

7-SESSION BIBLE STUDY FOR TEEN GIRLS

KRISTI MCLELLAND

*The
Gospel*
ON THE
Ground
for teen girls



THE GRIT & GLORY OF THE EARLY CHURCH IN ACTS

The
Gospel
ON THE
Ground
for teen girls

KRISTI MCLELLAND

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kristi McLelland is a speaker, teacher, and college professor. Since completing her Master of Arts in Christian Education at Dallas Theological Seminary, she has dedicated her life to discipleship, to teaching people how to study the Bible for themselves, and to writing about how God is better than we ever knew by explaining the Bible through a Middle Eastern lens. She has written another Bible study on Jesus's earthly ministry and His interactions with first-century women titled *Jesus and Women*. Her great desire for people to truly experience the love of God birthed a ministry in which she leads biblical study trips to Israel, Turkey, Greece, and Italy.

For more information about Kristi and what she's up to, visit: newlensbiblicalstudies.com.

INTRODUCTION



Every adventure begins in a moment, and the best ones come to us.

As we begin our study of *The Gospel on the Ground*, I want to share a bit about myself and my journey. In 2007, an adventure found me; the Lord opened the door for me to study the Bible in Egypt and Israel. During that time, I got to know the historical, cultural, linguistic, and geographical world of the Bible.

I was eating foods that Abraham ate, seeing stars in the sky that Jesus saw from earth when He looked up at night, and walking on ancient roads that Peter and Paul would have walked more than two thousand years ago. I learned to study and understand the Bible through the Middle Eastern lens (the way it would have been understood in Jesus's first-century world) rather than the Western lens that usually shapes the way we read God's Word in the United States today.

Studying the written Word of God in the living land of God where it all actually happened changed me forever. And here I am fourteen years later still talking about all I learned and all I continue to learn.

You may know that Jerusalem is considered the epicenter of the earth for the Jewish people. It's known as the city where God's name dwells. It's known as the city where God's temple stood during Solomon's reign and during the time of Jesus. *Yerushalayim*—the destination of all pilgrimage travel to the Holy Land for thousands of years.¹

Jerusalem feels like home to me. I feel the most whole and centered when I am there. I feel God there—as I see the places where Jesus walked and as I occupy the spaces He once filled in His thirty-three years on earth.

As a Jewish man, Jesus would have visited Jerusalem a few times a year to observe the annual festivals according to the commands of God. In His adulthood, Jesus was known as a Galilean Rabbi because His family was from Galilee. He lived His whole life within the districts of Galilee, Samaria, and Judea. For the vast majority of His life, He never traveled outside of a one-hundred-mile radius from where He was born. Yet His name is spoken and known in every corner of the earth.

How can that be? How does a man who lived a relatively short life of just more than thirty years and who spent His time mostly within a one-hundred-mile radius change the entire world and the course of all of human history?

This “gospel on the ground” feast is the story of how this Jesus-centered, world transformation happened and how it is *still* happening in our world and in our lives today.

(If you’ve never studied the Bible with me before, you’ll learn that I call our study times together “feasts” because we don’t so much *read* the Word of God as we *eat* it. We take it in, and we let it do its work in us. More on that later.)

We’ve discussed how Jerusalem was important to the Jewish people during Jesus’s time on earth and it remains so to this day.

Jerusalem is also important to us as the New Testament church, even now. And here’s why: the church was birthed in Jerusalem—at God’s house, the temple—during one of the three main annual foot festivals, Pentecost.

We find our beginning here—in Jerusalem at God’s house. But the story of the Bible and the church doesn’t end in Jerusalem.

Something began that day at Pentecost—something that is still underway today, in this very moment.

Something Jesus had told them to look for, to wait for . . .

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you;
and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and
Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

ACTS 1:8

From Acts 1:8 on, the Bible tells the story of how God’s church became His witnesses in all the earth by the power of the Holy Spirit. The gospel started moving along the ground, moving out from Jerusalem and into Judea, Samaria, and even further into the heart of the greater Greco-Roman world at that time. The early believers in Jesus carried the story of Jesus with them wherever they went.



