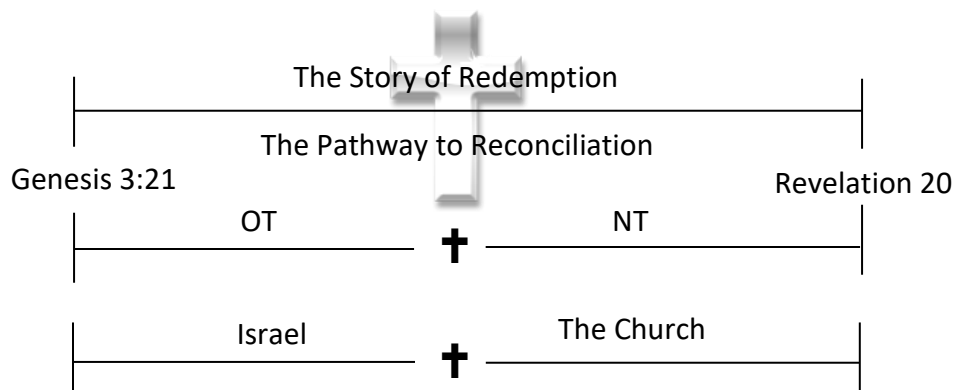


Introduction: God's agenda for planet earth

- An Amazing Love Story Genesis 1-2, Revelation 21-22

- The Great Divorce Genesis 3

- God's Tsunami of Grace – Genesis 3:21 ⇔ Revelation 20



God's agenda then (1st Century Christians)

1. His followers were to **FINISH** what Jesus began to do and teach. Acts 1:1-5
2. Their focus was to fulfill His **GLOBAL** agenda, not their national/political interests. Acts 1:6-8
3. Their assurance of **SUCCESS** was the indwelling Holy Spirit and the certainty of Jesus' return. Acts 1:9-11
4. They responded in **OBEDIENCE** to Jesus' words and looked to Scripture for their marching orders. Acts 1:12-26

God's agenda now (21st Century Christians)

1. Be **CONFIDENT** in Jesus' presence and purpose!
 - Principle – His Kingdom will come and His will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Matthew 6
 - Key Word = **FAITH**

2. Be **CLEAR** on your calling!
 - Principle – Every believer is a full-time missionary bearing witness to Jesus' supernatural life in them. Acts 1:8
 - Key Word = **MISSIONAL**

3. Be **DEPENDENT** on the Holy Spirit!
 - Principle – Apart from Him you can do nothing. John 15
 - Key Word = **PRAYER**

4. Be **OBEDIENT** to today's truth from God!
 - Principle – If you respond to the light, you receive more; if you don't, even what you have will be taken away. Mark 4
 - Key Word = **APPLICATION**

Resource: *Power Through Prayer* by E.M. Bounds

Discussion Questions:

1. How would you summarize God's agenda for planet earth?
2. To what role is every Christian called in fulfilling God's agenda?
(Acts 1:8)
3. How would your lifestyle and world view shift if you daily saw yourself as a missionary in your home, neighborhood, and work/school?
4. List 2-3 people who don't know Christ personally that you could express His love to in some tangible way this week. Pray for them and ask God how you could encourage them or meet a need in their life.

Introduction: Getting perspective... then and now.

- Something to consider when you're "waiting" on God:

"To believe actively that our Heavenly Father constantly spreads around us providential circumstances that work for our present good and our everlasting well-being brings to the soul a veritable benediction. Most of us go through life praying a little, planning a little, jockeying position, hoping but never being quite certain of anything, and always secretly afraid that we will miss the way. This is tragic waste of truth and never gives rest to the heart. **There is a better way. It is to repudiate our own wisdom and take instead the infinite wisdom of God.**"

The Knowledge of the Holy (p. 63) by A.W. Tozer

- The wisdom of God assures us that He will bring about the best possible ends, by the best possible means, for the most possible people, for the longest possible time.
 - God's **plans** are **PERFECT!**
 - God's **timing** is **PERFECT!**
 - God's **methods** are **PERFECT!**
- One of the primary purposes of how God birthed the church was to reveal the manifold wisdom of God in Jesus Christ. Ephesians 3:8-11

How did Jesus birth His new Spiritual Body?

