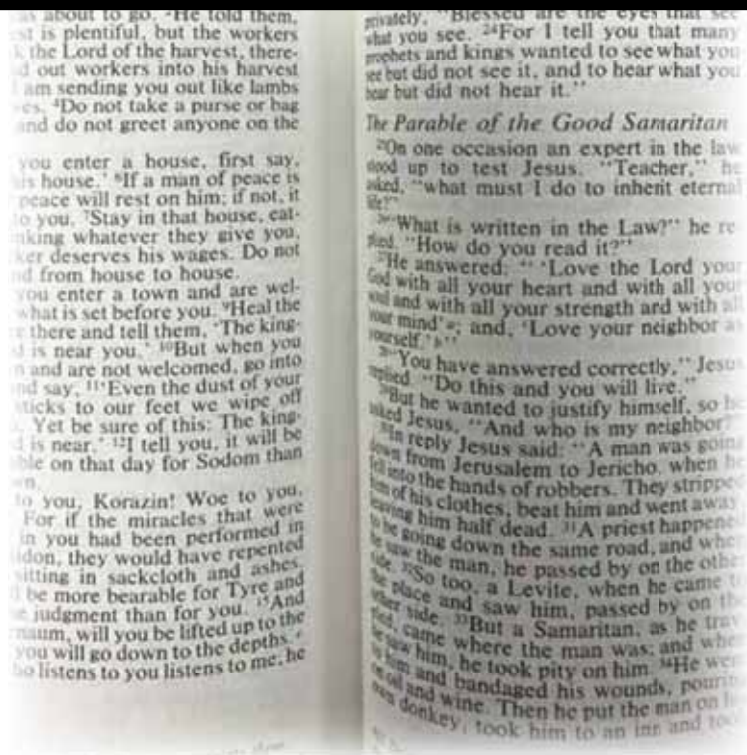
DAY SIX: As you think about your family, community, and church, how do you see the priesthood of all believers in action? Are there people who have sacrificed for you? Are there people you can sacrifice for, or pray for?

DAY SEVEN: You could create a small altar for your room. It could be a table or shelf with your Bible, perhaps a picture of Jesus, or of heaven, or of the tabernacle. You could have flowers there to remind you of God's creation, and lists of names of people you are praying for, or anything you can think of that will remind you that you are a child of God and have wonderful things to share with those you meet.



2017 STARTER KIT **WEEK 10** **ALL PRIESTS UNDER JESUS**

FOR YOUR YOUTH GROUP OR SMALL GROUP MEETINGS



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THE STORY

NEBUCHADNEZZAR, DEFORMED AND REFORMED

The story of King Nebuchadnezzar has to be one of the most dramatic transformations in the Bible. First, this king was simply a great military commander. His name means “O Nabu, preserve or defend my firstborn son.” Nabu was the son of the god Marduk, and Nebuchadnezzar probably worshiped him, since he once described himself in an inscription as Nabu’s “beloved” and “favorite.” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nebuchadnezzar_II (You can find more facts and a picture of a coin from Nebuchadnezzar’s reign on this site.)

Babylon had itself been conquered by the Assyrians who had taken over the northern kingdom of Israel. It was Nebuchadnezzar’s father who delivered them, and Babylon grew to its greatest height under Nebuchadnezzar’s rule. He was different from the Assyrian conquerors, who were renowned for their cruelty and ruthlessness. Nebuchadnezzar also tried to conquer everything he saw, but he believed in allowing his subject states to keep their own religion and even help in their own rule. He probably had good intentions when he brought young nobles like Daniel and his three friends to court to be educated and treated like royalty.

The role of these young men, especially Daniel, in Nebuchadnezzar’s life will not be fully known until heaven. He saw them politely ask to be excused from eating rich, unhealthy (and unclean) food, which he had offered as a compliment. Then he saw them not only complete but excel in their education in the pagan court. They would have learned about astrology and other magic, but it didn’t corrupt them one bit. They stuck to the one true God, praying earnestly to remain faithful no matter what.

Nebuchadnezzar watched all this as the years went by. He found that Daniel did not see the pagans as valueless or irredeemable. He intervened to save the lives of the magicians in Daniel 2 (see verse 24), and all four (and perhaps other faithful Jews we do not know about) did their best to witness to the king.

The vision of the image that showed all the nations through time impressed Nebuchadnezzar deeply. Perhaps the beginnings of reformation inside his heart began here. However, his pride still stood higher than anything else. Dissatisfied with being only the head of gold, he soon created a massive image entirely of gold, and set it up to be worshiped.

The fiery furnace is a notable example of the witness of the godly men in his court. Nebuchadnezzar began to reform. At the end of Daniel 3 we see him making a law that no one can speak against the God of these men, “for no other god can save in this way” (v. 29). Was Nebuchadnezzar beginning to lose faith in Nabu?

Then came the dream in Daniel 4. This time, Nebuchadnezzar did not threaten to kill his magicians. He called Daniel, saying, “I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you.” He still sees many gods, but he can tell Daniel’s is stronger. The reformation continues.

By now Daniel had built such a close relationship with Nebuchadnezzar that when he heard the dream he was upset to think of the king in danger. After he interpreted it, he boldly begged the king to repent of his sins and change his life (Daniel 4:27). Most people probably would have been executed for speaking to the king that way. What does this say about the relationship between Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel?

Well, we know the rest of the story—Nebuchadnezzar heeded the warning, but only for a while, and ended up being deformed into living as an animal for seven whole years. Did you ever wonder how his throne was still there for him? Isn’t it likely that Daniel, now in a high position at court, helped to hold it for him?

At any rate, after seven years, Nebuchadnezzar’s reason returned, and how he had reformed completely. He wrote the only chapter of the Bible that we know was written by a pagan (or once pagan) king: Daniel 4. And he ended it by saying, “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble” (Dan. 4:37).

As Ellen White notes on page 521 of *Prophets and Kings*, “This public proclamation, in which Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged the mercy and goodness and authority of God, was the last act of his life recorded in sacred history.”

DEVOTION

Pride. What is it? We use pride in different ways. We may speak of taking pride in our work, or in our appearance. This is a good and healthy thing. All we really mean is to do our best, look our best, and feel satisfied with that rather than putting ourselves down, calling ourselves names, or beating ourselves up for imperfections. Perhaps we should use a different word, like self-respect or dignity. My thesaurus even uses “joy” as a synonym for pride, as in “joy in a job well done.”

In general when speaking of pride, we mean a more negative thing. We mean conceit, or arrogance, or thinking you’re better than everybody else. Nebuchadnezzar had that problem. “Look at this mighty kingdom I have built!” If your joy in a job you have done begins to sound like that, you could be in trouble.

Humility is almost as confusing. Some people would define humble the way we had it in the first paragraph—putting ourselves down, calling ourselves names, or beating ourselves up for imperfections. Humble people, we may think, can’t take a compliment, or think that a Christians should be doormats for others to walk on, and never stand up for themselves. Think about what you know of Daniel. Was he “humble” in this way? No. He had the courage to go to the steward and ask for different food from the rest.

Let’s look at some Bible texts about pride and humility. (Read or have read the following verses.)

1. PRIDE:

In its negative sense, it’s easy to find lots of examples in any concordance.

Proverbs 16:18 is perhaps the most famous.

- 2 Chron. 26:16
- Esther 5:9
- Psalm 31:18

But we can find positive ones, too.

- 2 Chronicles 17:6
- Isaiah 4:2

What kind of pride is depicted in these two verses?

2. HUMILITY

- Proverbs 15:33
- Proverbs 22:4
- Zephaniah 2:3
- Eph. 4:2
- Col. 4:12

Discuss what conclusions the group comes to concerning pride, humility, and how to obtain the right kinds and stay away from the wrong kinds.

ACTIVITY SUGGESTION

Have three or four volunteers demonstrate something they do well, such as play an instrument, sing, do an athletic action, or show any talent or ability.

After each one, have others applaud them, then let the performers model different ways of responding. Each can choose whether to act arrogant and prideful, (“Yeah, I was pretty great, wasn’t I?”) or timid and self-effacing, saying, “It was nothing,” or “I didn’t do it very well,” or concentrating on the mistakes they made or things they wish they’d done differently.

Then let the others help them with suggestions of language that would be humble but still show satisfaction and joy in their accomplishment, as well as gratitude to God for giving them this ability.

SEVEN DAYS OF SOUL FOOD

SEVEN DAYS' WORTH OF DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

You must love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind (Luke 10:27). To put it another way, body+heart+mind=one living soul.

We can't divide ourselves into different sections, but it's useful to look at these different aspects of ourselves and be sure we have a well-balanced faith that uses all the avenues of a soul. Each of these starter kits will include a week's worth of food for your soul in each of these four methods of understanding and expression.

Write about each of the following in your prayer journal this week. Each day strive to use language of emotions, thought, physical health and strength, or spirit on the given days.

DAY ONE: *Reread the first four chapters of Daniel*, making notes on the changes Nebuchadnezzar goes through. What do you think helped or hindered these changes? At what point do you think Nebuchadnezzar was truly reformed? Did Daniel go through any changes during that same time?

DAY TWO: Heart. *Read 2 Kings 24:14-16.* This is most likely when Daniel and his friends were taken to Babylon. Think of a powerful country that is or could be an enemy to your country. What if you were taken away and made to live as a servant of that country's ruler while your own land was laid waste? Some countries today have experienced this sort of thing; perhaps you know what it is like to be a refugee in a strange land. Write about how you would feel (or how you do feel if it is true of you.) How do you maintain your identity as a child of God in these circumstances? Prayerfully connect with these emotional themes and consider how God wants to work in your heart this week.

DAY THREE: Mind. *Do some research on the political realities where you live.* Can you think of ways God wants you to be active in upholding His glory and helping His vulnerable people? How does God want to work in your mind this week?

DAY FOUR: Strength/body. *Reread Dan. 1:5, 8-20.* What kinds of foods was Daniel willing to eat? How close is your diet to this idea? Are there ways you could reform your eating and other health habits? What are the ways God wants to strengthen your body this week?