And by the end of Acts, we're told that the gospel of Jesus and the way of Jesus, embodied in His followers, had made its way to another important city—the imperial city of the Roman Empire—Rome.

The kingdom of God started invading the empire of this world. And let me tell you, the way of Jesus and the way of Caesar could not have been more different. The empires of the world had been anchored in acquisition. The world's philosophy could be summed up with the phrase “if you are strong enough to take it, it's yours.” When you consider the idea of empire, think of the power and glory of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome in the first century. The world of empire prizes strength and using that strength to stay on top.

In contrast, we find the kingdom of God to be anchored in surrender. The way of Jesus says the last will be first. Jesus says we are to lose our lives to gain them. The way of the kingdom of God is entirely upside-down to the way of the world and empire. Caesar will do anything to stay on top. Jesus says the way to flourish is to go low.

As we'll explore together in this biblical feast, the story of the book of Acts and the early church can be summed up in a series of sanctified invasions—God's redemptive work of grace confronting some of the seemingly insurmountable institutions of the world.

The kingdom of celebration invading the empire of entertainment.

The kingdom of abundance invading the empire of scarcity.

The kingdom of togetherness invading the empire of separateness.

I love the way that C. S. Lewis put it:

Enemy-occupied territory—that is what this world is. Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say landed in disguise, and is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage.²

C. S. LEWIS

This story continues today with us. We are being drafted into the “great campaign of sabotage” to spread the way and the wisdom of the reign of the rightful and benevolent King.³

Even now, you and I are being invited into the movement of the New Testament church as it grows, reaching unto the ends of the earth.

The kingdom of God is still coming down to the ground. And we, as God’s people, are called to bring celebration, abundance, and togetherness—light to a weary world that sometimes seems darker than anything else.

The witness of the women and men of the early church spoke to God’s all-sufficient worth. And the witness of our lives remains potent, speaking a word to the empires of today.

So what do you say?

Will you step into the adventure God is calling you to? Will you let Him use you in this chapter of the church’s story?

Our adventure can begin even at this moment.

Let’s take hold of it together.

All the best,



HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

In our time together, we are going to glimpse some snapshots of the early church, mostly living in a Greco-Roman world. We are going to study God's Word in a way that might seem a bit different from what you've experienced in the past. We are going to strive to view the Bible with a Middle Eastern lens and, at the same time, study a few Bible passages in a traditionally Jewish way—the way the rabbis would have taught Jesus the Bible and the way some rabbis still teach the children in Israel today.

With that in mind, let's discuss a bit of the philosophical framework for our study:

WE APPROACH THE SCRIPTURES AS CHILDREN EXPECTING TO BE FED BY OUR FATHER.

It can be easy to sit down with our Bibles and think something like, *OK, let me figure out some application from the passage I'm reading today*. I have good news for you—we are not spiritual orphans. We have a gracious heavenly Father who feeds us to the full with His Word; He gives abundantly. As we read the Word, we do our part by being open to what God will teach us. We posture ourselves to obey and to be gratefully fed by the living God through His Word and by the power of His Spirit. But God is in charge of feeding us.

WE'RE NOT LOOKING FOR THE "RIGHT" ANSWER.

Though it may sound strange to our Western ears, in Judaism, the student with all of the good questions is better than the student with all of the right answers. We never just read the Bible; we interact with it, asking questions of the text. We want to know what a text teaches us about God before we ask what it teaches us about ourselves. In our time together, we're going to focus on interacting with the biblical text in community, and we're going to learn to be OK with questions that cannot be easily answered and even questions that may leave us scratching our heads with a bit of mystery.

WE WANT GOD'S WORD TO BECOME A PART OF WHO WE ARE.