1. He sent the **HOLY SPIRIT**.

Acts 2:1-13

1. When?
2. How?
3. Why?

- The Lesson: God's timing and methods are wrought in perfect wisdom both then and now
Romans 11:33
- The Question: In what situation do you need to trust God's wisdom?

2. The Holy Spirit spoke through an **UNEDUCATED FAILURE** the message of life.

Acts 2:14-36

- The Message

1. Explains what's happening
Acts 2:14-21
2. Gives 4 proofs of the resurrection
Acts 2:22-35
 - The historical reality of Jesus
Acts 2:22
 - The Old Testament prediction of His resurrection
Acts 2:25
 - The disciple's eye witness account
Acts 2:32
 - The outpouring of the Holy Spirit
Acts 2:33
3. Calls for a decision
Acts 2:36

- The Lesson: The power is in the **MESSAGE** not the messenger. Romans 1:16
- The Question: What's keeping you from sharing His message?

3. The Holy Spirit implanted the (eternal) life of Jesus within all who **REPENTED** and **BELIEVED** Christ, as Lord and Messiah. Act 2:37-41

- The Result: The **CHURCH** is born! Romans 8:9
- How? The Spirit's **BAPTISM!** 1 Corinthians 12:13
- The Lesson: "He that has the Son has **LIFE**, he that has not the Son of God does not have **LIFE**." 1 John 5:11-12
- The Question: Do you have the Son?

4. Jesus' spiritual body began **DOING** what He did when He walked the earth in His physical body. Act 2:42-47

- What did they do? **LIFE, BIO**
- How? The Spirit's **FILLING!** Ephesians 5:18-21
- The Lesson: God's agenda for His people has not changed and His power is no less available today Acts 1:8
- The Question: What's your "God-sized" dream for Christ's glory?

Discussion Questions:

1. What new thing did you learn about the Holy Spirit?

2. What turned the fearful Peter into the bold apostle? Where do you struggle with being bold in your faith?

3. What is the difference between the baptism of Spirit and the filling of the Spirit? Why does knowing the difference matter? (see Romans 8:9, 1 Corinthians 12:13, Ephesians 5:18-21)

4. On a scale of 1 – 10, share with a friend or mentor your current successes and/or struggles with . . .
 - . . . coming **Before God** daily
 - . . . doing life **In community** weekly
 - . . . being **On mission** 24/7

5. Do you have a God-sized dream? What is it? If not, continue to pray that God would reveal His design for your life.

Introduction: How God changes the world!

I have a God-sized dream . . .

- It's humanly impossible!
- I can't shake it!
- It's the passion of my heart!

What's your God-sized dream?

- Is it birthing deep inside you?
- Do you wonder where to begin?

How does God turn the dreams He puts into our hearts into reality?

“Baby Steps” that change the world:

1. **DRAW** near to God.

Acts 3:1-2



Remember

It's faithfulness in the ordinary that prepares us for the extraordinary.

Luke 16:10

2. **LOOK** through Jesus' eyes.

Acts 3:3-5



Remember

Never assume “the way it is” is the “way it's got to be ...”

Ephesians 3:20

3. **ACT** on your good impulses.

Acts 3:6-10



Remember

God daily prepares divine appointments for you to be the answer to someone's prayer.

Matthew 5:16

4. Give God the **CREDIT**.

Acts 3:11-13



Remember

The world has yet to see the extent of what God will do through someone who does not care who gets the credit.

Luke 1:37

5. **BOLDLY** share the “Good News”.

Acts 3:14-26



Remember

How will they know if we do not tell them; and if not you, then who; if not now, when?