DAY FIVE: Soul/spirit. *Consider Daniel and his friends' prayer life, as depicted in Daniel 2:1-23; 3:16-18.* What do you think are the factors that made them able to stand firm in fearful circumstances? As you prayerfully ponder the heart/mind/body insights God has given you so far this week, seek to strengthen your own spiritual life like theirs.

DAY SIX: Within your family, community, and church, do you see some of the factors at work which you have studied this week, such as pride or humility, strong prayer lives, health principles, or a tendency to lord it over others as Nebuchadnezzar did? Pray for some ways you can help to strengthen positive tendencies and reduce negative ones.

DAY SEVEN: Use day 7 to create something beautiful that reflects what you have learned. Write a poem or song or story. Create a poster. Write a letter. Paint or draw a picture. Make a sign. Do some sidewalk chalk art or writings. Build something. Create a podcast or blog post or Twitter post(s). Make food and give it to someone in need. Use whatever creativity God has given *you*. We all have something. Share the love!

a short skit

THE PROCESS: ONE MAN'S CHANGE

written by
Debbonnaire Kovacs

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A SHORT SKIT (ABOUT 10-15 MINUTES)

This is a short skit in three acts, based on Nebuchadnezzar's deformation and reformation. Have the players do their best to imitate the changes strongly. Note that Nebuchadnezzar calls Daniel by his pagan name, Belteshazzar. For some reason, we have fallen into the habit of calling Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah by their pagan names of Sharach, Meshach, and Abednego, but I believe it is better to use their godly names, as we do with Daniel. In this case, though, since it is the king speaking, we will let him use the name he knew. I have taken the liberty of having him use "Daniel" at the end when he recognizes the sovereignty of God.

CHARACTERS

1. Nebuchadnezzar
2. Servant
3. Daniel (Belteshazzar)
4. Angelic Watcher (someone with a powerful voice)
5. Other courtiers or servants if they want to help "herd" the king out to the field
6. Scribe

PROPS

1. Designate one area as the king's chamber in Act 1 and the rooftop in Act 2.
2. Let the other side of the room be the outdoors, unless you do this skit outside.
3. For Act 3, it would be good to have a table or desk with a chair, and paper and pen.

Act 1

Nebuchadnezzar (pacing his room. A **servant** stands nearby. **Daniel** is waiting in the wings, or sitting on a chair in the front row.) I've had the most terrible dream! (Clutches his head.) I'm sure it means something, but I don't know what! My magicians are useless. (Turns to servant.) You, there! Go send for Belteshazzar!

Servant (bows) Yes, your majesty. (Hurries to get **Daniel**, who comes to the king. Servant can leave, or stand in the background as the king and Daniel talk.)

Daniel (bows) You wanted me, your majesty?
(As Nebuchadnezzar tells his dream, Daniel should be looking more and more worried.)

Nebuchadnezzar Oh, Belteshazzar, I know that a spirit of the holy gods is in you, and mysteries don't baffle you. Please explain my dream to me. I dreamed that I saw a great tree, so huge that it filled the whole earth. Its leaves were beautiful and its fruit was abundant. All the animals found shade under it, and the birds lived in it, and all living things fed from its fruit. So far, it was a good dream! (He looks troubled and shakes his head.) But then, an angelic watcher came down from heaven, and he shouted out, "Cut down the tree, chop off its fruit and branches, and let all the birds and animals flee! But leave the stump with a band of iron and bronze around it." (He hesitates.) And then—then he suddenly stopped saying "it" and started saying "he" as if the tree was a person! He said, "Let him get wet with dew, and share with the animals, and let his human mind be taken from him and let him be given an animal mind" (getting more and more upset) "*for seven times!*" I remember his last words perfectly: "This sentence is by the decree of the angelic watchers and the decision is a command of the holy ones, in order that the living may know that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whom He wishes and sets over it the lowliest of men."

Daniel (turns away and walks up and down once, looking very worried)

Nebuchadnezzar Belteshazzar, don't let the dream or its interpretation upset you. Tell me the truth. (He, too, should react visibly as Daniel explains the dream.)

Daniel (turning back to him) Oh, my lord, if only this dream was about your enemies! The meaning is this: the tree is you and your kingdom, which now has responsibility for the whole known world. But the angelic watcher's decree, which is really a judgment from heaven, is that you be driven away from human habitation and live like an animal in the sun and rain, grazing with the cattle, for seven years until you realize the only real ruler is the Most High God. *He* is the one who sets up rulers and has given you this kingdom. But there is hope. The band was left on the stump to tell you that you can regain your reason and your kingdom once you recognize God's sovereignty.

Nebuchadnezzar *shows that he is appalled and frightened.*

Daniel (earnestly) Please, oh king, listen to my advice. Break away from your sins! Do right and show mercy to the poor. Maybe there will be a prolonging of your prosperity and you could escape the judgment of this dream.

Daniel and the king sit down; servant too, if still there.

[You could have a narrator say, "One year later."]

Act 2

(Angelic watcher is at back of room.)

Nebuchadnezzar (goes back to what now represents the rooftop and paces, but this time proudly and arrogantly, pretending to look out over his city. He speaks as if he thinks he's the greatest thing ever.) What a view! Isn't this Babylon the great, which *I* have built as *my* own royal residence, by *my* own power and for the glory of *my* majesty?

Angelic watcher (interrupts right at "majesty," booms out sternly) "King Nebuchadnezzar!"

Nebuchadnezzar (jumps and looks around, then upward, frightened; he continues to get more upset as he listens, continuing to look up as if the voice is coming from heaven.)

Angelic watcher To you it is declared: your sovereignty is removed. You will be driven away from people to live with animals. You will be given grass to eat for seven years (even more sternly) *until you recognize and admit that the Most High is the true Ruler and gives kingdoms wherever He wishes!*

Nebuchadnezzar (wails) Oh, no, no! (Then changes into a beast-like creature—the actor can make as much of this as he likes, so long as he doesn't make it a farce. He ends up on his hands and knees, acting like an animal, and Daniel, the servant, and some others if any want to, come and herd the king out to the "field." Others may mock or act shocked or whatever they think might have happened, but Daniel is compassionate and sorrowful, trying to help the king as much as he can.)

Allow some time to pass, with Nebuchadnezzar acting like he's grazing, scratching himself, sleeping curled up on the floor, and generally acting like an animal. If you wish, you can have Daniel visiting and trying to watch over him.

[You could have someone say, "Seven years later."]

Act 3

Nebuchadnezzar (suddenly comes to himself, looks around in shock, then stands up and hangs his head in shame. He looks up to heaven humbly) O Most High God! I praise and honor You who live forever!

Daniel (sees the king and rushes to him) O king, are you all right?

Nebuchadnezzar (quietly) Yes, I'm all right. My reason has returned to me. I am ashamed, Daniel. You were right. I was arrogant. God's kingdom endures from generation to generation, and He does anything He wishes. People count for nothing. Least of all myself. I don't deserve to be king.

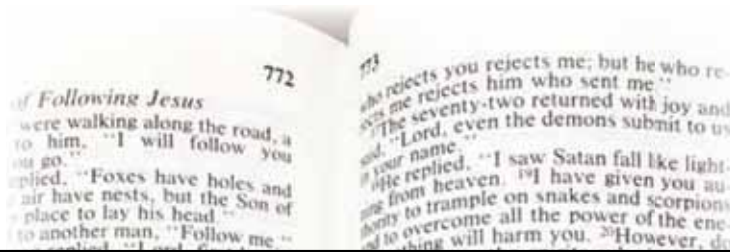
Daniel Well, you are still king, o lord. God has held your throne for you for seven years.

Nebuchadnezzar Really? God is merciful! Will you help me to get cleaned up? I want to write a proclamation.

(On their way to the desk or table, they make motions showing Daniel cleaning up and re-robing Nebuchadnezzar. The scribe goes to the table and takes up pen and paper, waiting.)

Nebuchadnezzar (to scribe) Write this. He thinks for a second, then begins to proclaim, while scribe writes.)

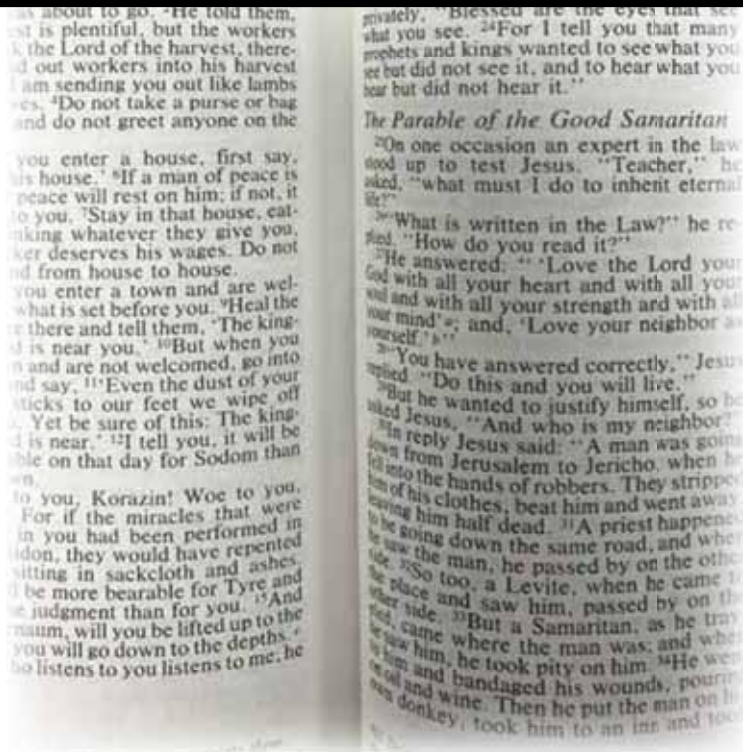
“Nebuchadnezzar to all the peoples of the earth: May your peace abound! It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me. How great are His signs and how mighty are His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and His dominion is from generation to generation.”



