

Kingdom Priorities and Perspectives from the Book of Acts



Radiant Church Lighthouse Groups Spring 2020

All scriptures from the New American Standard Bible

THIS IS A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ACTS CONCERNING THE FIRST CENTURY BELIEVERS LIVING OUT KINGDOM PRIORITIES AND KINGDOM PERSPECTIVES.

Every person, every generation since Jesus came has the responsibility to seek first and live the kingdom of God in their own lives and culture. The first century believers were responsible before God for their response to His call. Their response is well documented in the book of Acts and the Epistles. We will use the book of Acts as a springboard to glean instruction and inspiration from their responses to God's Kingdom Call.

We will look at the lives of some of the people in Acts - for they truly were people of action. Each of these people stand as enduring testimonies of lives that expressed Kingdom Priorities and Kingdom Perspectives. May we not just study these champions of Acts, but lay hold of the qualities they exemplified. In also looking at the Fruits of the Holy Spirit we see the Nature and Qualities of the King on display. One of the Fruit of the Spirit is included in each study. Consider how each person reflected this Fruit. We actually begin week one with an overview of the message proclaimed by Christ and His followers. Then we will look at eight people who provide examples of Kingdom Life. You will notice that beside each person is a heading that identifies essential characteristics for us today in living Kingdom Priority and Perspectives. Week 10 of our Lighthouse Groups will be a dinner together with communion right before Good Friday.

Outline for Kingdom Priorities and Perspectives from the Book of Acts

- 1. The Church Proclaiming Jesus and the Kingdom, Love**
- 2. Apostle Paul – Transformation, Self-control**
- 3. Ananias of Damascus- Obedient to the King, Patience**
- 4. Barnabas – Mentor, Reconciler, Bridge-builder Peace**
- 5. Peter the Apostle- Holy Spirit Boldness, Faithfulness**
- 6. Cornelius the Centurion- Hunger at all costs, Joy**
- 7. Phillip the Evangelist – Going Beyond, Kindness**
- 8. Timothy-Sons and Daughters, the Next Generation - Gentleness**
- 9. Stephen the first Martyr – Truth at all Cost, Goodness**
- 10 Dinner together and Communion in our groups**

Week 1- Portraits of Kingdom Priorities and Perspectives from the Book of Acts

The Church Proclaims Jesus and the Kingdom, love

Read: Acts 1:1-3, Acts 8:12, Acts 19:1-8, Acts 28:23-31

From the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, He was proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom. He preached it in the villages, cities and everywhere in between. He demonstrated for His disciples the importance of this message. "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this **purpose**."

Lk 4:43 He commissioned the Apostles and the 70 disciples to go out and proclaim the gospel of the kingdom of God. After the cross, and the resurrection, He ministered to the disciples over a 40 day period and was "speaking of the things concerning the Kingdom of God." At the time of His ascension to the Father, Jesus our Lord again made it clear what they were to do. "This **gospel** of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will **come**." Mt. 24:14. It is critical to understand that Jesus preached and taught the Kingdom of God. He was the living Gospel among them. Where He is, there the Kingdom of God is manifested.

After the Day of Pentecost when the Apostles and other believers were filled with the Spirit of God, they stepped out of the upper room with a fiery zeal to proclaim Christ and the Kingdom. Jesus was alive and present among them, living in the hearts of believers and the evidence of His Kingdom was all around them- changed lives under the power of the name of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Within at most two years Philip is in Samaria preaching "the good news about the **kingdom** of God and the name of **Jesus** Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike." Acts 8:12 The emphasis was upon the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. That was the message through which the life-changing power of God was being released.

Some 30 years later Paul is saying his farewell to the elders of Ephesus where he had ministered among them for two years. "And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about **preaching** the **kingdom**, will no longer see my face. Acts 20:25

What was his summary of two years of ministry among them? - "preaching the kingdom."