Romans 10:14

Discussion Questions:

1. Where were Peter and John going when God orchestrated the supernatural healing of the beggar? What might be some implications for us? You personally?
2. What was the result of this act of kindness and the miracle? How did this good work confirm the message of Peter?
3. How might you “look through Jesus’ eyes” this week in the routine issues at home? Work? School? (Hint: Meet a need)
4. List 3 people you care about who need to hear the “message of life” that Peter shared in chapter 3. How could you be a part of God’s plans to share that with them? A letter? Phone call? Meeting? Mp3? Meal?
5. What secret fear keeps you from boldly sharing your hope in Jesus Christ? What “baby step” will you take this week to address that fear in the power of the Holy Spirit?

Introduction: Review “baby steps” that change the world

- **DRAW** near to God. Acts 3:1-2

- **SEE** through Jesus’ eyes. Acts 3:3-5

- **ACT** on your good impulses. Acts 3:6-10

- **GIVE** God the credit. Acts 3:11-13

- **BOLDLY** share the “Good News.” Acts 3:14-26

- Expect a **POLARIZED** response. Acts 4:1-6

From “baby steps” to “walking” in the power of God: 4 lessons from Acts 4

Lesson #1

Fear Not! The Holy Spirit will **SPEAK** through you!

Acts 4:5-12

Jesus’ promise:

¹²But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of My name. ¹³This will result in your being witnesses to them. ¹⁴But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. ¹⁵For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict”.

Luke 21:12-15

Lesson #2

Fear Not! The Holy Spirit will **PROTECT** you!

Acts 4:13-22

Jesus’ promise:

"I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

John 16:33

Lesson #3

Fear Not! The Holy Spirit will **EMPOWER** you!

Acts 4:23-32

Jesus' promise:

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit-- fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in My name".

John 15:16

Lesson #4

Fear Not! The Holy Spirit will **SUPPLY** all your needs!

Acts 4:33-36

Jesus' promise:

"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

Matthew 6:33

Discussion Questions:

1. What was most encouraging about this message for you? Why?
2. Which of the four fears discussed limits your impact for Christ the most? Why?
3. What is the relationship between the promises Jesus gave to His disciples (and us) and the Holy Spirit's work in our lives?
4. What specific relationship or opportunity to extend Jesus' love and message do you feel prompted to pursue? Who might pray with you this week as you trust the Holy Spirit to empower you?

Introduction: Where did all the power go?

- The church in Acts is **POWERFUL!**
- The church in Acts is **BOLD!**
- The church in Acts is **GENEROUS!**
- The church in Acts is **LOVING!**
- The church in Acts **HEALED** the broken-hearted, the outcast, the poor, and the rejected.
- The church in Acts **GREW** daily!
- The church in Acts **EXPECTED** and saw the miraculous.

The Questions:

- What happened?
- What thwarts God's unstoppable grace in our lives?

The Answer: Acts Chapter 5

Jesus' newborn Church comes under attack!

Attack from within -

- The Story: Acts 5:1-10
- The Temptation: To **PRETEND / POSE**
- The Judgment: Acts 5:5, 10
- The Reason: **HYPOCRISY** kills the authenticity of the **MESSAGE** and the credibility of the **MESSENGER**.
- The Result: Great **FEAR** and great **REGARD!** Acts 5:12-16

Attack from without -

- The Story: Acts 5:17-33
- The Temptation: To **COMPROMISE**.
- The Judgment: Acts 5:34-40
- The Reason: **COURAGE** in the face of persecution authenticates the validity of the **MESSAGE** and the credibility of the **MESSENGER**.
- The Result: Great **POWER** and **JOY!** Acts 5:41-42

Discussion Questions:

1. How has hypocrisy in the church negatively impacted your life and spiritual journey? Who tempted Ananias and Sapphira to “appear” generous instead of being generous?
2. When and where are you most tempted to “pose?” What’s the difference between being authentic and “having to be perfect?”
3. How does the fear of what other people think impact your willingness to be bold in your passion for Christ? Read Romans 1:16 and discuss the implications.
4. What might be a “baby step” God would have you take to become more authentic? Courageous?
5. Do you believe God's power is as available today as it was in the early church? Why or why not? What are the conditions for God's power to flow through us?