2017 STARTER KIT **WEEK 11**

CALLED TO SPREAD THE NEWS

FOR YOUR YOUTH GROUP OR SMALL GROUP MEETINGS



HERE IS WHAT WE PROVIDE IN EACH SESSION:

1. A brief reading on the topic. This can be read, but of course should be shared instead in the leader's own words, adding or subtracting details that fit your group. Usually, there are Bible readings and questions worked into the text.
2. A short devotion that brings home the principles of the topic of the week. This is intended to be shared with the whole group.
3. An activity suggestion. These are simple, requiring few, if any, materials, but we all learn and retain better if we do something physical with what we've heard and seen.
4. A short skit. If you have time to rehearse and learn, these can be done on different weeks, or even for other meetings such as church services. But they can also be done in impromptu fashion, each person reading his/her part expressively. Always allow time to discuss people's reactions after skits.
5. Very important: Each week's starter kit includes a page called "7 Days of Soul Food." Print these out and give copies to each person, or give each person the link if they have online access. These are personal applications that will carry the devotion through the whole week. It is highly recommended that each person begin some sort of prayer journal and use it all year. We generally think of journals as being full of writing, but if you don't like to write, you can draw, doodle, paste in pictures that bring the lessons of the week to mind—anything that helps you draw closer to God.

THE STORY

CALLED TO SPREAD THE NEWS

The basic concept of the Great Commission was not one of the things that Martin Luther first learned about during his Bible study. The Catholic Church was already very active in spreading its beliefs far and wide. There were three problems: 1) many of the beliefs did not stand up under careful Bible study; 2) the motivation was fear—they wanted to save people from the ever-burning hell of an angry God and increase the number of people under the church's control; and 3) their methods were often by force, even torturing or killing those who refused to go along with them.

When Luther learned the glorious truth about God's free and abundant grace, not just to save a person's soul, but to give a person victory now and change the whole life, he was struck by an entirely new kind of missionary zeal. He preached everywhere he went, joyfully sharing this new understanding of how the Christian could live by faith.

We have already examined the idea of having a desire to share the gospel, and ways that we can strengthen that desire. This time we'll examine the fact that spreading the Gospel is an actual, God-given *calling* on every Christian life. The foremost way this calling is seen, and the one we usually think of first, is the call to paid ministry as a church pastor, a Bible teacher, a public evangelist, and so on. Some of you may have that call, whether you know it yet or not.

Beyond those possibilities, however, is the call for all Christians to be actively involved in telling others the Good News that God loves them—really—right now, as they are, and wants them in heaven with Him. As we study, we will bear both these realms of ministry in mind.

Let's look at the Great Commission as Jesus first gave it.

Have someone read **Matthew 28:18-20**.

What are the individual parts of this command? (*Invite a scribe to write the ideas the group comes up with.*)

Did you notice that the first sentence is, "All authority has been given to *Me* in heaven and on earth"? When any church, human institution, or human being claims its own authority instead of leaning *wholly* on Jesus' au-

thority, they are in great danger. It's just like the Ten Commandments. They don't begin with "thou shalt," they begin with "I am." Only after we recognize God's authority over us, and only after we realize fully that that authority is complete love and compassion rather than force and vengefulness, *then* we eagerly begin to share the gospel. In fact, sharing becomes a way of life.

What are the next things Jesus asks us to do, in the order that He asks them? (Answers will include: Make disciples, baptize, teach.)

Do you think any of these things are only for paid pastors to do? If so, why, and which things may any believer do?

In verse 20, what does Jesus end with? Again, it's reassurance of His presence and help.

We can find more details about our Great Commission in Acts. *Have someone read Acts 1:4-8.*

What does Jesus tell them to do first in verse 4? What do you think is the result when we try to witness without taking this step first?

Do you notice something the disciples get distracted with? What is it and what does Jesus tell them?

In verse 8 there is a specific order in which Jesus sends them. Why do you think this is so? Did you know that within one lifespan after Jesus went back to heaven, His disciples had spread the gospel throughout the then-known world from Great Britain to Asia, and including at least the northern parts of Africa?

Conclude this portion of the evening discussing briefly the makeup of the early church. Were there paid pastors? In what way? How did they decide what things were to be done by apostles and what things were done by members? How is our church re-formed (changed) today and why do you think it needs to be different in a different age?

To think about: What is *your* calling?

DEVOTION

Let's face it—following God's call in *any* direction always requires reformation and transformation. Let's consider the case of John Mark, a story from which we can learn a lot. According to Col. 4:10, John Mark was a cousin to Barnabas, one of Paul's most faithful helpers. We know from Acts 12:12 that John Mark's mother, Mary, had a large home in Jerusalem, where believers often gathered. This is where Peter went after he was miraculously released from prison.

One day, when Paul and Barnabas were there, perhaps at this very house, John Mark decided he wanted to go on a missionary journey with them. Of course he was welcome. There may have been other unnamed companions, as well; in Paul's letters he often mentions lots of co-workers that aren't necessarily "official" missionaries.

Have someone read **Acts 13:2, 3**. Here is where we get our first clue to the subject we are considering. Who does the Holy Spirit say to set aside for mission work? What do the others do to honor this call from God?

Notice that only Paul and Barnabas are actually set aside by prayer, fasting, and the laying on of hands. This could be like our division of paid ministers from lay people. John Mark (and any other companions) were called by God just as you and I are, but were not called in the same capacity to be *set aside* for this work as Paul and Barnabas were.

So they set off. Chapter 13 details some of the difficulties they ran into, and apparently John Mark decided the missionary life was too hard after all. In 13:13 he leaves. Now, at this point, nothing is said about how or why he leaves. For all we know from this verse, it was all fine. But we learn differently a couple of chapters later.

Read or have someone read **Acts 15:36-38**. Ah. There was more to the story. John Mark didn't just leave, he "deserted them." And in so doing, he disappointed, inconvenienced, and angered Paul, and probably Barnabas, too, at the time. But Barnabas' name means "encourager," and he was more ready to forgive and give second chances than Paul, who was very strong-willed himself and didn't understand other people's weaknesses.

Yet.

Read the next two verses, 39-40. What happened? Do you think this

helped or hindered God's work? How much territory could they now cover, with two groups instead of one?

Fortunately, God had transforming and reforming plans for each of these men. One of the lessons Paul learned is given in **2 Cor. 12:7-10**. **Read this passage.** What is Paul learning? Do you need to learn the same lesson?

We don't know how Paul's and John Mark's reconciliation came about, but we do know that it did, because in two places, in Col. 4:10-11 and 2 Timothy 4:11, Paul recommends John Mark and even calls him his "son."

List some of the lessons you think can be learned from this story.

ACTIVITY SUGGESTION

Make a list on the board of all the things that have to be done in order to put on a large youth evangelistic series. Be sure not to leave out any behind-the-scenes work. Now figure out who in your group has the right skills for each of those tasks. Do you have everyone you would need? What kinds of skills, if any, are missing from your group? You could even decide to actually plan and execute the series, and then evaluate how well the skill sets fit together. What would happen if you mixed up the jobs and gave them to people who didn't have the right skills? On the other hand, how do you discover hidden gifts you didn't know God had given you until you try new things?

A 14-year-old girl was once assigned to speak in a large youth rally. She was so frightened she seriously didn't think she could do it at all. But she did, and today she is a speaker. Sometimes God brings out unexpected things in surprising ways.

SEVEN DAYS OF SOUL FOOD

SEVEN DAYS' WORTH OF DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

You must love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind (Luke 10:27). To put it another way, body+heart+mind=one living soul.

We can't divide ourselves into different sections, but it's useful to look at these different aspects of ourselves and be sure we have a well-balanced faith that uses all the avenues of a soul. Each of these starter kits will include a week's worth of food for your soul in each of these four methods of understanding and expression.

Write about each of the following in your prayer journal this week. Each day strive to use language of emotions, thought, physical health and strength, or spirit on the given days.

DAY ONE: Re-read the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20. Write about things you already do or would like to do to fulfill your part of this mission. Also write about it if you don't think you do anything, and you would like to try. Ask God to show you one thing you can do.

DAY TWO: Heart. Read Acts 9:36-43. How did Dorcas work for God? If you asked her, do you think she would have considered what she did as gospel ministry? Do you think it was? How did she use her heart for others to help them find God? Prayerfully connect with these emotional themes and consider how God wants to work in your heart this week.

DAY THREE: Mind. Think through a mission statement for yourself. This can change as you change and grow; just create one for now, this stage of your life. How does God want to work in your mind this week?

DAY FOUR: Strength/body. In Bible times, there were only a few ways to "go into all the world." You could walk, ride an animal, ride in a cart pulled by an animal, or travel in a row-boat or sailboat. That was it. In some parts of the world, these ways are still largely used. How could you use your own feet to do what Isaiah 52:7 says? What are the ways God wants to strengthen your body this week?

DAY FIVE: Soul/spirit. As you prayerfully ponder the heart/mind/body insights God has given you so far this week, ask God to show you precisely what gospel calling He has for you right now, while you are young.

DAY SIX: You can practice on your family, community, and church. Find ways to share God's love that don't include preaching unless it is welcome and asked for.

DAY SEVEN: Use day 7 to create something beautiful that reflects what you have learned. Write a poem or song or story. Create a poster. Write a letter. Paint or draw a picture. Make a sign. Do some sidewalk chalk art or writings. Build something. Create a podcast or blog post or Twitter post(s). Make food and give it to someone in need. Use whatever creativity God has given *you*. We all have something. Share the love!

a short skit

CALLED TO SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS

written by

Debbonnaire Kovacs

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A SHORT SKIT (ABOUT 15 MINUTES)

CHARACTERS

1. John Mark
2. Paul
3. Barnabas
4. Mary, John Mark's mother
5. Other people, if desired (early, in Mary's house; later, with Sergius and Elymas)
6. Voice of Holy Spirit (someone with strong voice, reading from farther back in room)
7. Elymas the sorcerer
8. Bar-Jesus the false prophet
9. Sergius Paulus the proconsul
10. Silas

PROPS

1. Designate one area as the king's chamber in Act 1 and the rooftop in Act 2.
2. Let the other side of the room be the outdoors, unless you do this skit outside.
3. For Act 3, it would be good to have a table or desk with a chair, and paper and pen.

Act 1

(Group is in **Mary's** house, with John Mark, Paul, and Barnabas.)