Not long after, Paul was in Rome where he was imprisoned. The last verse in the Book of Acts captures the essence of his ministry. He was receiving all who would come to him in his rented quarters within the compound. What was his enduring message? He was "preaching the **kingdom** of God and teaching concerning the Lord **Jesus** Christ with all openness, unhindered." Acts 28:31

Evidence of His Kingdom: The Fruit of the Spirit- Love

Read 1 Co. 13, the Love Chapter

Week 1 Discussion:

As you read the lesson for week 1, what stands out to you? What truths do you glean from the lesson?

How does the message of the Kingdom of God and the good news concerning Jesus Christ the Lord go hand in hand? How do they amplify one another?

How would you summarize the good news concerning Jesus Christ the Lord? Talk about your answers in the group.

How would you summarize the message, the good news of the Kingdom of God? Talk about your answers in the group.

How does the Love Chapter inform us and challenge us as believers concerning how we treat other people? What is it speaking to you?

Week 2- Portraits of Kingdom Priorities and Perspectives from the Book of Acts

From Saul to the Apostle Paul – The Transformation of a Life

Read: Acts 8:1-3, Acts 9:1-9, Acts 9:18-22, 2Co. 5:17

Jesus told Nicodemus, “You must be born again to enter the Kingdom of Heaven”. Flesh and Blood cannot inherit the Kingdom. Only people who have gone through the Transformation of the Spirit may be citizens in God’s Kingdom. Like Nicodemus, Saul also needed transformation.

Saul was not an evil man; in fact, he was very devoted to God. He was highly committed to the God of Israel and hated all who opposed Him. Like Elijah of old he was willing to slaughter the prophets of Baal. In essence, Saul was like a surgeon cutting away rotten, infected flesh in God’s people. He was merciless upon the followers of Christ. To Saul, this new doctrine concerning Jesus the Messiah was a lie and His followers were deceivers and false prophets. Saul’s mission in life became the task of eliminating all people of this perverted cult. Saul was persistent, dedicated and willing to do whatever it took to accomplish his mission on God’s behalf.

The Resurrected Christ had other plans for Saul. His entire nature, his mission, his identity, his message and everything in his life would be transformed by this encounter with Jesus Christ. We would have picked another vessel; Christ saw in Saul a potential sold-out follower.

No man will enter, nor will any man discern the Kingdom of God on their own. We are left without hope to save ourselves and nothing in our hands will purchase the entrance ticket into the Kingdom. Christ provides.

The Book of Acts has a number of Transformation stories in it. All were people just like us. There is no pattern, no simple 1,2,3 to how God draws us to Himself in Christ. “For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” Ph. 2:13

Evidence of His Kingdom: The Fruit of the Spirit- Self-Control

1Co. 9:24,25²⁴ Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. ²⁵Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

Week 2 Discussion:

From Acts 9:1-9 identify some of the things that prepared him for his Transformation three days later in Damascus. Discuss them together. How did God so work to prepare you for Transformation.

Identify from Acts 9:17-22 the steps to Saul's conversion to Christ. Talk about the evidence of Transformation in Saul's life.

Many years later Saul, who was now known as the Apostle Paul, wrote 2 Co. 5:17 which is probably the headline verse for Transformation. Discuss it together in the light of Saul's transformation- and your own.

Why is ongoing transformation required to live Kingdom Perspectives and Priorities? In what ways is this transformation into Kingdom Life a process?

Discuss together the benefits in our lives for self-control and how this fruit of the Spirit positions us for blessings in our lives.

Ananias of Damascus- Obedience to the King,

Read Acts 9:10-18, Acts 22:11-15

In the Kingdom of God, obedience is required, essential and our part of participation in the Divine Order of Life. Living with Kingdom priorities and perspectives is only possible through obedience. Obedience keeps us in perfect alignment with the King. There is no room for “no” when the King commands one to do something. Jesus said that if we love Him, we will obey Him; yet obedience is also about honor. How we see the Lord and our heart submission to Him will be revealed in our response of obedience. Therefore, for one to bestow honor upon the King through their life requires obedience. So, in this passage in Acts chapter 9, Ananias was confronted with a life-threatening directive from King Jesus.

Jesus had demonstrated to His Father, and to His disciples, a life of obedience after sweating blood over the decision to go to the cross.