Introduction: Two competing agendas

*“Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through Me (Jesus) will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. The thief’s purpose is to **steal** and **kill** and **destroy**. My purpose is to give them a **rich and satisfying life**.”*

John 10:9-10

- God’s Agenda = **LIFE** → Unstoppable!
- Satan’s Agenda = **DEATH** → Diabolical!

“**Diabolical**” – Extremely wicked or cruel, evil, fiendish, heinous, hellish, vile, vicious, satanic, infernal, demonic, despicable, deplorable.
(Webster’s, Wiktionary)

- What would rank as diabolical in your list of evils?

1. Genocide?	6.
2. Serial killers?	7.
3. Mass murders?	8.
4.	9.
5.	10.

Precepts to remember *

1. Good and evil are realities, not merely concepts or metaphors. Matthew 4
2. God is the source of all good; Satan, the author of evil. James 1, Genesis 3
3. Satan is a fallen angel who led 1/3 of the angels in a rebellion against God.
Ezekiel 28, Isaiah 14
4. We are in an “invisible war” with temporal and eternal consequences. Ephesians 6
5. We face a formidable, but defeated foe. Colossians 2:15
6. We fight **from** victory, not **for** victory. 1 John 4:4
7. Ignorance of his tactics is lethal. 2 Corinthians 11:3-14

Perceptions to challenge

1. Two common errors – C.S. Lewis
2. Our view of “diabolical” vs. God’s
3. A lesson from “The Screwtape Letters”

*A complete study of spiritual warfare is available in the book, Small Group study guide, or audio series, The Invisible War by Chip Ingram. Available at www.LivingontheEdge.org

A pattern to recognize

Acts 6

- The Context – **RAPID** growth/change.
- The Complaint – **UNMET** needs.
- The Core - differences are fertile ground for **DIVISION** when growth/change creates real or perceived unmet needs.
- The Cure – “New wine demands new wineskins.” - Jesus

Principles to practice at the first sign of disunity

1. Don't be **DEFENSIVE**; listen objectively. Acts 6:1
2. Get to the **CORE ISSUE**; refuse to blame. Acts 6:2
3. Seek outside **HELP**; the “3rd” alternative. Acts 6:3
4. Be **FLEXIBLE**; accept that roles and priorities will always change, in healthy, growing environments. Acts 6:4
5. Refuse to **FEAR**; change means “different,” not wrong. Acts 6:5-7
6. **BEWARE**; our perceived loss of “control/power” makes us vulnerable to divisive words and/or behavior. Acts 6:8-15

A prayer to ponder

*^{11b} “Holy Father, protect them by the power of Your name—the name You gave Me—so **that they may be one** as We are One. . . . ¹⁵My prayer is not that You take them out of the world but that You protect them from the evil one. . . . ²⁰ “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message, ²¹ **that all of them may be one**, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. ²² I have given them the glory that You gave Me, **that they may be one as We are One**: ²³ I in them and You in Me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that You sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me.”*

John 17:11b, 15, 20-23

Personal Application and Small Group Discussion Questions:

1. Is there a person or group that you need to forgive or seek forgiveness from, to answer Jesus’ prayer for unity?
2. Have you subconsciously allowed “differences” in personality, gender, culture, spiritual background, or ethnicity to put up barriers in relationships or make you feel superior to those not like you?
3. In view of this prayer by Jesus, is “division and disunity” diabolical in God’s eyes?
4. Could our acceptance of “moderate disunity” explain the lack of power and impact the church has in your geographical area?
5. Will you pray this week for Christ’s unity within the Church, your family, and relationships?

Introduction: Sometimes, what we're used to isn't always right!

- ✓ "The earth is flat."
- ✓ "The Bible must remain in Greek, Hebrew, or Latin."
- ✓ "Cigarettes make you cool."
- ✓ "Suntans make you healthy."

Tradition – "an inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action, or behavior (as a religious practice or social custom)" – "the passing down of elements of a culture from generation to generation; especially by oral communication."

(Webster's)

Thesis: Traditions are not wrong, but they are dangerous!

