COUNTERCULTURE STUDIES

SESSION 1: CULTURE

ACTS 17:22-34

MAIN POINT

These days in our culture require authentic zeal, and real passion for God.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

> **On what social issue are you most likely to be courageous, outspoken, and active? Why?**
>
> **On what social issues are you most likely to remain silent, uncertain, or inactive? Why?**

In a rapidly shifting cultural landscape, it is tempting to only take a stand for those issues which those around us also take a stand for. Our supposed social justice quickly becomes a selective social injustice. Zeal for the glory of God does not allow us to pick and choose what we stand for and does not allow us to be silent on those things which God condemns. The same gospel that compels us to speak about marital fidelity compels us to speak about sexual purity. The same gospel compels us to speak about sex trafficking and all forms of sexual immorality, poverty and abortion. These issues should provoke our holy anger, and we cannot remain be silent.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

WATCH SESSION ONE OF COUNTERCULTURE.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 17:16-21.

What happened to Paul when he saw the culture around him in Athens? How did he respond? When have you experienced a similar feeling?

In this session, David mentioned Paul's holy anger. When is it right to be angry? How can you tell if your anger is righteous anger?

What made the speakers want to hear more from Paul? How does taking a contrite, courageous, and compassionate stand make people curious about what we have to say?

Was Paul afraid of sounding strange to the people of Athens? What about the gospel message is strange to unbelievers?

When Paul saw the city of Athens was full of idols, his spirit was provoked within him. The glory of God being mocked by the city of idols was more than Paul could take. His zeal for the glory of God would not allow him to be silent. Paul went from synagogues to the marketplace to talk to people and tell others about the glory of God. So strange was the gospel message to a few of the philosophers that they asked Paul to come explain his strange beliefs at the Areopagus. When our culture dishonors the glory of God, our zeal for God compels us to act.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 17:22-31.

What titles of God do we see in Paul's message at the Areopagus?

How did Paul use the culture around him to make a bridge into the gospel message? What are some bridges in your culture to the gospel?

Trace the 5 essential threads of the gospel in Paul's sermon. What are they and where do you see each thread?

Which part of the gospel do you have the most difficulty talking about or explaining? How could you better prepare yourself to proclaim this part of God's message?

Taking cues from the Athenian culture, Paul made a bridge to the gospel. He explained how God is the creator, sustainer, ruler, savior, Father, king, and judge of the whole world, and methodically shared the gospel message. Many commentators have called this a sermon, but it is more like Paul being a Christian explaining His beliefs, something each and every Christian should be able to do. Paul spoke the gospel clearly. We have the same opportunity each and every day.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 17:32-34.

What variety of responses do you notice in these verses?

Read Romans 1:16. What unique power does the gospel message have? Why should we continue to share the gospel every chance we get?

When Paul was finished speaking, there was no wide spread revival that broke out in the city of Athens. Some mocked Paul, some asked questions, but some believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and were saved. All God asks is for us to be obedient and speak the gospel whenever we have the opportunity to do so. Only time and eternity can will tell what God can and will do with faithful gospel witness.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Which culture issues incite your holy anger? Which issues should incite your holy anger, but do not?

How do we begin to, like Paul, to view all cultural issues through the lens of zeal for the glory of God?

Do you know the gospel well enough to speak it to another person? Practice sharing the gospel using the following threads: the character of God, the sinfulness of men, the sufficiency of Christ, the necessity of faith, and the urgency of eternity.

PRAYER

Pray for God to make you zealous for His glory and passionate for people's salvation. Ask for God to give you eyes to see your culture with His eyes. Pray for a bold and courageous spirit to speak the gospel to any who will listen.

COMMENTARY

ACTS 17:16-34.

Paul and his fellow missionaries traveled to Thessalonica where he followed his usual pattern of beginning his witness in the synagogue. After preaching there, opposition developed; and Paul had to abandon his synagogue witness. Many believed, however, (17:1-4). Eventually Jewish opponents stirred up a riot against Paul and Silas, and they went to Berea, 50 miles southwest of Thessalonica. Paul found the synagogue there more receptive to his teaching and led the people in serious Bible study. Jews eventually came from Thessalonica and incited crowds in Berea against Paul. Paul fled to Athens in the southern Greek province of Achaia (17:10-15).