Then the Apostles modeled for all believers the power of obedience in the Kingdom when they stood before the Sanhedrin, the very religious leaders who had condemned Jesus to be crucified. Acts 5:29 But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men.”

As followers of Christ in the 21st century western world, we also have these same two choices looming before us. We can obey God or obey Men. Live with Kingdom Priorities or Live for this World and it’s pleasures.

Thus, Ananias understood the call of obedience, even when facing imprisonment and possibly death at the hands of Saul. You might say that to Christians, Saul was the Osama Bin Laden of their day; infamous, treacherous and dangerous. In his flesh Ananias may have been thinking, “pray for him, I would rather run him through with a sword.” But he obeyed His King and represented His King’s wishes toward Saul. Ananias became the instrument of conversion and healing in Saul’s life.

Evidence of His Kingdom: The Fruit of the Spirit- Patience

Ephs, 4:2 with all humility and gentleness, with **patience**, showing tolerance for one another in love,

Week 3 Discussion:

When the Lord appears to Ananias in a vision, He builds confidence in him when He shares with Ananias such detailed instructions. How do “the details” help reduce the doubt and build Ananias’ faith?

Ananias was used to open the eyes of the blind and lead Saul to Christ. We never hear of Ananias again in scripture except in Paul’s testimony (Acts 22:3-16) of his conversion. In Acts 22:14-16 Paul reveals more of Ananias’ prophetic ministry to him. Read it again. One single act of obedience changed the world. Ananias is surely cemented in heavens “Hall of Faith”. Ponder the impact of his obedience and ministry to Saul. Write your thoughts here.

Ananias overcame his fear, his doubts and his reluctance to do the will of the King. Think about your own life and journey. Recall the times when the Lord was asking you for the sacrifice of obedience. What was the situation, how did you overcome or maybe even fail in the trial? What lessons did you learn? What did God build in you as a result? Is the Lord asking you now for an act of obedience to His leading?

Patience that shows tolerance toward another person’s behavior is a beautiful grace and empowers us for enduring relationships. Is there a person in your life to whom you are being called to patience that shows tolerance? How is that going?

Barnabas – Mentor, Reconciler, Bridge-builder

Read Acts 9:26-31, Acts 13:1-7

Acts 4:36,37 Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), ³⁷ and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Early in the book of Acts Barnabas is mentioned for his generosity and is well known by the Apostles in Jerusalem. His name means, "son of encouragement". When Saul came to Jerusalem some years later the Apostles wanted nothing to do with him. It was only because Barnabas took Saul to the Apostles and spoke well of him that Saul entered into relationship with the Apostles. Without the Bridge that Barnabas built between Saul and the Apostles, the future ministry of Saul was in doubt.

In Antioch believers who had been dispersed after the stoning of Stephen preached Jesus to the people and revival broke out "for a large number who believed turned to the Lord." (Acts 11:21) The Apostles in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch to oversee the revival. Barnabas came and "encouraged them all" in the ways of the Lord. Then what did Barnabas do after he saw what was happening? He went to Tarsus and got Saul and brought him back to Antioch. Barnabas is a well-established leader in the church of Jerusalem of excellent reputation as "a good man and full of the Holy Spirit" (11:24) intentionally seeking out one who was showing great potential in the work of the ministry. Remember, Saul was controversial; Saul had a bad reputation that followed him. Saul created upheaval wherever and whenever he preached Christ Jesus. As Barnabas was used years earlier in Jerusalem on behalf of Saul, here again in Antioch Barnabas puts his own reputation to work on Saul's behalf. Barnabas wanted Saul to help him, but he also wanted Saul to learn from him.

Oh, how we need Spiritual Fathers and Mothers to mentor, encourage and build bridges of relationships on behalf of young believers. After coming to Christ, I had to give up all my friends for they were all using drugs and I was determined to walk with Christ. I knew I could not do both. The one who led me to the Lord took me under his wing and taught me, befriended me and introduced me to a whole new circle of friends.

Evidence of His Kingdom: The Fruit of the Spirit- Peace

James 3:18 And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Week 4 Discussion:

As you read these passages, what were the attitudes and actions both evident and implied, that Barnabas demonstrate in his relationship with Saul?