Traditions are the highway by which we pass on the values and principles that matter most; unfortunately, over time, the means (traditions) we practice to remember those values/truths can take precedence over the truths themselves.

<u>TRUTH</u>	(vs)	<u>TRADITION</u>
Liberates		Perpetuates
Gives Life		Nullifies God's Word
Change		Status Quo
Reality		Stability
Threatening		Comforting
Dynamic		Static

Satan's Agenda:

2 Timothy 3:5

To separate the truth from the tradition so deceptively that sincere people would diabolically “hold to a form of godliness, but deny its power.”

A case study – Acts 7

- **The Scene** - Stephen seized and accused. Acts 6:8-15
- **The Opposition** -
 - Blasphemy against God and Moses
 - Speaking against the Holy Place – The Temple
 - Speaking against the Law of Moses
- **The Historical Setting** - The Jews in Jesus' day had come to venerate and worship the **LAND** (Palestine), the **LAW** (given by Moses), and the **TEMPLE** (unique location) more than **the purpose** of the land, law, and temple.
- **Stephen's Defense** - He challenges the “status quo” tradition concerning the land, the law, and the temple with the **TRUTH** that demands faith, radical change, and following God's promised deliverer and Messiah **JESUS**.
- **Stephen's Defense Hinges on Three Timeless Truths:**
 1. God's agenda has always been based on His **PROMISES**, which necessitates progression and **CHANGE**.
 2. God's **BLESSINGS** and purpose have never been restricted to Palestine, the Temple, or the Jewish people.
 3. God's people have historically and repeatedly **REJECTED** God's man (prophets) and **God's plan** (deliverance).

Stephen's Message: Truth vs Tradition

Acts 7:1-8

Abraham

Location - **Mesopotamia**
Promise - Land and descendants
Focus - To bless all nations
Faith means... **LEAVING**

Acts 7:9-16

Joseph

Location - **Egypt**
Promise - A dream and a position
Focus - Joseph's rejection and God's deliverance
Faith means... **ENDURING**

Acts 7:17-43

Moses

Location - **Midian**
Promise - You will deliver My people
Focus - God's Law given and rejected
Faith means... **RETURNING**

Acts 7:44-50

Joshua

Location - **Wilderness**
Promise - Victory over enemies
Focus - Tabernacle's purpose, temple's limitations
(Isaiah 66:1-6)
Faith means... breaking through **TRADITION**

Acts 7:51-59

Jesus

Location - Our **Hearts**
Promise - Eternal life, deliverance from
sin and death, fulfillment of the Law
Focus - Rejection and killing of Jesus Messiah
Faith means... refusing to **COMPROMISING** the **TRUTH**

Summary = You received the law (tradition), but did not obey it (truth).

Lessons from Stephen's life and message:

1. Truth demands **TRANSFORMATION**. James 1:22-25
2. The basis of God's blessings is **RELATIONAL**, not ritual. Matthew 15:1-20
3. Perverted traditions must be **EXPOSED** and abandoned. Acts 7
4. Truth-bearer's refuse to accept the **STATUS QUO**
in their life, their relationships, and their sphere of influence.

Application Questions for Personal and Small Group Use:

1. What positive traditions have helped you experience and walk intimately with Christ?
2. What "status quo" issues need to be evaluated in your life and relationships? How have they subtly thwarted your growth?
3. How specifically can you focus on God's promise for your life and walk by faith? Who or what is holding you back?
4. What habits aren't wrong, but are unprofitable for your spiritual growth and development?
5. Is there a situation that needs you to be a truth bearer? How can you do it with humility and gentleness?

Introduction: When subtlety doesn't work

Satan has two tactics:

Intimidation – “to make fearful, to compel or deter by acts or threats, to terrorize – causing alarm, fright, or dread with the apprehension of violence, injury or death. To induce fear through a sense of inferiority; to bully, or cow resulting in a broken spirit and loss of courage.”

(Webster's)

Isolation – “to set apart from others; to cut off, separate, seclude.”