Mary Welcome to my home! Please tell us some stories of the work you are doing for God. How are people receiving you?

Paul We have traveled many places, and there are often hardships. Most people don't listen, or even mock us, but some accept the Gospel of Jesus Christ, blessed be His name!

Barnabas It's just wonderful how many men and women, and even children, too, love to listen to stories of Jesus' life!

John Mark I would love to go with you next time you go!

Barnabas You would be welcome!

Mary (clasps her hands together in joy) Oh, my son! This is wonderful!

Voice of Holy Spirit "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

(Everyone looks startled, then they act out prayer, fasting, and laying hands on Paul and Barnabas.)

Everyone Good-bye, good-bye! God bless you!
(Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark go away from group.)

Act 2

Group including **Elymas** the sorcerer, **Bar-Jesus** the false prophet, and **Sergius Paulus** the proconsul stand together. There could be other people as an audience if desired.

- Bar-Jesus** (to Sergius) I'm telling you, my lord, these men are false! They are turning the people away from the true faith and claiming that their prophet, a criminal who was rightfully put to death by Rome, has risen again! (He looks contemptuous.)
- Elymas** Paul and his companions are stirring up the city! You should arrest them!
- Sergius** I want to hear what they have to say for myself. Summon them here. (The other two bring Paul and Barnabas and John Mark to him. Mark looks scared and hangs back behind the others.)
- Paul** My lord, I am happy to tell you the true story of Jesus, who lived and died for us all, even Gentiles!
- Sergius** (looks interested) For *all*? Really?
- Barnabas** Oh, yes, sir. Jesus is God's only Son, and He loves every single person, man or woman, boy or girl, poor or rich!
- Elymas** Lord, you can't listen to them! They're crazy!

Paul (looks sternly at Elymas) "You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time."

Elymas (cries out and grabs his eyes) I can't see! I can't see! Help me! (He gropes for a hand and Bar-Jesus leads him out.)

Sergius (amazed) I believe!

John Mark (backs away, looking scared, stammering) Uh, I'm going...I think I need to go back home now. I, uh, I think I shouldn't have left my poor mother alone! Bye! (Paul and Barnabas call after him, but he leaves.)

Act 3

(Paul and Barnabas and a few others are standing together talking. Silas is among the group. John Mark is there, looking ashamed and humble. He should react to the discussion as it develops.)

- Paul** Let's go back and visit the cities where we've been and see how they are doing.
- Barnabas** That's a good idea! Let's take John Mark with us.
- Paul** (angrily) That quitter! I'm not taking someone who deserted us as soon as things got a little difficult!
- Barnabas** Brother Paul, the Lord is forgiving and I think we should be, too. The boy needs another chance.
- Paul** Not with me he doesn't! If you take him, I'm not going!
- Barnabas** Fine! Then I'll take him with me and go a different direction. We can sail to Cyprus.
- Paul** Go then! Silas, will you go with me?
- Silas** (a little embarrassed) Uh, yes, certainly, brother Paul.

(The two groups separate and walk in two different directions.)

John Mark

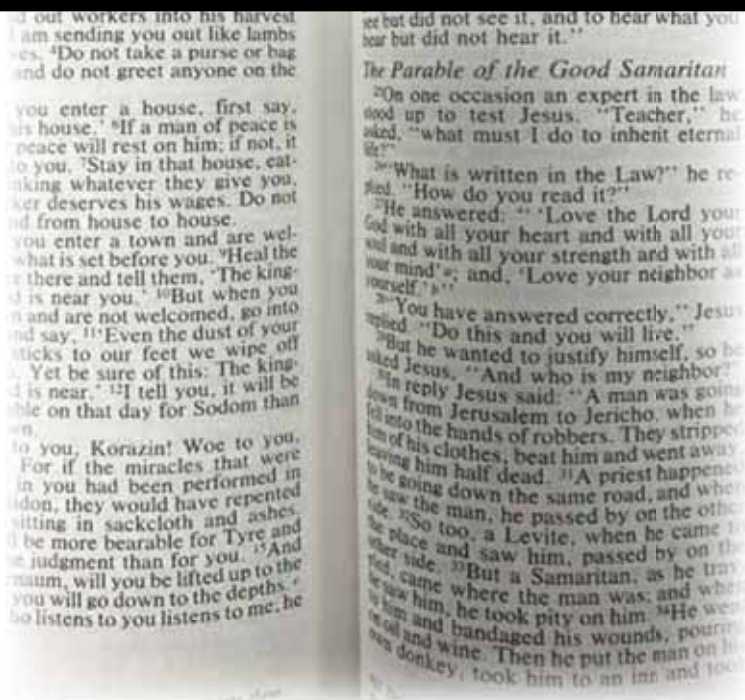
Thank you, Barnabas, for standing up for me. I promise I'll do better this time. I have reformed, by the grace of God. In fact, I'm thinking about collecting stories and writing a book about Jesus' life. (The two walk away, their voices falling into a murmur.)



2017 STARTER KIT WEEK 12

THE FIRST EVANGELISTS OBEY THEIR CALLING

FOR YOUR YOUTH GROUP OR SMALL GROUP MEETINGS



HERE IS WHAT WE PROVIDE IN EACH SESSION:

1. A brief reading on the topic. This can be read, but of course should be shared instead in the leader's own words, adding or subtracting details that fit your group. Usually, there are Bible readings and questions worked into the text.
2. A short devotion that brings home the principles of the topic of the week. This is intended to be shared with the whole group.
3. An activity suggestion. These are simple, requiring few, if any, materials, but we all learn and retain better if we do something physical with what we've heard and seen.
4. A short skit. If you have time to rehearse and learn, these can be done on different weeks, or even for other meetings such as church services. But they can also be done in impromptu fashion, each person reading his/her part expressively. Always allow time to discuss people's reactions after skits.
5. Very important: Each week's starter kit includes a page called "7 Days of Soul Food." Print these out and give copies to each person, or give each person the link if they have online access. These are personal applications that will carry the devotion through the whole week. It is highly recommended that each person begin some sort of prayer journal and use it all year. We generally think of journals as being full of writing, but if you don't like to write, you can draw, doodle, paste in pictures that bring the lessons of the week to mind—anything that helps you draw closer to God.

THE STORY

THE FIRST EVANGELISTS OBEY THEIR CALLING

The first evangelist in the Bible, believe it or not, is Enoch. Genesis doesn't tell us this, or at least not at first sight. Read or have someone read **Genesis 5:18-24**. Take a minute to discuss all the details about Enoch that you can glean from this passage. You could have a scribe record them if you like.

Can you tell he was an evangelist from this passage? Well, that depends on what you mean by evangelist. All through these lessons we have been discussing the ways that allowing God to reform your life can speak to those around you, even without words. So if Enoch was so close to God that his biography reads, "Enoch walked with God," then yes, his life definitely shared the Good News with those around him.

What was the Good News at that time? **Read Gen. 3:15**. God had promised deliverance. There would be more details revealed in coming generations, but they knew that they had sinned, that God had forgiven and still loved them (*great news!*) and that He was going to provide a Redeemer.

However, we know something more about Enoch. Read or have read Jude 1:14-16. He was preaching about what we recognize as the Second Coming! Now, it's possible they didn't know at that point that Jesus would come twice, once as a human and once as a conqueror, but it's clear that Enoch knew and taught about the final judgment.

The next evangelist mentioned is Noah. We know a lot more about him. **Read or have read Gen. 6:8-14**. What can we learn about Noah here? (*Make a list if you wish.*) Now read verse 22. Noah obeyed. That's when his real trouble began.

At first, Noah had no sons to help him. From Gen. 7:6 we know that the flood came when he was 600, which means he had been building and preaching since he was 480. And according to 5:32 his first son was born when he was 500. So Noah had already been preparing for 20 years before he had children. It's possible that he and his wife, like many famous Bible characters, were barren at first, until God's promises to them were fulfilled. However, he did still have the help of Methuselah and his sons, all of whom died before the Flood came, but they were believers and would have gone into the ark if they had still been alive. Here is how Mrs. White described the situation:

“Amid the prevailing corruption, Methuselah, Noah, and many others labored to keep alive the knowledge of the true God and to stay the tide of moral evil. A hundred and twenty years before the Flood, the Lord by a holy angel declared to Noah His purpose, and directed him to build an ark. While building the ark he was to preach that God would bring a flood of water upon the earth to destroy the wicked. Those who would believe the message, and would prepare for that event by repentance and reformation, should find pardon and be saved. Enoch had repeated to his children what God had shown him in regard to the Flood, and Methuselah and his sons, who lived to hear the preaching of Noah, assisted in building the ark” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 95.)

At first, Mrs. White says, people listened. They were fearful because they knew they had been living unholy lives. After all, Adam’s godly son, Seth, died only a few years before Noah’s birth, and Seth’s son, Enos, lived until Noah was 84! The believers still didn’t move far from Eden, worshipping near the gate where the angel guarded the way in, and everyone alive still knew the true story of creation and the fall of Adam and Eve very well. Nobody should have had to remind them of their guilt.

But as time passed and nothing changed, nature still seemed to work nearly perfectly, and “crazy Noah” kept building his boat and claiming that water was going to fall from the sky, they lost interest. Especially after Methuselah and his children died, it looked to all the world as if Noah was simply out of his mind.

Yet he faithfully kept on, now with the help of three sons, as well as the four wives...and one day the animals and birds came. That must have made the people stop and think. But still they refused to enter, and finally, the door was shut.

For that generation, probation had ended.

DEVOTION

The generations after Eden was closed de-formed incredibly fast. The first generation saw the first murder, but it wasn't the last. Within a few generations there were men claiming more than one wife, which shows that already the idea that women are somehow less valuable than men was gaining credence. The beginnings of war mentality, such as Lamech seeking revenge "seventy-sevenfold" (Gen. 4:24) were present. And even idolatry, the worship of creations instead of the Creator began—while they could still see the angel at the gate of Eden!

