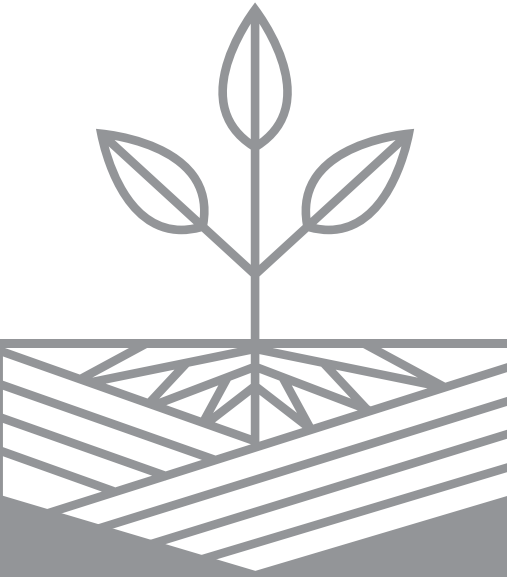


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A 6-SESSION STUDY
FOR DIALOGUE IN
COMMUNITY AROUND
THE SCRIPTURES



BECOMING A DISCIPLE

First Principles of the Faith

BY JEFF REED

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These materials are designed to integrate with BILD-International resources, which are designed to help churches train leaders.

All Scripture, unless otherwise noted, is from the New American Standard Bible.

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THE GOSPEL MESSAGE 1

Embracing the gospel is the first step in becoming a disciple. The gospel literally means “good news”—the good news of Jesus Christ. Before we can proceed in our Christian faith, we must understand the gospel in its simplest form—the way the Apostles taught it to the Early Church. We will begin this study booklet, *Becoming a Disciple*, by studying a passage in Acts 10:34-48. This is one of Peter’s sermons; in fact, it is the very first gospel presentation to the Gentiles (all non-Jewish people). This message by Peter is an excellent example of the gospel that was proclaimed by the Apostles. The Early Church referred to the gospel proclaimed as the *kerygma* (the New Testament Greek word for “proclamation”). Before anyone was baptized and received into the churches, they needed to understand the *kerygma*.



Study the Scriptures

READ THE PASSAGE: ACTS 10:34-48

Think Through the Questions:

1. What was the core content of the message that Peter preached? What exactly did he say about Jesus?
2. What did Peter say they needed to do to have their sins forgiven?
Believe what?
3. What happened to them when they believed?

Summarize the Core Teaching of the Passage:

Write a paragraph, outline, annotate, or chart your conclusions— whatever best communicates for you. Be sure to comment on the content of Peter’s message, especially concerning who Christ was and what was required for forgiveness of sins.

Core teaching of Acts 10:34-48



Consult the Scholars

The following comments are designed to help you better understand the passage and to stimulate your thinking on the implications of the teaching.

Read and Reflect on this Brief Commentary on Acts 10:34-48:

It is important to understand the context of Peter’s message in Acts. You may want to take time to read the context—Acts 10:1-11:18. Up to this time in Acts, the gospel had only gone out to the Jewish people in Jerusalem and eventually to the surrounding areas. About 40,000 had become Christians in Jerusalem, but there were still no Gentile believers. This whole narrative about Cornelius, which began in Acts 10:1, is about the gospel going to the Gentiles for the first time.

Cornelius was a Roman (Gentile) military man who was a religious type. He looked favorably on the Jewish people, even giving money to them. He genuinely sought to know God. However, Peter was slow to take the gospel to the Gentiles, as were most of the other church leaders. Therefore, God stepped in through a dream, directing Peter to go to Cornelius' house. When he got there, Cornelius asked to hear the gospel.

So what did Peter tell him? The essential facts Cornelius needed to know about Jesus Christ:

- Jesus was sent to Israel by God.
- He went about doing good.
- The Jews put Him to death—but God raised Him up.
- The Apostles saw Him, ate with Him, and He ordered them to preach this message.
- He is the judge of the living and the dead—and all who believe (trust) in Him will have their sins forgiven.
- All of this was predicted by the prophets in the Old Testament (over 300 prophecies predicted the person and work of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament).