What kind of personal challenges may Saul have presented for Barnabas? What level of personal cost was exacted from Barnabas in his ministry as a mentor, bridge-builder and reconciler on Saul's behalf?

Have you ever been mentored by anyone? Have you mentored anyone? What might be the ingredients of successfully mentoring of a young believer? Are you willing to mentor young believers in the light of the cost?

In 2 Co. 5:18 records that God gave to us the ministry of reconciliation which is bringing into unity those people who are separated and alienated from one another or God. Barnabas did that for Paul with the Apostles in Jerusalem. How does this aspect of Kingdom perspective play out in our culture?

What does James 3:18 mean in practical terms and in our lives today?

Week 5- Portraits of Kingdom Priorities and Perspectives from the Book of Acts
The Apostle Peter- Holy Spirit Boldness

Read Luke 22:31-34, 54-62, Acts 2:1-41, Acts 4:13

Peter, you will be sifted like wheat by Satan. You will deny that you even know Me. “But I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”

Jesus prayed for Peter. His faith would be sustained and he would arise from the ashes of his failed testimony and denial of Christ. After the resurrection of Christ from the dead, Peter was still wounded and beaten down. At the encounter by the Sea of Galilee Jesus restored him to fellowship. After Jesus ascended to His Father, Peter and the other Apostles and a group of about 120 followers went into a season of prayer (Acts 1:12-15). They were devoted in unity to one another and to ongoing prayer as they waited for the promise of the Father concerning the Holy Spirit.

They were expectant, for Jesus had promised the coming of the Spirit of Truth. What that would mean, how He would come and what impact He would have upon these believers all remained a mystery. All they could do was wait, pray and stay in one accord.

Acts Chapter 2 is a record of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the followers of Jesus on the feast of Pentecost. They were all together in one place and the Holy Spirit came. On this day, everything changed. The group of followers were filled with the Holy Spirit. Today was the day for the believers to come out of hiding. Like a baby coming out of the protected womb of their mother, these believers exploded into their culture. Their prayer changed to speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. The fire of the Holy Spirit had fallen upon them all and they were forever empowered to carry out the commission given to them by the resurrected Christ in Acts 1:8 “but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be my witnesses-“.

Timidity, Fear and Guilt gave way to Confident Boldness birthed by the Holy Spirit. Peter arose and preached before thousands when only a few weeks earlier he had denied Christ before a servant girl.

Evidence of His Kingdom: The Fruit of the Spirit- Faithfulness

Psalm 37:3 Trust in the LORD and do good; Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness.

Week 5 Discussion:

Peter was a leader among the Apostles. From the very beginning among the band of followers around Jesus, Peter was a man of influence. Yet Jesus said Peter was going to be “sifted like wheat” by Satan. Why is the role of leadership so often accompanied by a greater level of spiritual warfare? How then should leaders thus respond?

What lessons have you learned that have helped you bounce back from a period of failure, intense temptation or opposition?

How does the Holy Spirit produce great boldness within Peter? How was boldness on display in Acts Chapter 2? Have you experienced boldness that is produced by the Holy Spirit? To do what?

What are your beliefs and thoughts about Acts 1:8? What all is involved in being a witness for Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit? Discuss together your Biblical beliefs concerning the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. Why is Holy Spirit Boldness considered critical for living out Kingdom Priorities?

Ps. 37:3 Peter ended up being full of Faith-fulness. He was full of Faith. This is evidence of Kingdom life within a person. How so???

Week 6- Portraits of Kingdom Priorities and Perspectives from the Book of Acts

Cornelius the Centurion- Hunger at all costs, Joy

Read Acts Chapter 10 and 11:9-18

At the trial of Jesus, the Jewish leaders put great pressure upon Pilate the Roman Governor, by using a very persuasive argument as stated below.