Yet still God worked, still people faithfully worshiped and obeyed and taught the truth. Enoch was taken to heaven, to the astonishment and bewilderment of all. Methuselah and his sons and grandsons (Noah was his grandson) tried to live and teach the truth in the midst of violence and turbulence. But they probably weren't as much in the public eye as they were after God told Noah to build the ark. And being in the public eye was not a comfortable thing. And the numbers of the faithful must have been dwindling terribly, or more would have been saved in the ark.

Can you imagine what it must have been like to stand faithfully for the truth in such a situation? Let's think about how it progressed.

First, Noah probably told his wife and relatives of God's command. They must have been awestruck, and promised to help him fulfill what God had asked.

Next they started gathering the materials, and answering questions from neighbors. As the story spread, people came to watch, and perhaps to help, at least at first. So they began preaching more fervently to larger crowds.

Some eagerly said they believed and would repent. Maybe they even showed a little life reformation—at first. But others mocked and jeered, and time passed...how discouraging it must have been for Noah and his family when they—those who seemed to believe what Noah preached—began to fall away and change their minds.

Their sons were born and grew old enough to help. They found wives among "the sons of God," the believing community, and those three young women joined in the work. No doubt by now Noah was famous in the whole known world, which was all still centered in and near what we today

would call the Fertile Crescent and North Africa. No doubt also that he and his family were the subjects of every kind of mockery, taunts, and perhaps threats.

How did they stand? How did they maintain their love for their fallen neighbors and keep pleading with them to come in and be saved?

It had to be, as it always is, by the Spirit of God. God “repented that he made people,” but He still loved them. He wanted to save them all if He could. Maybe, like the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, or of Jonah and Nineveh, if many had repented, He would have turned back the Flood.

They didn’t. Noah and his family had to go in all alone. But they did not give up faith. They stood firm. (Though that seven days before the rain began must have tested their faith!)

And when they came out, the whole planet had been re-formed. Taken apart, torn up, and turned into something completely unrecognizable. But God was still there. **Read or have read Gen. 9:12-17** to see how He reassured them.

ACTIVITY SUGGESTION

Using clay, popsicle sticks, paper, cardboard, or whatever you have, try to build a model of the ark following the directions in Genesis 6:14-16.

Decide what your scale will be—for example, 1” to 10 cubits would give you a model 60” long, or 1 cm to 5 cubits would give you one 60 cm long.

Choose any scale that fits your materials, or even have individuals make their own, probably smaller.

Instructions from Genesis 6:14-16:

1. Build yourself a ship from teakwood
2. Make rooms in it
3. Coat it with pitch inside and out
4. Make it 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high
5. Build a roof for it
6. Put in a window eighteen inches from the top
7. Put in a door on the side of the ship
8. Make three decks, lower, middle, and upper

SEVEN DAYS OF SOUL FOOD

SEVEN DAYS' WORTH OF DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

You must love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind (Luke 10:27). To put it another way, body+heart+mind=one living soul.

We can't divide ourselves into different sections, but it's useful to look at these different aspects of ourselves and be sure we have a well-balanced faith that uses all the avenues of a soul. Each of these starter kits will include a week's worth of food for your soul in each of these four methods of understanding and expression.

Write about each of the following in your prayer journal this week. Each day strive to use language of emotions, thought, physical health and strength, or spirit on the given days.

DAY 1: Noah and his family and thousands of animals and birds, representative of all the species God wanted to save, spent an entire year in a boat that, for the first 40 days, rocked so hard that "Satan himself, who was compelled to remain in the midst of the warring elements, feared for his own existence" (PP 99). What was that like? Read, if possible, the chapter "The Flood" in *Patriarchs and Prophets*. Consider what your present life suggests about how you would have reacted if you had been there to hear Noah preach.

DAY 2: Heart. Reread Gen. 6:5, 6. Write about the two hearts mentioned here. Which one do you reflect? Prayerfully connect with these emotional themes and consider how God wants to work in your heart this week.

DAY 3: Mind. List some of the ways Noah and his helpers had to use their brains to do what God asked. Do you think Noah knew about boat-building before this? Are there things you know God is asking of you that will take more intellect than you think you have? What will you do?

DAY 4: Strength/body. Physical strength comes into this story in several ways. First, there is the great health of the people before the Flood. They were still only a few generations from the Tree of Life. How hard do you think farming and gardening, and even building, were at that time? Then the whole world changed terribly, and so did their health and strength. Now what might it have been like? How can we today maintain health even though we are mere shadows of what our ancestors were? What are the ways God wants to strengthen your body this week?

DAY 5: Soul/spirit. As you prayerfully ponder the heart/mind/body insights God has given you so far this week, write out a commitment to God that you will stand for Him no matter how hard it is, and that you are depending on *His* strength, not your own.

DAY 6: In your family, community, and church, how do you see the message being given that we are near the end and must get ready to go with Jesus? What can you do to help?

DAY 7: Use day 7 to create something beautiful that reflects what you have learned. Write a poem or song or story. Create a poster. Write a letter. Paint or draw a picture. Make a sign. Do some sidewalk chalk art or writings. Build something. Create a podcast or blog post or Twitter post(s). Make food and give it to someone in need. Use whatever creativity God has given *you*. We all have something. Share the love!

a short skit

EVANGELIST NOAH AND HIS FAMILY

written by

Debbonnaire Kovacs

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Skit

15-20 minutes depending on how long you take on between-scene things, which are optional

CHARACTERS

1. Noah
2. Mrs. Noah
3. Methselah
4. Lamech
5. More of their family if you wish and have enough people
6. Noah's 3 sons and their wives
7. Other people

PROPS

1. You could have hammers, saws, and so on, to pretend to build with. You could even, if you do this skit outdoors, have some boards to carry around.
2. Designate a spot that will be the ark. It could have some chairs for the family to sit on once they go in. **Noah** (smiles at her) And so are we all. I'll send a dove. (They wait) No, she's coming back. If there's no place for a dove to land, there's no point in our trying to get out, even if we could.

Act 1

Have Noah and Mrs. Noah together in one spot, and Methuselah, Lamech, and his family ready to be called.

- Noah:** (to his wife) You're not going to believe this, but...(he hesitates)...God wants me to build a boat!
- Mrs. Noah:** (startled) What?
- Noah:** A boat! A huge boat, 300 cubits long! Out of gopher wood.
- Mrs. Noah:** But...why?
- Noah:** I need to call the family. I'll tell you all together. (He calls to Methuselah, Lamech, and his family, and they come to join them.) God has given me a calling. He says people are only evil continually, even in their thoughts, and He's... (he hesitates again, looking upset) He's going to destroy the earth! (The others react with shock and horror.
- Methuselah:** (shakes his head sorrowfully) I had a feeling something like this was going to happen.
- Lamech** But, are we all going to die?
- Noah** No, everyone has a chance to be saved. God has told me to build an enormous boat. There will be lots of room. He says we have 120 years, and surely we can convince some to get in the boat, in all that time?

Mrs. Noah But I still don't understand, why a boat?

Noah Well, the way He will destroy the earth is that water is going to fall from the sky.

Everyone: From the sky?! What? How??

Noah: (raises his hands to quiet them) Water. Lots of it. He called it "rain."

Everyone is silent for a moment.

Methuselah: (looks around) Well, we'll help you, won't we, everyone?

(All agree. For the next 3 minutes or so, all builders gather and use or pretend to use tools, bring lumber, etc. A couple of other people begin to gather, asking questions, and Noah and his family answer. As more and more people gather, he tells them all about the Flood and the boat and begs them to get in. Some agree and begin to help, but others make fun of them, so they quit. After a minute, have Noah's 3 sons and their wives join in. If you don't have enough people, some of the "other people" can become Noah's family in the next scene.)

Act 2

(Noah, Mrs. Noah, Shem, Ham, Japheth, and their three wives are gathered together, with tools if you have them, pretending to inspect the completed ark.)

Noah: Well, it's done. It took a long time, especially after Methuselah and his sons died. (All sigh and put down their tools, stretching as if they're sore. Noah looks around sadly.) Nobody. Not a single one. Can you believe it? They're not even here to mock us today.

All wives: (turn and gasp and point. They talk at the same time.) Look! What's happening? Do you see that?

Noah: (and his sons turn, too. Noah's face lights up.) They're coming! Just as God promised!

Noah: The birds and animals—God said—

(He is interrupted as others run up, pointing and shouting fearfully) What's happening, what's happening? Magic! Sorcery!

Noah: (raises his hands and his voice) Listen! Listen to me! Don't be afraid. It's the animals and birds coming to get into the ark. God promised this would happen. You will notice there is one pair of each unclean animal and seven of each of the clean ones. Now how could I do that? It's God, don't you see? (He points, and the others calm somewhat. Also, Noah's family move out of the way as the imaginary animals come toward the door.)

Mrs. Noah: Look! They're going right in, just as if...
(she pauses and looks up and another wife finishes)

A son wife: (with hushed voice) I think angels are shepherding them!

Others: (begin to shout and threaten again) It's magic! Noah's put some kind of spell on them!

Noah: No, no, my brothers and sisters, listen to me! God is saving the animals, and He wants to save you, too! Won't you please come in with us?

(Others jeer and refuse, and finally Noah and his family sorrowfully go in alone. If you have time, spend a minute or so with the family first waiting and trying not to be anxious, saying things like, "It's been a whole week!" and then "Oh, here it comes!" and pretending to be thrown around and frightened, taking care of and reassuring animals, and so on. The storm calms after a while.)

Act 3

Wife: I think we've stopped moving.

Mrs. Noah: I ...I think we have!

Others: I can't believe it! Thank God! At last!

Noah: (stands as if he's looking out from the boat, shades eyes with hand) I think we're on a mountain.

(Pause a moment.)

Shem: It's been 40 days since we stopped! When will we be able to get out?

Noah: We can't get out until God opens the door, but I think I'll send out a raven and see what it finds. (He pretends to send out a bird from his hand.)

(They all watch. Ham speaks.)

Ham: No, here it comes back again.

Another pause.

Mrs. Noah: Another week. How long do you think it will be, Noah? The animals are getting very restless!

Noah: (smiles at her) And so are we all. I'll send a dove. (They wait) No, she's coming back. If there's no place for a dove to land, there's no point in our trying to get out, even if we could.