The Middle Eastern way of learning falls in line with more of an oral teaching tradition, less so the more formal learning style of our Western world. In our study together, we want these concepts in God's Word to get into our hearts and minds so much that they become a part of who we are, changing the way we see God and interact with the world. You'll notice we will revisit some of the same concepts each week; the study is intentionally crafted in this way. By the end of our time together, I hope these biblical concepts are so clear and familiar they are almost like second nature to you.


LEARNING WILL BE COMMUNITY-ORIENTED.

In the Middle Eastern way, learning is very communal. Here's what I mean: in a Middle Eastern context, it would be common to see rabbis teaching students as they walk down the road. This teaching tradition places significant value on students discussing an issue with one another. Rabbis often instruct their students to "go first" and discuss what they believe about a teaching before the teacher explains the concept to them. We're going to adopt some of those ideas in our time together. In many cases, I'll "go first" in our feast-teaching times. But you'll notice group discussion guides that I've crafted especially for you to use as you *yeshiva*, or discuss biblical texts together, after we begin unpacking them in our video teaching sessions.⁴

Before You Start: Grab your highlighters or colored pens! We want you to engage as you read, so choose your colors to mark meaningful quotes and insights.




- Use this color to underline something new you've learned.
- Use this color to circle something you don't want to forget.
- Use this color to "star" something you need to live out.

Throughout the session, we want you to break out your favorite colored pens or pencils to mark up what you read. At the beginning of each session's personal study, you will see a prompt to create your color guide. Whenever you see this logo  throughout the study, it's time for you to engage the text with your colored pens or pencils!

LEADERS, YOU'LL FIND DETAILED INFORMATION FOR HOW TO **ACCESS THE VIDEO TEACHING SESSIONS** THAT ACCOMPANY THIS STUDY IN THE LEADER GUIDE LOCATED ON PAGE 184.





TAKING ON THE
Teachings
of Jesus

THE RABBI-TALMID RELATIONSHIP

SESSION ONE

I'm a professor, and at the beginning of every semester, I usually tell my college students a few important things. I'll share one of them with you: The Bible is not only the best story that's ever been told; it's also the truest story that's ever been told.

The things we read about in the Word of God happened.

Remember, we do not just want to know the Word of God. We want to eat it. We want to take it in like a feast and let it do its work in us. We want it to become part of us so we can carry the Word with us wherever we go.

The Word of God is like great food. Great food is best experienced with great people. In Jesus's world, the Bible was experienced communally first and individually second. In calling His disciples and building His kingdom, Jesus was forming a new covenant people who would not only know what He knows, but be just like Him. Not just in word, but in word and deed.

This seven-session study is a feast to be eaten together as we take a journey through some of the book of Acts. The Word of God is living and active and so are we as God's children. When any believer sits down with a Bible, it is life with life. As we study His Word, the life that God has placed in us through His Holy Spirit interacts with the

living Word of God to create more life in us—abundant life, an overflow of life—because God is the Author of life.

The Word is on the move. The kingdom is on the move. As followers of Jesus, we can't help but be on the move too.

As we journey through the Bible, the book of Acts, and beyond, we will journey together. In ancient times, no one traveled alone. If you traveled alone in that world, you could easily be attacked. Jesus told a parable in Luke 10:30-37; we call it the parable of the good Samaritan. This parable follows a man who traveled alone, and as you may remember, he was attacked! In Jesus's time, you always traveled in a caravan. Usually many families traveled together, helping and aiding one another along the way to their destinations.

We will travel the pages of the Bible together. We will welcome the adventure that is upon us and live it out together. So in our own way, we are a caravan.



Begin

As we begin our feast and our journey, take a few moments to answer the following questions before you watch the video teaching.

What are you asking the Lord to do in your life through this seven-session feast and journey?

Finish the following sentence:

"I am here because my heart needs

_____."

Who is in your caravan? Who are you feasting with and journeying with through this seven-session adventure?