(Webster's)

Peter gives us two helpful things to remember:

The Warning

*“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a **roaring lion** looking for someone **to devour**. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.”*

1 Peter 5:8-9

The Promise

“And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To Him be the power forever and ever. Amen.”

1 Peter 5:10-11

God's answer to intimidation and isolation:

Acts 8

- **The Context** - Stephen martyred Acts 7

- **The Result** - Persecution and Dispersion Acts 8:1-8
 - Satan's strategy to **DESTROY** through **INTIMIDATION** and isolation.

 - God's purpose to **DEPLOY** through **SUFFERING** and proclamation.

 - The Truth - Sometimes our worst times are God's best times to use our lives.

 - Application – Fear not! **PREACH** the Word! Hebrews 4:12

The Confrontation: Good vs. Evil

Acts 8:9-17

- Simon intimidates through demonic sorcery.

- Philip liberates through God's Word.

- The Truth - The power is in the **MESSAGE**, not the messenger.

- Application - Fear not! Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.

1 John 4:4

The Warning: Genuine vs. Counterfeit Faith

Acts 8:18-25

- The Truth – Intellectual ascent and external ritual does not constitute **SAVING** faith.
- Application – Fear not! Settle the issue **TODAY**.

The Scope: God’s plan unfolding

Acts 8:26-40

*“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

- Philip obeys a **PROMPTING** by the Holy Spirit.
- God had **PREPARED** a heart to hear.
- The Truth - God is sovereignly working in the lives of people all around you, all the time.
- Application - Fear Not! **BOLDLY** share the Gospel every day, in every way.

◆ **Summary** = The Matthew 28:20 Principle

Application Questions for Personal and Small Group Use:

1. How aware are you that you are in a spiritual battle? What present difficulty might be a hidden opportunity to share Christ?
2. How has fear/intimidation kept you from boldly sharing Christ's love and message with others?
3. What new insight did you receive concerning how difficulty and suffering, even persecution, can be used by God to fulfill His plans?
4. Which of the four applications have "your name on it" to apply?
5. Who could you share your "next step" application with, to gain support and encouragement to follow God's plan for your life?

Introduction: Death by lethal religion

- We become anesthetized.
- We become paralyzed into patterns.
- Our hearts become closed.

Religion – “to acquire a deep conviction of the validity of a religious belief or practice.”

Root – old French/Latin – religio – to fear the supernatural; religarē – to tie up, to bind (state of a life bound by vows)

(Webster’s)

Jesus’ Commentary on Religion – Matthew 23

Question –

What is the difference between dead religion and a living relationship with God?

Pharisee – Clean

Focus = Death

Subject = Murderer

Jesus = Rebukes

Eyes = Blinded

Becomes An Invalid

“Get Up” – “Go where I will tell what you must do.”

Healed = To carry His message to the Gentiles

Healed = By the name of Jesus

“Get Up” – “All Lydda comes to see what Jesus has

Invalid Begins to Walk

Eyes = Opened

Jesus = Resurrects

Subject = Doer of good works

Focus = Life

Tanner – Unclean

Dead Religion vs. Living Relationship
Acts 9 – A Study in Contrasts

Religion
results in
control, fear
and
DEATH!

180°
Conversion

Acts 9:20-22

100% Called
to Mission

Relationship
results in
power, love
and
LIFE!

Lessons we must learn about religion:

1. Religion focuses on **ACCEPTANCE** from the outside-in; life occurs from the inside-out.
2. Religion is rooted in **PERFORMANCE**, life is rooted in **GRACE**.
3. Sincerity and **DEVOTION** are no substitute for truth.
4. Religion is easy to spot in others and nearly **INVISIBLE** to ourselves.
5. It is God's **MERCY** that rocks our world to reveal our **RELIGION** and birth a fresh **NEW LIFE**.

Application Questions for Personal and Small Group Use:

1. Where have you seen religion bring death in others? In yourself?
2. Read Matthew 23 and discuss Jesus' commentary on religion.
3. Where has religious thinking crept into your life?
4. What specific action do you sense God leading you to take?