(A third pause.)

Noah: It's been another week. Let's try the dove again.

(Pause)

Japheth: Look! Look! She has an olive branch in her beak!

Everyone Everyone is excited. Things are growing! Soon! I can't wait!

Pause

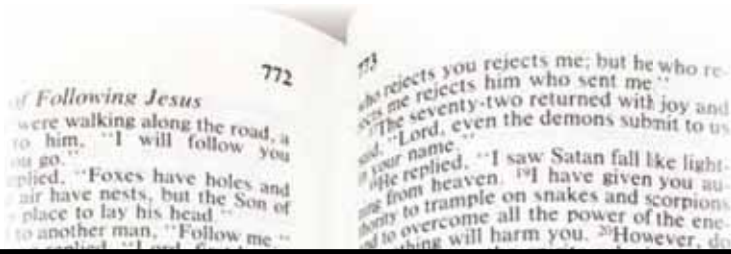
Noah: (sighs) Well, it's been five months since we first came to rest on the mountain! And finally, the dove has not returned. Surely God will open the door soon now. (He looks up to the sky.) Please, Lord?

Pause

Mrs. Noah: Another month? How long, Lord?

Everyone: (with great excitement, all talking together) It's opening! It's opening! Oh, thank God!! (They run out, look around, look shocked.) Oh, what a mess! How will we ever--?

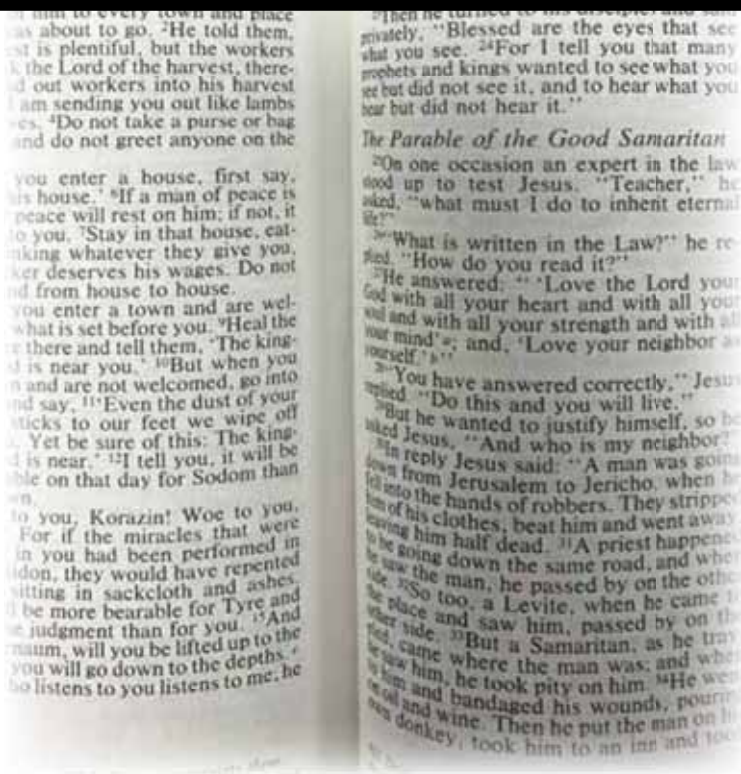
Noah: (holds out his arms, gathers in his family) Listen. We are safe. God kept us together, kept us alive, and has brought us out to begin again. Let's begin with prayer. (All kneel, and you could use this as closing prayer for the meeting, asking God to help all to hold up His name and His glory in the earth.)



2017 STARTER KIT **WEEK 13**

THE CHURCH AND ITS PURPOSE

FOR YOUR YOUTH GROUP OR SMALL GROUP MEETINGS



HERE IS WHAT WE PROVIDE IN EACH SESSION:

1. A brief reading on the topic. This can be read, but of course should be shared instead in the leader's own words, adding or subtracting details that fit your group. Usually, there are Bible readings and questions worked into the text.
2. A short devotion that brings home the principles of the topic of the week. This is intended to be shared with the whole group.
3. An activity suggestion. These are simple, requiring few, if any, materials, but we all learn and retain better if we do something physical with what we've heard and seen.
4. A short skit. If you have time to rehearse and learn, these can be done on different weeks, or even for other meetings such as church services. But they can also be done in impromptu fashion, each person reading his/her part expressively. Always allow time to discuss people's reactions after skits.
5. Very important: Each week's starter kit includes a page called "7 Days of Soul Food." Print these out and give copies to each person, or give each person the link if they have online access. These are personal applications that will carry the devotion through the whole week. It is highly recommended that each person begin some sort of prayer journal and use it all year. We generally think of journals as being full of writing, but if you don't like to write, you can draw, doodle, paste in pictures that bring the lessons of the week to mind—anything that helps you draw closer to God.

THE STORY

THE CHURCH AND ITS PURPOSE

[Note to translators: Please rewrite first paragraph as necessary to make it applicable to the language into which you are translating.]

Here is a little lesson for you in ancient Greek. The word we translate “church” in the New Testament is *ekklēsia*, meaning “called out ones,” or the people who have been called out of a life of sin and into God’s kingdom. I’m not sure why that word is translated “church” in English, since that word actually comes from the Greek *kyriakos*, meaning “belonging to the Lord.” This, of course, is certainly true of believers, but it isn’t a correct translation of *ekklēsia*.

Clearly both of these words are about a 24/7 way of life, and not just about an assembly. As important as that assembly is, it can never take the place of choosing every minute of every day to live as one who has been called out of sin and now belongs to the Lord.

In some ways, the church of Martin Luther’s time did live this way. Religion was a huge part of the people’s everyday lives. Every single thing they did, from homemaking to farming to working in their crafts and trades, was surrounded by the sense of God and the angels being around them. This should have been wonderful (and no doubt often was), but there were two major problems.

First and most importantly, trust in a loving God had largely been supplanted by fear of an angry one who was constantly watching them, hoping to catch them doing something wrong so He could condemn them. His watchdogs were the local priests and religious teachers.

Secondly, they were taught that faith meant ritual. So, prayer took the form of daily mass, plus certain prayers read out of a book at predetermined hours of the day. Unfortunately, many people could not read, so even though they might have a prayer book (and think of it as a holy and somewhat protective object in itself) they had to depend on the (usually Latin) prayers of the priests, monks, and nuns, as well as the memorized, repeated prayers of their rosaries. It might not even occur to many of them that they could pray in their own words. Certainly they were taught they could not pray directly to God, but had to go through intermediaries of dead saints or

the Virgin Mary. And they were more likely to have their prayers answered if they did some good deed or gave money to the church.

So it wasn't so much that God was the center of their lives as that the church was. Luther reformed this way of thinking. Remember in session 2 when he said: "I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me."? This led to an entirely new way of being, with a cheerful, trusting life centered on the certainty of the Holy Spirit's loving presence all the time. Prayer came from the heart, not from a book.

This church, this ever-growing body of believers all over the world, spread in invisible ways, like yeast in bread dough, all through their communities, their cities, the countries they knew, and overseas. The church, instead of being visible as a building or a certain group of buildings, was visible wherever, in any community large or small, you could see love at work. The Bible says all good gifts are from God (James 1:17) so wherever you see love and compassion, God is at work there even if the people don't know it yet! It's the greatest of transformations.

However, in order to share and grow, the church must also meet together, and in most climates, we need buildings for that. So in the early church we see both personal, individual faith and witness, and the group gathering together in large bodies. Both of these are the church in action.

Read or have read Acts 2:43-47 and make a list of the purposes this early church saw for itself. Decide which of these things were personal and might be done by one or two, and which were done as a group. How well does your church measure up to this vision?

DEVOTION

In practical terms, what kind of reforming does it take to live as a called-out one?

Obviously, one first has to hear God's call and respond to it. Each morning, when we wake up and say good morning to God, we can reaffirm our choice to live in the awareness of the Holy Spirit's presence all day long. On many days, this will not include a formal assembly with other believers, although we can certainly have prayer partners, either in person, on the telephone, by email, or social media, or whatever. On other days (this one, for instance!) the assembly of believers will be an important part of our day or evening.

In our recent Bible study in Hebrews, we learned about the new and living way that Jesus made for us. Let's look again at Hebrews 10:19-25. Read or have read this whole passage. Then go back and create a step-by-step path from individual verses.

- Verses 19 and 20: What is the confidence that these two verses promise and why? Is this speaking to an individual or to a group? Explain your answer.
- Verse 21: Who is our great high Priest? Can you think of another word for "house of God"? Is this part for an individual or a group? Explain your answer.
- Verse 22: There are three separate steps outlined in this one verse. What are they? Individual or group? Explain.
- Verse 23: What are we to hold fast? Is this speaking to the individual or the group? Explain.
- Verse 24: What mission is given here? Individual or group? Explain.
- Verse 25: What does assembling encourage? Is this true of your church or group? Why or why not, and what can you do to increase that? Why does "the day drawing near" make a difference?

You are the church! Just you, one person, really can make a difference.

ACTIVITY SUGGESTION

God can see the whole planet as if it were lit up with the small lights of each believer. Perhaps there are villages where there is only one who follows the Creator of love. The Holy Spirit is there, and the darkness can never overcome that tiny light. (See John 1:4.) But just imagine what it looks like when a lot of tiny candles come together to praise God and encourage each other! They can go out from this gathering with their lights rekindled.

Give each person a small unlit candle. Have them scatter all over the room. Some can be alone and some can be in pairs or small groups near each other. Have one large candle at the front of the room to represent God, from whom all light comes. Darken the room as much as possible. Now have a few people light their candles at the main light. They then take their candles and go to the others, urging them to come to the great light. They do not light each other's candles, but they light the way for their friends to come to the big candle and be lit by God.

When everyone is lit, gather together to sing "This Little Light of Mine" or another similar song. How bright is that area? Now have each take his or her light back to the place where they started. This represents going to find more people to bring to God. How lit-up is the room now, and how lit-up would it be if each could bring one more?