What do you hope to gain from this community as you journey together? How might you pour into those you are walking alongside?

Before we get started, I always tell my students that the first step at Bible study is never to read the Bible.

The first step at Bible study is always to pray that we might align our hearts with God—that we might ask Him to give us ears to hear and eyes to see who He is, what He's like, and what it means to walk with Him.

So let's just pray together tonight as we begin our biblical feast together.

The Feast

Use the following fill-in-the blanks and space provided during our feast-teaching time to take notes as you watch the Session 1 video.

The _____ loved knowledge. The _____ loved power. But the _____ have always loved the light.

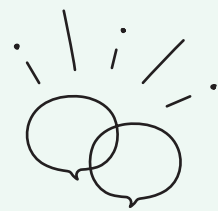
There is a big difference in being a _____ in Jesus and being a _____ of Jesus.

When you follow a _____, you don't just want to know what your rabbi _____. You want to be just like _____.

The _____ of God faces _____.

The _____ of God is the way of knowing the _____ of God.

Let's Yeshiva!



Both learning and travel were done best in community in the biblical world. We want to practice **YESHIVA together—discussing, wrestling, and brainstorming around what we heard in this session's video teaching.**

Now that we have feasted on our first video teaching, take some time to read God's Word and discuss the following questions with your group. We're going to learn from each other by journeying together and sharing some of our own stories during this seven-session feast.

Where's the farthest you've ever traveled? Was it more than a hundred miles from where you were born?

I don't know if you've ever thought about it, but for the vast majority of Jesus's life, He never traveled outside of a one-hundred-mile radius from where He was born. Yet His name is spoken and known in every corner of the earth. This is the story of how that happened. And it's the story of how it is still happening today. It's the story of how the good news of the gospel traveled on the ground, first in Jerusalem, then in Judea and Samaria, and ultimately on to the ends of the earth.

READ ACTS 1:4-5 TOGETHER.

Why would the disciples need the Holy Spirit?

Remember, for us to follow Jesus like a student followed a rabbi, we don't want to just know what He's like. We want to be just like Him. And we need the help of the Holy Spirit for that.

What do you think it looks like to be more than just a believer of Jesus? How would it look for someone like you to wholeheartedly follow Jesus in today's world?

If I were to ask you, where is God's Word found in your life, what is the first thought that comes to you? What position does God's Word have in your life?



The word of God was literally located in the center of the synagogue in Jesus's day, and all of the people sat around the Word of God, kind of like pulling their chairs up to a table to feast together on the Word. The Word was central to their lives, because they didn't just care about knowing it. They cared about living it out and carrying it inside of them everywhere they went.

Where would you go to learn the Word of the Lord? You went to your rabbis. By the time Jesus reached the age of thirty and became a rabbi of Israel, He was a big deal in His world. The word *rabbi* comes from the root Hebrew word, *rab* meaning "master." It means great one. It means numerous or many. It's a weighty word.

So when we say that Jesus is our rabbi, we are saying that He's our master. It's very synonymous with when we say Jesus is our Lord and Savior.

I want to say it again now, because I cannot stress enough what it means to follow a rabbi. You don't just want to know what he knows. You want to be just like him. You want to sound like him. You want to taste like him. You want to eat what he eats. You want to go where he goes. You want to be a representation of him on the earth.

If you could sit at a table with Jesus, would you try to get a seat really close to Him so you could hear Him really well? Or would you be more inclined to listen from afar?

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 5:20.

We are Christ's ambassadors. His representatives. How does the rabbi-disciple relationship help you understand what this actually means?

You might be wondering, how did someone become a disciple of Jesus? Well in Jesus's world, people chose their rabbis; the lesser tried to get to the greater. And yet Jesus did a few things radically different from everyone around Him. Jesus, this rabbi of Israel who came on the scene, didn't sit on a throne waiting for people to come to Him. He went out and He chose His disciples on His time.

READ MATTHEW 4:18-22.