Introduction: Operation “Insulation”

- We are all born into a cultural **BIAS**.
- Apart from interaction outside “our group,” we grow up assuming “our view” accurately defines reality.
- Generations of socialization and **INDOCTRINATION** create barriers at best and **hatred at worst** with those who are different from ourselves.
- **Internal** inaccurate assessment (pride) and **external** inaccurate assessment (prejudice) result in the fulfillment of Satan’s agenda – to kill, steal, and destroy.

Pride – “a high or inordinate opinion of one’s own dignity, importance, merit, or superiority, whether as cherished in the mind or as displayed in behavior.”

(Webster’s)

Prejudice – (1) : “preconceived judgment or opinion (2) : an adverse opinion or learning formed without just grounds or before sufficient knowledge.”

:“an irrational attitude of hostility directed against an individual, a group, a race, or their supposed characteristics.”

(Webster’s)

The Problem: Prejudice creates walls between individuals and groups so the Gospel cannot move from one group to another.

The Context – Historically and culturally

The Story – The **GOSPEL** smashes hundreds of years of prejudice and hatred through an enlisted soldier and fisherman.

How did it happen?

- Cornelius' vision Acts 10:1-8
- Peter's vision Acts 10:9-16
- Messengers arrive in Joppa Acts 10:17-23a
- Peter's reception by Cornelius Acts 10:23b-33
- Peter's sermon Acts 10:34-43
- Gentiles "grafted" into the Church Acts 10:44-48

How to break the power of prejudice:

1. God is working in places and among people we **assume** He doesn't. Acts 10:1-8

Practice = **ASSUME** God is speaking to everyone, everywhere and wants to use you.

2. Prayer is a **prerequisite** to seeing others differently than our cultural bias. Acts 10:9-16

Practice = **ASK** God to let you see others the way He does.

3. Walls of prejudice often come down a few **bricks** at a time. Acts 10:17-23

Practice = Take a **SMALL** step this week to connect with someone much different than yourself.

4. Obedience to God often **alienates** us from "our group" and is the **price tag** to take the good news across cultures. Acts 10:23b-33

Practice = Choose to **PLEASE** God, not men.

5. The "good news" of the Gospel is for **all** people, of **all** backgrounds, in **all** places. Acts 10:34-43

Practice = **SHARE** the difference Jesus has made in your life with someone this week.

6. God refuses to allow Himself or His **ways** to be put in a box. Acts 10:44-48

Practice = **REFUSE** to assume that God will work in others the same way He's worked in your life.

Application Questions for Personal and Small Group Use:

1. Why do we all have some measure of prejudice toward others – even if we don't realize it?
2. How have you seen or experienced prejudice affect people negatively?
3. Which of the six principles/practices covered in this message spoke to you today? Why?
4. Who or what group (kind of people) do you find yourself pre-judging?
5. This week, how could you “let the walls fall down?” (i.e. pray for them, get around and understand them, share a meal, ask questions, ask for forgiveness)
6. How will our inter-generational, inter-racial, and inter-socio-economic unity and love impact our geographical area according to Jesus? John 13:34-35

Introduction:

1. What does it mean to “be generous”?

- **Definition:** Showing a readiness to freely give or share money and other valuable things; providing more than the amount needed or normal: abundant, ample; showing kindness and concern for others.

- **Synonyms:** Liberal, lavish, magnanimous, openhanded, free-handed, bountiful, unselfish, ungrudging, benevolent, charitable, big-hearted, free, noble, good.

- **Antonyms:** Mean, stingy, selfish, meager, miserly, unwilling to share, cheap, greedy, tight, unkind, thrift, self-seeking.

Summary: We all have thoughts, words, time, stuff, money, and influence to share with others.