SEVEN DAYS OF SOUL FOOD

SEVEN DAYS' WORTH OF DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

You must love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind (Luke 10:27). To put it another way, body + heart + mind = one living soul.

We can't divide ourselves into different sections, but it's useful to look at these different aspects of ourselves and be sure we have a well-balanced faith that uses all the avenues of a soul. Each of these starter kits will include a week's worth of food for your soul in each of these four methods of understanding and expression.

Write about each of the following in your prayer journal this week. Each day strive to use language of emotions, thought, physical health and strength, or spirit on the given days.

DAY 1: Read 1 Corinthians 12 and ponder the imagery of "the body" that Paul uses to represent the church. There are two ways to see this, and both are true. In the most important sense, all the believers in the whole world are one body, walking, talking, and working for Jesus in this world. But in a more practical sense, we can use this image to think about our own local churches. Make a drawing or chart that represents the "body" of your church. Keep it to use all week in your devotional times.

DAY 2: Heart. If you had to choose a person or persons who is/are the "heart" of your church congregation, who would they be? Why? Write the name or names on your drawing in the heart area and pray for them today.

DAY 3: Mind. There is only one Head of the church, of course: Jesus. But some in your congregation are particularly gifted in thinking things through, understanding deep Bible study, solving problems, and so on. Who would they be? Put the names on your chart and pray for them today.

DAY 4: Strength/body. Where is the physical strength of your congregation? Are there people who are particularly health-conscious and help others to be healthy? Are there athletes? In another sense, is there a particular area of strength that your congregation has? You could put names of people who go out to serve on the feet of your drawing, or medical workers on the hands, for instance. Pray for all you think of.

DAY 5: Soul/spirit. As you prayerfully ponder the heart/mind/body insights into this symbolic body of Christ, your church, have you begun to think of where you fit into the picture? Where would you put your name and why? Pray for God to show you how you can both help and be helped by people in the other positions you have thought about.

DAY 6: Your family and your community are presently being influenced one way or another by your church. What are the ways you can think of, and how can you help to encourage strong areas and strengthen weak areas?

DAY 7: Use day 7 to create something beautiful that reflects what you have learned.

- Write a poem or song or story.
- Create a poster.
- Write a letter.
- Paint or draw a picture.
- Make a sign.
- Do some sidewalk chalk art or writings.
- Build something.
- Create a podcast or blog post or Twitter post(s).
- Make food and give it to someone in need.

Use whatever creativity God has given you. We all have something. Share the love!

a short skit

written by
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Skit

10 minutes

CHARACTERS

1. Peter
2. Several disciples, both men and women, to represent the 120 in the Upper Room.
3. Others to represent the crowd.

PROPS

1. Some Bibles, or if you want, you can roll up papers to represent scrolls.
2. Have one Bible open to Acts 2 for Peter to use.
3. Decide in advance whether he will read the entire sermon, which is verses 14 (beginning with "People of Judea") through 36, or if you want to shorten it, in which case he can stop at verse 24 and then read verse 36.
4. Choose an area to represent the Upper Room and an area to be the outside where the crowd gathered.

Act 1

Opening Scene: The disciples, including Peter, are gathered together, studying and discussing the Bibles or scrolls. Spend a minute or two, having them discuss whatever seems relevant, such as telling each other stories of seeing Jesus in Jerusalem even though He was crucified weeks ago, or perhaps the story of the road to Emmaus. After a minute, have them all begin to pray together. Suddenly they begin to look up and gasp and point. (You could have someone make noises like blowing wind if you like.)

One disciple: Fire! There's fire over your head!

Another: It's over your head, too!

A third: What is it?

Peter: (reverently and with wonder) It's the Holy Spirit!

Disciple: That's right! Remember, Jesus said power would come on us from on high!

(As the group grows excited and louder, the crowd begins to gather and exclaim, asking what's going on. The disciples go to the area that represents the outside, praising God. It would be wonderful if some can actually praise God in different languages, the more the better. At first it sounds like confusion.)

Person from crowd: (shouting above the noise, which quiets somewhat) Listen! Do you hear that? Aren't they all Galileans? Why do we hear them praising God in all our languages?

(Others agree and exclaim, saying to each other, "What does this mean?"

Another person from crowd: (mockingly) They're drunk, that's all! (A few others might agree and laugh or jeer momentarily.)

Peter: (gets his Bible and raises his hands for quiet; everyone quiets down) People of Judea, and everyone who lives here in Jerusalem, listen to me! (He reads the sermon, either to verse 36 or skipping 25-35, as previously determined. Everyone listens intently. As he ends, "this Jesus whom you crucified," everyone is very upset and begins asking, "What can we do?"

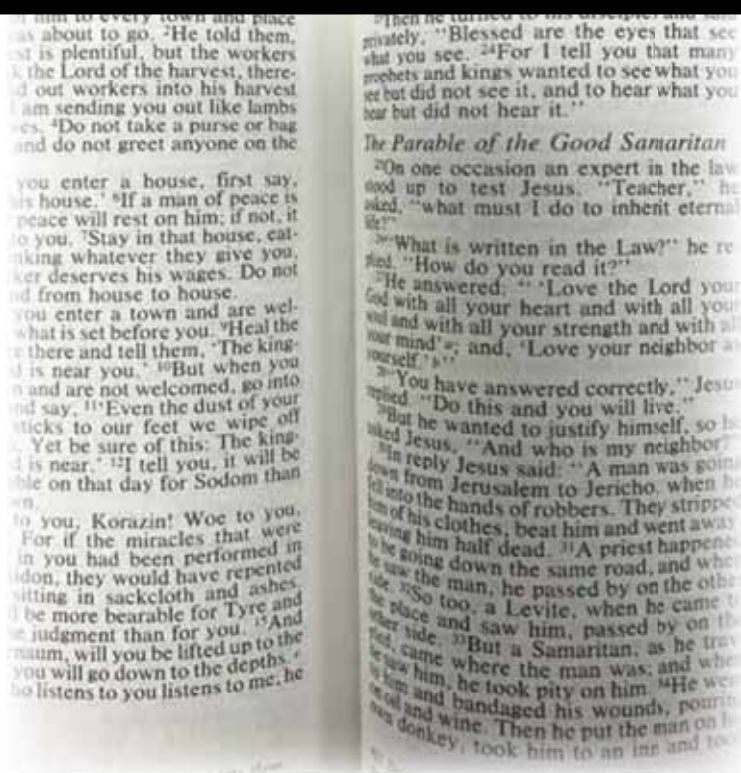
All disciples: now disperse through the crowd, explaining things and praying with individuals. Then read together verses 37-47 and discuss how the whole group of apostles worked together, even though it was Peter preaching.

End with a group prayer and song of praise.



2017 STARTER KIT **WEEK 14** FROM **MOCKER** TO **LEADER**

FOR YOUR YOUTH GROUP OR SMALL GROUP MEETINGS



HERE IS WHAT WE PROVIDE IN EACH SESSION:

1. A brief reading on the topic. This can be read, but of course should be shared instead in the leader's own words, adding or subtracting details that fit your group. Usually, there are Bible readings and questions worked into the text.
2. A short devotion that brings home the principles of the topic of the week. This is intended to be shared with the whole group.
3. An activity suggestion. These are simple, requiring few, if any, materials, but we all learn and retain better if we do something physical with what we've heard and seen.
4. A short skit. If you have time to rehearse and learn, these can be done on different weeks, or even for other meetings such as church services. But they can also be done in impromptu fashion, each person reading his/her part expressively. Always allow time to discuss people's reactions after skits.
5. Very important: Each week's starter kit includes a page called "7 Days of Soul Food." Print these out and give copies to each person, or give each person the link if they have online access. These are personal applications that will carry the devotion through the whole week. It is highly recommended that each person begin some sort of prayer journal and use it all year. We generally think of journals as being full of writing, but if you don't like to write, you can draw, doodle, paste in pictures that bring the lessons of the week to mind—anything that helps you draw closer to God.

THE STORY

FROM MOCKER TO LEADER

We know very little about the childhood and youth of Jesus and His brothers and sisters. If we only had the Bible for information, we could still assume that His siblings must not have been believers, because they are never mentioned as being among His followers. Yet in Acts 1:14, His mother and brothers are listed as being in the Upper Room with those who are “all of one mind.” Clearly, an important reformation has happened.

Jesus’ sisters are not mentioned at this point, but that doesn’t necessarily mean they did not believe; they could have had young children at home. There were thousands of people who had been following Jesus and either were believers already or were poised to become believers at Pentecost, and they were not gathered in the Upper Room. That 120 were most likely His closest followers, and most, if not all, would become leaders, whether officially or not, in the new church.

However we do have other information on Jesus’ boyhood. In *The Desire of Ages* there is a chapter tellingly called “Days of Conflict,” which goes into the difficulties the boy Jesus faced during childhood and youth. A large part of that problem is His family. Page 86 says that his brothers sided with the Pharisees on the side of trying to get Jesus to follow Jewish traditions, whether they went along with God’s Word or not. Page 87 tells of Jesus’ gentleness and tact, especially with people who were poor or suffering, and that the brothers not only didn’t have that tact, they spoke harshly to the suffering ones and were angry with Jesus for denying Himself to give to those who were in need. They threatened and intimidated Him—or tried to; it didn’t budge Jesus. On page 88, his unselfishness and integrity are sneered at, and forbearance and kindness are called cowardice.

Have you ever had that happen to you? You refuse to get into a fight, and then are called a coward? You are in good company.

In this lesson we are going to concentrate on the one of Jesus’ brothers that we know the most about, though it isn’t much: James. The SDA Bible Commentary on the book of James (Vol. 7; pp. 497-500) goes into great detail on what we do and don’t know or can guess or speculate. We think James was the oldest because he is always listed first. And we know he reformed

and became a leader in the church. We are fairly sure he is the one listed as the leader of the church in Jerusalem, though the commentary makes it clear that we can't know for sure.