Who initiated this rabbi-disciple relationship?

What was the disciples response to Jesus's call?

READ JOHN 15:16.

Because Christ has chosen you and appointed you, how might your response need to look like the disciples' response to Jesus's call?

Friends, we don't just want to know what He knows. We want to be like Him here on earth. We don't just want to be believers in Jesus. We want to be followers of Jesus.

What's the most encouraging thing that you learned this week about the rabbi-disciple relationship in the first-century world of Jesus?

follow up



Before You Start: Grab your highlighters or colored pens! We want you to engage as you read, so choose your colors to mark meaningful quotes and insights.



- Use this color to underline something new you've learned.
- Use this color to circle something you don't want to forget.
- Use this color to *star* something you need to live out.

WHOM DOES THE LIVING GOD CHOOSE?

Jesus was highly unusual in His first-century Jewish world as a “great one” (**RABBI**) who went out and chose His disciples. In a world where it was the highest honor to be able to come under the yoke of a rabbi and walk with him, Jesus, the “great one” (rabbi), did the work of seeing, choosing, and inviting people to follow Him and learn to be just like Him. He knew that while He would live most of His earthly life within a one-hundred-mile radius of where He was born, His disciples would be the ones to carry the gospel to the very ends of the earth. He knew *we* would *still* be carrying it to this day.

In choosing His disciples, Jesus was acting like His heavenly Father.

At the very beginning of the biblical story, there was another choosing—all the way back to the *genesis* (meaning *beginning*). The living God created Eden as a place of *shalom*—a place of wholeness, flourishing, harmony, and delight. Sin entered the story in Genesis 3 and *shalom* was lost, fractured, darkened, and marred. The living God would begin the ancient and ever work of bringing deep salvation, restoration, renewal, and redemption to the broken world. *But whom would He choose to partner with Him in this great restoration work?*

READ GENESIS 12:1-4 AND 15:1-6.


What did God promise to Abram?

List any information we’re given about Abram’s life in these passages.


Shalom

A place of wholeness, flourishing, harmony, and delight.





GOD CHOSE
ABRAM AND
TOLD HIM THAT
HE WOULD
MAKE HIM INTO
ABRAHAM—
AN EXALTED
FATHER OF A
MULTITUDE.



In the ancient world of patriarchy, males with strength and numbers ruled from the top. Men with lots of children were prized, honored, exalted, and valued. Impotence and barrenness were both considered curses.

We would expect the Lord to pick a “great father” to partner with Him. But He chose a seventy-five-year-old man with zero children (Gen. 12:1-4). He chose Abram. Being a seventy-five-year-old childless male in the ancient world would have been laughable. Abram would have been seen as the epitome of weakness. He was like a blank slate in society’s eyes. No one in that world would have chosen Abram. But the living God did. God chose Abram and told him that He would make him into Abraham—an exalted father of a multitude.

The living God wasn’t done choosing yet.

In the ancient world, the firstborn male was of supreme significance, highly desired, and favored. According to Torah Law, the firstborn received a double-portion of the inheritance (Deut. 21:15-17). The firstborn was seen as the picture of strength, power, and virility—everything prized in that world. The picture we get of Cain, Ishmael, and Esau in the book of Genesis points to strength.

But when we read Genesis, the living God kept choosing the second-born sons, not the firstborn sons.

It’s not Cain. It’s Abel.

It’s not Ishmael. It’s Isaac.

It’s not Esau. It’s Jacob.

The living God was not afraid to choose a seventy-five-year-old impotent male, and He was not afraid to choose second-born sons in a world where firstborn sons held all the strength and preeminence.

The living God still wasn’t done choosing.

For women in antiquity, barrenness was considered a type of curse. It was shameful to be unable to bring forth children into the world, to add to the family, the clan, and the tribe. As a woman in antiquity, you would rather be anything but barren. Being barren was figuratively considered the bottom of the barrel. We would expect the living God to choose fertile women, with babies popping out here, there, and everywhere.