As a result of this Pilate made efforts to release Him (Jesus), but the Jews cried out saying, “If you release this Man, you are no friend of **Caesar**; everyone who makes himself out to be a **king** opposes **Caesar**.” John 19:12

In the Roman world, Caesar was king of the Empire and a god upon the earth. Cornelius was a Roman officer, a leader of 100 soldiers. Centurions formed the backbone of the army. Absolute loyalty to Rome and to Caesar was required. There was no other king but Caesar allowed in Cornelius' life. Centurions were famous for being hard on their troops and quick to hand out punishment with a vine -stick (*vitis*) which was a symbol of the centurion's authority and the implement with which he meted out punishment. (Wikipedia)

But Cornelius was different that most Centurions. His testimony proceeded him as “a righteous and God-fearing man well-spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews,”. (vs 22) These were the words used by the servants of Cornelius as they spoke to Peter about him. In fact, heaven knew him also for the angel said to him in a vision, “Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God.” Vs.4

Peter had new understanding and theology as a result of meeting Cornelius and hearing his story. Peter said, “I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.” Vs 34,35

As we look at the qualities of individuals who demonstrated Kingdom priorities and perspectives, we can see a deep hunger for the true God of Heaven. He was a man of disciplined prayer for he was praying at the Jewish assigned hour of prayer 3-4pm. He had a fear of God that was obvious to man and God. He did the best he could to do good for people. These acts and attitudes caught the attention of God. He chose Cornelius as the person to open up the gospel to the Gentiles. All of these facts speak of a deep inner hunger and after hearing the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius and all in his house. They were all baptized that very day. His spiritual hunger had opened up the door for him to be saved, filled with the Holy Spirit and baptized into Christ and the fellowship of believers. In gaining eternal life, he became vulnerable before Caesar for persecution and death. Cornelius is truly an example of spiritual hunger leading to Kingdom priorities.

Evidence of His Kingdom: The Fruit of the Spirit- Joy

Acts 13:52 And the disciples were continually filled with **joy** and with the Holy Spirit.

Week 6 Discussion:

What does spiritual hunger provoke in the one experiencing it? What details of Cornelius' life journey impress you most?

Have you ever been deeply spiritually hungry for a length of time? If so, what happened as a result? How did God meet you in the midst of your hunger?

What are your beliefs regarding suffering as a result of doing good? Why does God our good Father allow us to suffer persecution as a result of serving Him? How do you explain Cornelius' willingness to pursue God at all costs, even the possibility of he and his family being killed or imprisoned for the rest of their lives?

How amazing is it that God and the angels knew of Cornelius and his offerings and prayers. How does that help shape your own beliefs about God? What testimony before God do you hope to build in heaven?

We know that the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit Rom 14:17 What is your experience with JOY? Ac.13:52

Week 7- Portraits of Kingdom Priorities and Perspectives from the Book of Acts

Phillip the Evangelist – Going Beyond, Kindness

Read: Acts 6:1-6, Acts 8:1-40

Now this is an amazing set of events. WOW, talk about an adventure. But in Philip's life there was first an established testimony that was evident in his life. He was chosen from among all the disciples in Jerusalem as one of the seven who would oversee the ministry to widows. He was chosen for being of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom. This was to be a ministry of service, mercy and kindness. This was a ministry appointed by the Apostles for the benefit of the Church. A high calling and honor indeed. Jesus had told the Apostle, "to the extent that you did it to one of these my brothers of Mine (and sisters), even the least of them, you did it to Me." Mt. 25 Philip could have been content, but he was led by the Spirit of God to go beyond.

Yet one of Philip's companions, one of the seven, was killed by the same council that petitioned Pilate for Jesus to be crucified. Persecution and opposition will move us out of our comfort zone. Stephen was a brother and close associate and now he was dead.

What did Philip do, like so many he left Jerusalem for a season. It was not safe for a time after the martyrdom of Stephen. But instead of hiding out, Philip reached out. So, during this time he went to Samaria a city about 30 miles due north of Jerusalem. He went to the rejected and despised Samaritans.

Philip began to preach "the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ."(8:12) Miracles began to happen and these signs captured the attention of multitudes of Samaria. (8:5-7). Pretty soon the revival breaks out and news travels to Jerusalem. Apostles Peter and John were sent to pray for the converts that they may receive the Holy Spirit.