2. Why is living generously so important?

1. Generosity is commanded by God. 1 Timothy 6:17-19
2. Generosity is the antidote to idolatry and materialism. Luke 16:1-15
3. Generosity today determines your harvest tomorrow. 2 Corinthians 9:6-7
Luke 6:38
4. Generosity expresses God's love and kindness to others. Matthew 5:16
5. Generosity results in joy to the giver. 2 Corinthians 9:11
6. Generosity results in praise and thanksgiving to God by the recipients. 2 Corinthians 9:11-12
7. Generosity is God's method to fund His Kingdom agenda until His return. 1 Corinthians 16:1-2
8. Generosity requires us to put our finances and priorities in order. Matthew 6:33
9. Generosity grows our faith and develops our intimacy with Christ. Matthew 5 & 6
10. Generosity is a prerequisite to claiming God's promise to meet all our needs. Philippians 4:19

Habitually generous people are happier, have deeper relationships, and live longer.
Scientific research¹

¹Dr. Stephen Past and Jill Neimark – Why Good Things Happen to Good People: How to Live a longer, Healthier Life by the Simple Act of Giving

Summary: Living generously is the most logical, wise, and rewarding way to arrange our lives and resources.

3. What are our first steps to living generously?

- Recognize it's a **JOURNEY**.
- Re-evaluate your view of **GOD**.
 - Exodus 32-33
 - Genesis 12
 - Psalm 84:11
 - James 1:19
- God is **EAGER** to bless your life.

Summary: We do not own or deserve **ANYTHING**.

4. What keeps us from living generously?

- Human **NATURE** Romans 3:23
- Delusional **THINKING**
- Irrational **FEAR**
- Greed and **PRIDE**

Summary: Living generously requires wisdom, honesty, practice, faith, and humility.

5. How can you become more generous?

- Take daily “baby steps” with words, thoughts, time, stuff, and money, and record them.
- Celebrate, daily, God’s blessings and record them.
- Give your **FIRST** and best portion back to God each payday.

Summary: I will step out in faith this week to grow in generosity by...

Discussion Questions:

1. What is keeping you from living generously? What steps will you take today to change this?

2. Do you need to re-evaluate the way you view God? What passages from scripture can you use to help you view God for who He really is?

Resources:

I Like Giving – Brad Formsma
The God Guarantee – Jack Alexander
The Genius of Generosity – Chip Ingram

Introduction: What is a manifesto?

Definition: A published, verbal declaration of the intentions, motives, or views of the issuer, be it an individual or group. It usually accepts a previously published opinion or *promotes a new idea with prescriptive notions for carrying out changes the author believes should be made.*

My Generosity Manifesto

- I want to be known in Heaven and on Earth as an extraordinarily kind and generous person.

You can become an extraordinarily kind & generous person

A picture to emulate - “Henry”

A process to follow - “Seeds”

The Creation – *Genesis*: “Life & Likeness”

The Cultivation – *Genesis 2*: “The Perfect Garden”

The Choice – *Genesis 3*: “Paradise Lost”

The Conflict – *Genesis 4 – Revelation 20*: “Seeds at War”

The Conqueror – *1 Corinthians 15:20-26; 54-58*: “Christ the First Fruits”

The Consummation – *Revelation 21-22*: “Back to Eden”

A practice to start - “Sowing”

- We reap **WHERE** we sow...

⁷ Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

Galatians 6:7-8

- We reap **HOW MUCH** we sow...

⁶ Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

2 Corinthians 9:6-7

- Kingdom sowing is **COUNTER – INTUITIVE**.

*⁹ Honor the LORD from your wealth
And from the first of all your produce;*

*¹⁰ So your barns will be filled with plenty
And your vats will overflow with new wine.*

Proverbs 3:9-10

*²⁴ There is one who scatters, and yet increases all the more,
And there is one who withholds what is justly due, and yet it results only in want.*

*²⁵ The generous man will be prosperous,
And he who waters will himself be watered.*

Proverbs 11:24-25

Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.”

Luke 6:38

- We never **REAP** in the same season we sow.

⁹Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. ¹⁰So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.

Galatians 6:9-10

Discussion Questions:

1. What kind of seeds are you sowing spiritually? Relationally? Financially?
2. What do our money and time allocations tell us about our genuine level of kindness and generosity?
3. Why did Jesus emphasize “seeds” and “money” so much in His teaching?
4. What could keep you from signing the 90 Day Generosity Manifesto?