But when we read Genesis, the living God kept choosing barren women to be the wives of the patriarchs! *Whaaaaaaat?*

Abraham's wife Sarah was barren.

Isaac's wife Rebekah was barren.

Jacob's wife Rachel was barren.

When the living God was choosing whom He wanted to partner with to change the world, He chose impotent men, second-born sons, and barren women. Three times over He chose those no one else would have ever chosen.

The Bible was given to us so that we might know who the living God is—what He's like and what it is to walk with Him.

The biblical record tells us that you don't have to be powerful in plenty, strong in might, or fertile in production for the living God to choose you. Jesus knew this, and He chose like His heavenly Father did.

Jesus chose simple fishermen, "sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17), tax collectors, zealots, and others to be His followers. And Jesus chooses you.

If you are a follower of Jesus, do you really believe Jesus has chosen you? Explain.

How would you act differently if you walked every day of your life with a full sense of God's choosing you?



* Temple at Capernaum as it appears today

LEARNING IN THE TEMPLE

READ LUKE 2:41-52.

In this story, what is happening?

Remember from our earlier discussions—what was in Jerusalem during Jesus’s time on earth?

How do you think Joseph and Mary could have missed Jesus in their travels? Take a guess if you’re not sure.



This story brings several things to light about Jesus in His first-century Jewish world. Growing up in Nazareth (in the region of Galilee), His family would have traveled to Jerusalem (in the region of Judea) annually for Passover, and they would have traveled in a caravan. They would have likely planned to take the journey with family and friends from Nazareth and perhaps surrounding villages.

The Bible tells us that this annual trip was their custom. The particular year that this story took place, the Bible lets us know Jesus was twelve years old.

After the Passover festival, the caravan set its sights on Nazareth and headed north. A day of travel into the trip home, Joseph and Mary noticed Jesus was not with them. How do you lose the Son of God? Well, as you may have guessed in your previous response, in caravan travel, Mary and Joseph probably just assumed that Jesus was with His cousins, aunts, uncles, or even other friends from Nazareth. Can you imagine that moment? I wonder how Joseph and Mary felt.

They returned to Jerusalem to look for Jesus and found Him at the temple, sitting with the teachers, listening to them, and asking them questions. What was Jesus doing at this moment? Why was any twelve-year-old sitting with religious teachers at the temple, listening, and asking questions?

We envision Jesus sitting on the southern rabbinic teaching steps. This is where teaching happened at the temple two thousand years ago. They didn't teach inside the temple. That space was set aside for prayer and worship and sacrifice. Instead, religious teachers would meet with their disciples on the southern steps, teaching their **TALMIDIM** and explaining the Scriptures.

Please note, terms in the text marked with **THIS STYLE** are explained in further detail in the glossary found at lifeway.com/gospelontheground.

We see twelve-year-old Jesus sitting right in the middle of this moment and these men, interacting with them about the Scriptures. I really love this story because it shows Jesus's love and desire for the biblical text, as One who would become a Rabbi.

One way of understanding this moment in Jesus's life is that He was possibly preparing for His **BAR MITZVAH** that would happen the following year when He turned thirteen.

Age thirteen is a special year for both boys and girls in the Jewish faith and practice. It is a transitional year. At age thirteen for Jewish boys and age twelve for Jewish girls, they take part in a special and sacred ceremony. It is called a bar mitzvah for boys and **BAT MITZVAH** for girls. *Bar* means "son" and *mitzvah* means "commandment." Bar mitzvah literally means "son of the commandment." *Bat* means "daughter." Bat mitzvah literally means "daughter of the commandment."¹



* Aerial view of Capernaum as it appears today

Most boys and girls celebrate this coming of age time with their families and friends in a party close to home. But some wealthy families have the means to take the party on the road and travel with friends and family to host their sons' bar mitzvah celebrations in Jerusalem. Jewish families come from all over the world for this celebration.