Read or have read Galatians 1:19. Paul is telling the story of his early call to ministry, and it seems clear that he is here meeting with two highly-regarded leaders. Here he clearly identifies "the Lord's brother." In 2:9 he mentions a James as a "pillar" of the church, which implies that it's the same James, but we can't know. (BC7: 498-9)

Now read Acts 12:17. This James is not identified as Jesus' brother, but some early church writers from the first two centuries after Christ say it was. Finally, read Acts 15:13-21. This chapter tells of the very important Jerusalem Council in which the young church made a decision concerning how many Jewish laws the Gentile converts would have to follow. (Another kind of reformation can be seen at work here.) James is clearly presiding over this council, and early writings indicate that this was Jesus' brother, but again, we cannot be certain (until we meet him in heaven and ask!)

As for whether he is the one who wrote the book of James, again we are not sure, but we think so.

The important facts are these:

James not only did not believe in his Brother as Messiah, he mocked and criticized and made Jesus' life difficult.

He later reformed, and probably became a leader in the church, perhaps the top official in Jerusalem.

Put yourself in James' place for a minute. How would you feel if you had the incredible blessing of growing up as Jesus' brother or sister, but you made his life miserable? How, then, would it feel to come to believe—after He dies a cruel death and it's too late to tell Him how sorry you are!

In closing, read this paragraph from DA 325.

"What a support Christ would have found in His earthly relatives if they had believed in Him as one from heaven, and had co-operated with Him in doing the work of God! Their unbelief cast a shadow over the earthly life of Jesus. It was a part of the bitterness of that cup of woe which He drained for us."

It is definitely true that Jesus is very glad His family finally came to Him. But it would have been so much better if they'd done it sooner. As younger brothers and sisters of Jesus, let's make a different choice.

DEVOTION

Do we have the same troubles in our families that Jesus had in His? Do we argue and fight when we disagree? How about in our church families? Let's take a look at some instructions the Word of God gives for these situations.

Our first text is right in the story we have been studying: Acts 1:14. Read this together. Do you think "of one mind" meant they all thought alike about everything? Do you think God even wants that? Why or why not? What action does the text specifically say they were doing with one mind?

Now let's look at Romans 12. This whole chapter is about getting along in home and church families. What does the first two verses tell us to do first?

The next several verses talk about the imagery of the body, where each part has an important part to play, and the rest of the chapter lists much advice for getting along in love. Particularly note verse 18. What does this verse say? Why does it begin with "if possible" and "so far as it depends on you"? What should we do if someone else refuses to be at peace with us, as Jesus' brothers refused to be at peace with Him?

Take a minute to let people say what they think Jesus did in that situation.

Then read the last verses: 19-21. What does Paul say to do? Is it easy?

There are many passages in the Bible that give counsel to us on how to live lovingly with each other. Another is in Colossians 3. First glance over verses 5-11 and note that Paul is saying that first we have to put off the sinful things from our natures. In other words, make a choice. We can't purify ourselves, but we can make a definite choice to put away those ugly things.

Now have someone read verses 12 through 17. What do you think are some of the most essential things to living together with each other when we disagree? Which are the hardest and easiest? Where do we get the power for these attitudes? (Hint: See the first four verses.)

We can choose to live in peace, without neglecting to stand up for right. Jesus did it, and if we watch Him and talk to Him and cling to Him and turn to Him in every difficulty, He will do in us what He modeled for us while He was here.

ACTIVITY SUGGESTION

Leader: In advance, write on small cards or slips of paper different ways people could disagree. Make some unimportant, such as “You disagree over what foods to make for dinner,” or “You disagree over what color the new curtains should be.” Have some more important, such as “You disagree on where to live,” or “You disagree on whether or not higher education is important.” Make some very important, such as “You disagree on the importance of the Sabbath,” or “You disagree on whether God exists.”

Divide the group into pairs or small groups and pass out the slips randomly. Have the pairs or groups model good ways to discuss and perhaps “agree to disagree.” What can you do if someone disagrees with you on something essential?

SEVEN DAYS OF SOUL FOOD

SEVEN DAYS' WORTH OF DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

You must love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind (Luke 10:27). To put it another way, body+heart+mind=one living soul.

We can't divide ourselves into different sections, but it's useful to look at these different aspects of ourselves and be sure we have a well-balanced faith that uses all the avenues of a soul. Each of these starter kits will include a week's worth of food for your soul in each of these four methods of understanding and expression.

Write about each of the following in your prayer journal this week. Each day strive to use language of emotions, thought, physical health and strength, or spirit on the given days.

DAY 1: We have seen how painfully Jesus' birth family treated Him. Do you face some of the same things, or know someone who does? You probably already pray hard about this situation. Commit to keep on doing that, and ask God to keep you gentle and loving in the meantime.

DAY 2: Heart. Spend a few moments trying to imagine the feelings in the heart of Jesus when He was your age. What do you think He did to help Himself find comfort and stay strong? Notice Luke 6: 11-12. Prayerfully connect with these emotional themes and consider how God wants to work in your heart this week.

DAY 3: Mind. James may have been a thinker. He may have seen the importance of God's written law and thought that doing every little ritual "right" was the way to be righteous, and he must not have had a heart connection with God (or with his Brother!) How would you explain to someone like that how to keep God's law from your heart? Deut. 6:4-5 may help you.

DAY 4: Strength/body. One of the things Ellen White speaks of in connection with Jesus' childhood is that He was from a poor family, so He had simple food and hard work to do. How do you think this helped Him? How can you imitate that? What are the ways God wants to strengthen your body this week?

DAY 5: Soul/spirit. As you prayerfully ponder the heart/mind/body insights God has given you so far this week, reread Colossians 3:5-17 and item by item, put off the things listed in the first verses and put on the things listed in the last ones. Give your spirit entirely into God's keeping for today.

DAY 6: This lesson has had a great deal to do with how you live in your family, community, and church. Make a list of the things God has shown you that you need to reform, and pray for them to be formed into something beautiful that will draw yourself and others closer to God.

DAY 7: Use day 7 to create something beautiful that reflects what you have learned.

- Write a poem or song or story.
- Create a poster.
- Write a letter.
- Paint or draw a picture.
- Make a sign.
- Do some sidewalk chalk art or writings.
- Build something.
- Create a podcast or blog post or Twitter post(s).
- Make food and give it to someone in need.

Use whatever creativity God has given you. We all have something. Share the love!

a short skit

written by
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Skit

10-15 minutes

CHARACTERS

1. As children or youth: Mary, Jesus, James plus three brothers, at least two sisters. We don't know how many sisters He had, only that they were plural. Fewer people can play these roles if necessary.
2. As adults (could be the same people or others, depending on how many you have that want to be involved): all the above plus a group as congregation in the synagogue at Nazareth
3. Paul
4. Barnabas
5. Peter

PROPS

1. None for Act 1
2. For Act 2, a lectern or desk and a Bible open to Isaiah 61, facing some rows of chairs. A covering for Jesus' head.
3. Some chairs in front for leaders for Act 3.

Act 1

1. No script: just have the group role play Jesus' brothers and sisters making life difficult for Him; Jesus being
2. patient and loving no matter what, and Mary trying to calm things down.
3. Spend 2-3 minutes on this.
4. Then have group disperse.

Act 2

- Congregation:** Sits as if in synagogue. Jesus' family is there. All are very excited, pointing and whispering as **Jesus** puts his head covering on (a Jewish custom) and goes to the lectern to read the Bible. His family look proud.
- Jesus:** (reads verse 1 and the first line of verse 2, then closes the Bible, sits down) Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.
- Congregation:** (murmuring, especially the family) Doesn't He speak wonderfully? What gracious words! Yes, but isn't this just Joseph's son? His family is right here. Who does He think He is?
- Jesus:** I suppose you want Me to do here what I did in Capernaum, but I tell you, no prophet is honored in his home town.
- Congregation:** Grows angrier and angrier as Jesus continues to speak.
- Jesus:** There were plenty of widows in Israel during Elijah's days, but God sent him out to a widow in Sidon. And there were plenty of lepers in Israel in Elisha's day, but only Naaman the Syrian was healed.
- Congregation:** Shouting, calling him a false prophet, "Kill Him!" "Get Him out of here!" Grabs Jesus (His family, especially His mother, protesting) and tries to drag him away. Jesus moves away quietly and others act astonished and bewildered, as if He has disappeared out of their hands. All sit down.

Act 3

(Set up something like a courtroom, with Peter, James, and other elders in chairs at the front, Paul, Barnabas (can have others if desired, since Bible mentions "and some others") are standing before them.

Others are around as audience.

Elders have Bibles.

Paul: (as if he's at end of longer speech) So you see, brothers, how the Holy Spirit is doing miraculous things among the Gentiles.

Audience and elders Praise God! That's wonderful!

One of the elders: Yes, that is great, but they have to be circumcised and taught to follow all the Jewish regulations!

(A minute of back and forth "No they don't, it's too burdensome," "Yes, they do, it's the law of God" and so on. Not unruly, just people trying to figure it out. They look in Bibles and murmur together.)

James: Brothers, brothers. (All quiet.) We must pray about this. (They pray together.)

Peter: (stands) "Brothers, you know God sent me to the Gentiles. Remember that vision I had about the animals, and the visit to Cornelius? (All nod.) Well, God is the one who knows their hearts, and He gave them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us. He didn't make any distinction. He cleansed their hearts by faith, just like ours. Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the new disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? We believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, and so are they."

(Many are nodding.)

James: Brothers Paul and Barnabas, tell us more.

Barbabas: We've seen healings, we've seen families reconciled, we've seen wonders of salvation!

Paul: Believe me, I find just as much faith among our Gentile brothers and sisters as I do here in Jerusalem, if not more.

Peter: Remember, God first began by taking our own forefathers out from the Gentiles.

James: (looks around at the others, then stands)
Brothers, listen to me. Peter has reminded us of our own beginnings. The Scriptures agree with this, telling us that God will call all humankind to Himself, including Gentiles. Now, here is my judgment. We shouldn't trouble our new converts with all the rules and regulations, but we should write and tell them not to eat strangled meat, because those animals do not have the blood drained as God commands, not to offer their food to idols, but only to God, and to abstain from fornication and from blood. After all, Moses is preached in every city from ancient times, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath. (He looks around again, and all agree.)

Paul and Barnabas bow and thank them, and they send them off to continue their work for God.