After much ministry, they all began to return to Jerusalem. But Holy Spirit had other plans for Philip. Remember, Philip is not an Apostle, he serves widows in the church. Yet it is not Peter or John sent on mission to Gaza, but Philip.

So, Philip goes about 35 miles south to the road between Gaza and Jerusalem for a divine encounter with a man from Ethiopia on his way back home from Jerusalem. The man is hungry to know the Lord and is seeking God in the book of Isaiah. Philip leads him to the Lord, baptizes him and POOF- he is gone. Where did he go? The Spirit of God transported him approximately 18 miles to the city of Azotus (Ashdod) midway between Gaza and Joppa. There he preached his way to Caesarea. An Amazing journey of partnership between Holy Spirit and Philip.

Week 7 Discussion:

What do you believe is the Scriptural connection between the ministry of the Gospel in the harvest and signs, wonders, miracles, healing and deliverance from demonic spirits?

What factors (there are several) helped Philip not label himself as “just a deacon” and leave the ministry of proclaiming the gospel among the lost to the Apostles?

Why do we ever limit ourselves or one another based on titles, job description or ministry experience? What needs to change in you to see yourself and others from a whole new “Kingdom” perspective as ministers?

We always hear about Paul’s missionary journeys, but Philip’s missionary journey (though shorter) was no less fruitful or powerful or amazing. Recount all that God did in and through Philip by the power of the Holy Spirit. What do you imagine happened when the Ethiopian returned to his homeland?

Evidence of His Kingdom: The Fruit of the Spirit- Kindness

Col. 3:12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, **put on** a heart of compassion, **kindness**, humility, gentleness and patience; What does it mean to “Put on kindness”? How does one do that?

Week 8- Portraits of Kingdom Priorities and Perspectives from the Book of Acts

Timothy – Spiritual Sons and Daughters- the Next Generation

Read: Acts 16:1-3, 1 Co. 4:17, 2 Tim. Ch. 1 and 2

Paul and Silas set out from Antioch in ancient Syria (now part of Turkey) after a dispute with Barnabas over his cousin John Mark who had abandoned them on the first missionary journey. Paul felt John Mark was not to accompany them on this second trip. Paul and Barnabas could not resolve the issue so Paul ended up taking Silas as his companion. Barnabas took John Mark in another direction. Paul and Silas began traveling through present day Turkey.

In Lystra, Paul and Silas met a young disciple named Timothy. Timothy was “well-spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium.” Acts 16:3 says, “Paul wanted this man to go with him”. Remember Paul had just had an unresolved disagreement with his dear friend and mentor Barnabas concerning another young believer, John Mark. But here we see Paul ready to have Timothy join them in their missionary adventure. What was it about Paul that made him willing to again take on another young disciple on this dangerous mission? Paul saw something in Timothy that made the risk worth taking. Paul knew that each generation was responsible to pour into the generation behind them.

Over many months, many cities, and through many trials Paul developed a deep respect for Timothy. Paul included Timothy; he preached with Paul, authored letters with Paul and went through riots with Paul and Silas. Paul in his writings calls Timothy: “our brother”, a “bondservant of Christ Jesus” and “God’s fellow worker in the gospel of Jesus Christ”.

But there is a deeper thing that happened over time - more meaningful, more life-changing for both Paul and Timothy. Paul addresses Timothy as “*my beloved and faithful child in the Lord*”. In another place he calls Timothy “*my true child in the faith*” and on another occasion calls him “*my son*”. Timothy won a place in Paul’s heart that was beyond brotherhood and even deeper than one’s natural family. Timothy eventually became Bishop of Ephesus and at an old age was martyred. Paul had seen by faith a great leader in the making yet gained a son in the journey together.

Paul’s fatherly exhortation to his son was 1 Tim. 1:18,19 ¹⁸ This command I entrust to you, Timothy, *my son*, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight, ¹⁹ keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.

Week 8 Discussion:

It requires humility, hunger and faithfulness to gain the place of a true spiritual son or daughter. It requires devotion and patience by spiritual fathers and mothers to enrich the next generation. What are your insights into these relationships? Why is it worth the effort? Benefits and Challenges?