One of my favorite things to do when I take teams to Israel is to spend Mondays or Thursdays in Jerusalem at the temple area. Why? Because Mondays and Thursdays are bar mitzvah days!

In case you've never seen it, here's a quick snapshot.

Imagine this: *A thirteen-year-old boy is placed under a canopy and proceeds to the Kotel area, the Western Wall. He usually wears black pants with a white shirt. He wears a kippah or yarmulke, a small hat, on his head.*

The procession is loud and full of joy, life, and levity. Drummers go before the boy, playing their drums and singing into portable microphone systems. The family walks, dances, and sings with and behind the boy as he walks to the place where he will recite a portion of the Torah—the very moment he takes the commandments on for himself.

This time is a rite of passage for Jewish boys and girls. It is sacred and holy. It is bursting with celebration. The ceremony is followed by tons of food and family time. The ceremony is a memorial marker in the young boy's life. He lives forward from it as a man. A man of the commandments—God's commandments.

We can only imagine what Jesus's trip to Jerusalem would have looked like the year after this Luke 2 story occurred—the year He went up to Jerusalem as a thirteen-year-old. The bar mitzvah celebration as we see it in the Jewish faith today likely came into being much later than the first-century world of Jesus. But He and His family would have marked the milestone of His coming to the age of accountability and taking on His own spiritual growth. His family and friends would have surrounded Him and celebrated as He took the commandments onto Himself. I imagine singing, dancing, food, and more food.

The southern steps where the rabbis taught are still there today. In Israel, I take teams to sit on those steps as we unpack the biblical stories that happened on those very steps.

Peter preached his Pentecost message while standing on those steps. (See Acts 2.)²

The gospel started moving on the ground from that very place at Pentecost.



* The southern steps where the rabbis taught are still there today.



FORTY DAYS WITH JESUS

READ ACTS 1:1-3.

Focusing on verse 3, list the things the Bible says Jesus did after His resurrection.

What do you think “speaking about the kingdom of God” practically looked or sounded like (v. 3, ESV)?

Why do you think Jesus focused so much on the kingdom of God?



You only have to read the first three verses of the book of Acts to know it’s about to be a wild ride, an incredible story, and an earth-changing adventure. Acts begins with the resurrected Jesus walking around for forty days giving “many convincing proofs that he was alive” (v. 3).

Can you imagine this? Can you imagine witnessing the crucifixion or even hearing about it from friends or family who witnessed it and then seeing the living Jesus walking down a Jerusalem street? Not once. Not twice. But for forty days.

I read these first three verses and questions flood my imagination and heart.

What did Jesus look like after the resurrection?

What was His demeanor?

What were those “convincing proofs” that He was alive (v. 3)?

Were people freaked out?

Were they astonished and afraid?

How did His mother Mary feel the first time she saw Him resurrected, back from the dead and forever victorious? Did she cry? Or laugh? Or both? What in the world was going on in her heart when she saw Him? Did He pick her up and twirl her around? Did He walk with His arm around her? Did she touch His hands, feet, and side?

I honestly cannot imagine being alive during those forty days and seeing the resurrected Jesus walking, talking, eating, and laughing—just living His final days on earth after shattering death forever.

We often see the number forty in the Bible. The flood lasted for forty days. The Israelites wandered in the desert for forty years. Goliath taunted the Israelites in the Elah Valley for forty days before David knocked his block off and chopped Goliath's head off with his own sword. Jesus was in the wilderness for forty days between His baptism and His emergence as a Rabbi of the Galilee. And here, at the beginning of Acts, we see forty once again.³

When you see forty in the Bible, look for change. Something's about to pivot in the story. It's an incredible beginning to the book of Acts.

Three verses in and you are already hooked. You have to keep reading. Where does *this* story go from here? For all our questions as to what it might have been like, we do know one detail in the story. We know what Jesus was talking about during those forty days. "He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3).