Every message in Acts given by Peter and Paul focused on the person and work of Jesus Christ. This is what the Early Church called the *kerygma*—the proclamation. All who believed in the proclamation were considered true believers.

The Gentiles in Cornelius' house believed (inferred here, stated in Acts 11:17), received the Spirit of God, and finally were baptized. The Spirit was given to those who believed and came to live in them, as Jesus had promised in John 13-17. In this instance, the mark of receiving the Spirit was speaking in tongues. God gave this same sign to the Jewish believers when they received the Spirit in Acts 2. In this instance, this phenomenon—speaking to someone in his own language, a language that the speaker did not know—was a sign to the Jewish people of God, and was predicted in the Old Testament. This sign is what helped convince them that the gospel was really going to the Gentiles (Acts 11:13-18).

What is clear from the passage? The message is clear—Jesus is the judge of all of life, and He will forgive the sins of all who believe in Him. Once we believe, we receive the Spirit of God. Then we need to be baptized, which is a sign of identifying with Christ and His new believing community—the Church. In sessions 2 and 3 we will deal with the issue of baptism and the work of the Spirit in our lives.

Read and Reflect on Key Quotes:

“...C. H. Dodd, one of the greatest New Testament scholars this century, has shown that there was a basic pattern underlying the early preaching of the gospel. It was a rough outline, which of course was not slavishly followed, but provided a basic structure for the preachers to memorize and use as they thought fit. This pattern they used ran something like this (consult Dodd’s book *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* for the details). ‘The age of fulfillment has dawned, as the Scriptures foretold. God has sent His messiah, Jesus. He died in shame upon a cross. God raised him again from the tomb. He is now Lord, at God’s right hand. The proof of this is the Holy Spirit whose effects you see. This Jesus will come again at the end of history. Repent, believe, and be baptized.’”¹

This is taken from Michael Green’s book *Evangelism Now & Then*. Green is an Englishman who has developed an expertise in evangelism and the Early Church.

In *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*, by C. H. Dodd, there is a summary of the Kerygma of Paul. Dodd compiled Paul’s teaching and wrote it in credal form:

“The prophecies are fulfilled, and the new Age is inaugurated by the coming of Christ.

He was born of the seed of David.

He died according to the Scriptures, to deliver us out of the present evil age.

He was buried.

He rose on the third day according to the Scriptures.

He is exalted at the right hand of God, as Son of God and Lord of quick and dead.

He will come again as Judge and Savior of men.”²

This is basically what is recorded in the sermons in Acts and in the gospel summaries in Paul’s letters to the churches. This is the essence of the gospel proclaimed by the Apostles. If the early converts really believed this, you can see why it changed their whole view of life.

Record any insights from the brief commentary and quotes:



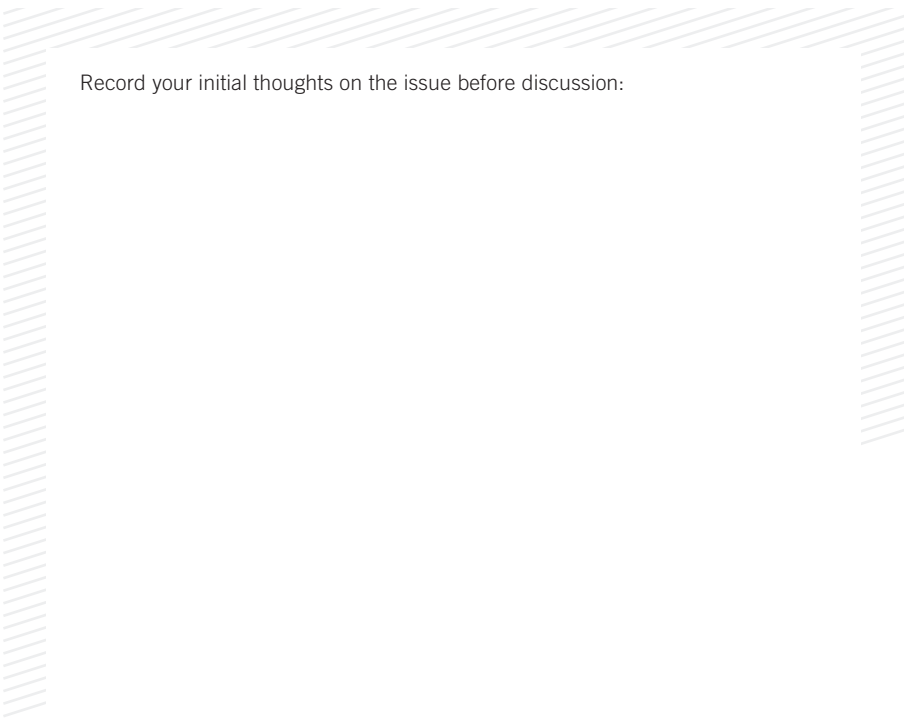
Think Through the Issues

Too often today, the gospel is presented in a way that is significantly different from how it was presented in the New Testament. In our culture, we market everything—even the gospel. To get people to buy it, we want to explain it in simple steps, often without the entire picture. The questions below will guide you in thinking through and discussing what it means to embrace the gospel in today's world.

ISSUE: Your own reception of the gospel

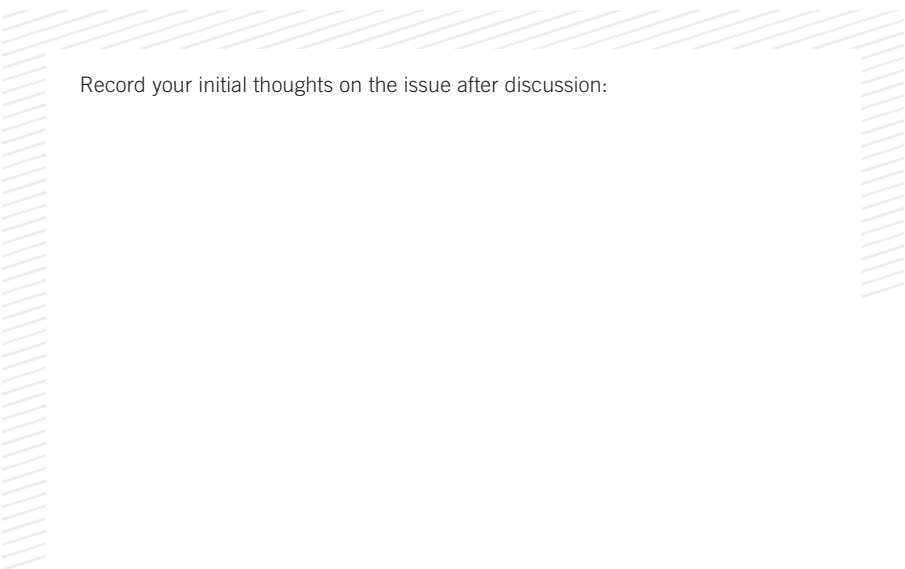
Think Through the Issue Before Discussion:

1. How was the gospel first explained to you? Was it different from what you have studied so far in this guide?
2. Did those who shared the gospel with you leave any parts out? Which ones?
3. Why do you think the Apostles included all of the elements they did in their gospel proclamation?
4. When encountering the gospel, what might be possible effects of not getting the whole picture?



Record your initial thoughts on the issue before discussion:

Discuss the issue in your small group.



Record your initial thoughts on the issue after discussion:



Apply the Principles


It is now time to respond to what you have studied and discussed. Take your time on this section.

Think Back Through the First Three Steps.

Design an Application for Your Life.

Complete the assigned project and record any additional applications.

There are two aspects to the assigned project. The first part is to write your summary of the gospel message. The second part is to record your testimony and a commitment to share it with someone.



— continued

It is possible, at this point, that you may not be ready to receive the gospel. If that is the case, here are several recommendations for your continued search.

1. Read the Gospel of John
2. Read one of the following books:
 - a. *Mere Christianity*, by C. S. Lewis
 - b. *Loving God*, by Charles Colson