Paul had been disappointed with young John Mark on their first missionary journey. Yet he did not give up on mentoring others. What are the keys to get past the disappointment or hurt when either being mentored or mentoring others? Read Mal 4:5,6 for additional insight into these relationships.

Bill Johnson says it is so critical that each generation be able to fly from the shoulders of their spiritual parents. Consider and write about your thoughts concerning these things. What can you do to position yourself for such tasks-both shouldering and flying?? How willing are you for each? Who are you mentoring? Who has poured into your life? One of the keys is to be clear and intentional. Discuss what this might look like in your life?

Evidence of His Kingdom: The Fruit of the Spirit- Gentleness

1 Tim. 6:11,12. ¹¹But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance *and* gentleness. ¹²Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

Week 9- Portraits of Kingdom Priorities and Perspectives from the Book of Acts

Stephen the first Martyr – Truth at all Costs, Goodness

Read: Acts chapter 6,7 and 8:1-4

Telling the truth will cut people who have an investment in their own way. Sometimes telling the truth will cost you greatly. Such it was for Stephen, the first martyr among the followers of Christ Jesus. Stephen was probably a Greek Convert to Judaism for he was selected as one of the seven deacons to serve the Hellenistic widows in the community of believers in Jerusalem. There was evidence of preferential treatment and the Apostles assigned Stephen and the other deacons to bring justice to the matter. Acts 6:3,8,9 offer much to describe what was happening around Stephen. Stephen was full of the Spirit of God and of wisdom. He was doing great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. He was full of grace and power from God. Talk about a witness among both the unsaved and the believers- Stephen was on fire. He was out among the people; serving, preaching and moving in great power. The resurrected Jesus was living in him and moving through him.

But just like it was for Jesus, so it was for Stephen. There was opposition with those whose system and status was being challenged. But Jesus had taught his followers – who taught others also- that they are not of this world even as He is not of this world. Our home, our citizenship is in heaven not in this world. Do you believe this with all of your heart? Stephen did, and that belief carried him into the same halls of judgment that his Savior had entered. This same group had flogged all the Apostles (Acts 5:40-42). Before the Sanhedrin, Stephen gave a long history lesson and then took out the sword of truth and cut them to the core.

Read verses 7:46-53.

Acts 7:54-60 gives account of his martyrdom. Stephen stands as an eternal witness as a believer who refused to back down in the midst of trial and threat. He spoke truth in his hour of testing. Remember He was full of the Holy Spirit and power. When flesh shrinks back, the person under the unction of the Spirit will do exploits beyond their human limits. Like his Master, he forgave his accusers and cried out “receive my spirit”. In the end his witness was shining and he was granted strength in seeing His resurrected Lord standing to honor his sacrifice.

Evidence of His Kingdom: The Fruit of the Spirit- Goodness

Acts 6:15 And fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in the Council saw his face like the face of an angel.

Week 9 Discussion:

Jn. 3:20 ²⁰ For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.” Jesus spoke of this principle that later was in operation at the trial of Jesus, Stephen and all those who oppose the truth of the Gospel. What does it mean to “practice the truth”?

What does it mean to love the light? What is the evidence of that love and practice in your life?

Read Rev 12:10-12, 17 What is the power of a believer’s testimony when their love for the world has been severed and their confidence is in the blood of Christ? Note in vs. 17 the war is against those who are obedient to the word of God and those who hold the testimony of Jesus. Your testimony is to be told- do you tell it? Have you prepared to speak it out? Have you fallen under the spell of indifference or intimidation? What is your personal commitment to living and speaking the truth in a culture of tolerance? Ponder, then discuss together these questions. Remember Iron sharpens Iron - so sharpen one another!

As it says in the lesson, Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit and power and this was the source of his strength in trial and ministry. Oh, how we need to live and minister in truth under the unction of the Holy Spirit. What are the keys to living this type of life? What is the next step for you in this? How hungry are you for such things?

Read Acts 10:38 How might one use the fruit of the Spirit shown in Goodness as a testimony to this lost world?