Jesus knew He was about to ascend to heaven, and He also knew the gospel was about to move along the ground through these people from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and unto the ends of the earth. Salvation had been won for all who would believe, but the world did not know it yet. Jesus knew they could not take this adventure without divine help and supernatural empowerment to embody and share the gospel (good news).

He not only walked around for forty days; He gave them their next instructions. "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (vv. 4-5).

At our next feast-teaching video, we will pick up our story here—with Pentecost and the gift of the Holy Spirit poured out at a Jewish festival.



BOUND TO GOD

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul.

PSALM 19:7, ESV

What sticks out to you in this verse?

How does the Law (Torah) revive the soul?

When we think of the Law (Torah), we usually think of rules and regulations. We think of a list of things we can do and a list of things we cannot do.

We don't think of it as something that revives our souls. We don't wake up on Sunday morning saying, "Ohh, it's Sunday! I get to read Leviticus today!" We think of the Law (Torah) as somewhat boring, dry, ancient, and old.

The word *law* here in Psalm 19 is the word *Torah* in the original Hebrew.⁴ Torah represents the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, what we call the Old Testament. Within Torah, we have 613 laws or commandments. We should look at these laws as "instructions" to live on God's path—the path of *shalom*, flourishing, wholeness, and delight. We may shy away from laws, but we love instructions that teach us to live in *shalom*.

Our peace, our *shalom*, is connected to a Person, the living God. *Shalom* comes to us through meaningful connection to God. The violence of sin in our hearts and lives and minds disrupts our connection to God. Sin breaks the harmony we have with God and ruins our *shalom*, our peace. Repentance of our sins allows us to reconnect with God and get back on the path of life He's laid out for us.

God's Law, His commandments, help us stay away from sin and instead stick closer to God.

The Hebrew word for *commandment* is **MITZVAH**.⁵ *Mitzvah* comes from the Hebrew root *tzavta* which carries the idea of "attachment."⁶ Keeping the Lord's laws (instructions) helps us live on God's path and attaches us to the living God. The Scriptures are like an adhesive. They bind us to the Lord in *shalom* and wholeness.

What passage of Scripture has been sticking/attaching/binding you to the Lord's heart lately? What passages have made you feel close to Him?

How does this understanding of God's Law as instructions, not rules, change how you communicate these things to your friends? Your teammates? Your siblings?

Now that we have this understanding of how the Law of the Lord revives our soul, read Psalm 19:7-14. List every benefit that comes to us when we allow the Word of God to attach us to the living God.





* Fishing boat on the Sea of Galilee



WEAKNESS IS THE WAY

When Jesus wanted to change the world, He chose simple fishermen, “sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17), tax collectors, zealots, and others to partner with Him. He knew they would be the ones to carry the gospel from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and unto the ends of the earth.

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.

JOHN 15:16

This fallen world is anchored in the way of empire—striving, straining, and acquisition. Each and every person fights to get to the top. And each and every person fights to stay on top.

But the way of the kingdom is the way of surrender. We follow Jesus when He says we should lose our lives to gain them (Matt. 10:39). We follow Jesus when He says “the last will be first, and the first will be last” (Matt. 20:16). We follow Jesus in our weakness and trust He is our strength, portion, and sustenance.

Kingdom is invading empire every day.

We are part of the kingdom of God on the move. We are a part of the gospel moving on the ground. The ancients did their part. But we are the current living generation of the church, and it’s our turn. We’re up to bat. But we breathe in this

glorious partnership because we rejoice in knowing we are chosen in our weakness and not our strength.

Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:26-29

As we close this week's feast and journey, ponder this: *What if Jesus is choosing you in your weakness and brokenness rather than in your strength?*

Where do you feel ill-equipped right now in your life?

Where do you feel weak right now in your life?

Where do you feel lacking right now in your life?

Using your Spirit-soaked imagination, consider what God might use in that weakness for His glory. Explain your ideas below.