In Athens Paul encountered all sorts of people from many religious backgrounds. Athens was the intellectual center of the Roman empire, filled with teachers and students of every persuasion. Paul was especially upset by the many idols throughout the city. It was filled with temples and shrines, lavishly decorated with images of the gods.

Paul was disgusted by the idolatry. It was a testimony to the polytheistic error of Greek religion. They worshiped the many gods of Olympus rather than the one true God. In Athens Paul preached in the synagogue on Sabbaths and on weekdays to whoever passed by in the marketplace. The Greek philosophers were curious about the new message Paul was preaching. The philosophers led Paul to a meeting of the Areopagus.

Paul began by seeking to win the good will of his audience and sought to gain attention by introducing something thoroughly familiar to the Athenians: the altar to an unknown god. The idol Paul referred to was a particularly blatant example of the religiosity of the Athenians. They had room for all the gods, known or unknown. Paul seized his opportunity to introduce them to the one true God. He proclaimed to them the God they did not know was the only One that counts, the only One that exists. In speaking of their ignorance of this God, Paul was striking at the very self-identity of the philosophers.

Although Paul confined himself to clear Bible teachings, he presented them in a manner that would have been understood by the Athenians. Paul first presented God as Creator. Stoics were pantheistic. They did not believe in a divine Creator. He drew a further conclusion that the Creator of all that exists needs nothing from His creation such as idols or any other external form of human piety.

Paul's first teaching focused on God's distance from us; the second emphasized His nearness. Paul argued that we turn things upside down when we worship idols. Idolatry fashions God after earthly likenesses. That leads to worshiping the creation rather than the Creator. We are truly God's image when we know Him through faith in Christ and reflect Him in our lives, living so as to point beyond ourselves to God.

The Athenians' idolatry was a sign of their sinfulness Paul proceeded to the next step: he called on his hearers to repent, to turn from their sins to God. God had overlooked their sins of ignorance in the sense that He had not brought to them the judgment they deserved. He had instead sent the gospel to them. God now commanded them to repent. If we fail to repent in light of the gospel, only judgment remains for us.

Paul's address was cut short by mockers who found the idea of Jesus' resurrection to be foolish. (See 1 Cor. 1:23-24.) A second group were unconvinced, but still open. They wanted to hear more. But the third group believed.

SESSION 2: WEALTH

1 TIMOTHY 6:6-19.

MAIN POINT

The path to great gain is being content in God not in acquiring wealth.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

WATCH SESSION TWO OF COUNTERCULTURE.

David started this session with many statistics about world poverty. Which one of these shocked you the most? Why?

What does it mean to be content? If you were honest, what standard of living do you expect to be content?

By any standard, modern Americans are the wealthiest people who have ever lived. When thousands upon thousands die every day from preventable disease, lack of sustainable food and clean water, living a life of luxury is no longer an option for the Christian. During Jesus' ministry, He identified with the poorest and most marginalized in society and gave them honor and dignity. We must be content with having necessities and be cautious when acquiring excess. We will take nothing with us when we die, so we live for a future kingdom instead of building a bigger kingdom in this place.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 TIMOTHY 6:6-10.

What did Paul identify as the path to great gain? How is this different than what contemporary culture sees as the path to great gain?

How would you define "necessities"? How do you think someone in the majority world would define "necessities"? How do we reconcile these two viewpoints?

What language did Paul use to describe the drive and desire to constantly acquire more in verse 9-10? Is this a problem you treat as seriously as Paul did? Why or why not?

How have you seen money be a destructive force in your own heart and life? In the lives of those you know?

Godliness with contentment is great gain. These words from the apostle Paul provide key and crucial insights for how Christians should relate to wealth and possessions in this life. Chances are you are among the wealthiest people who have ever lived. We are tempted all the time to find our contentment in what we own instead of who owns us. The love of money and the desire for riches lead to live of self destruction and self mutilation. For followers of Christ, living for more in this life is not an option.

What are a few ways you could simplify you standard of living to reach greater contentment in God?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 TIMOTHY 6:11-19.

How is Jesus Christ described in verse 11-16? How does coming face to face with a God like this make all the riches in the world seem like filthy rags?

What makes riches uncertain? How do we maintain focus on the giver as opposed to the good gifts He provides?

Do you think of yourself as rich by your culture's standards? By the world's standards? Why or why not?

According to verse 17-19, how should rich people relate to the gifts God has given them?

What does it mean to be rich in good works? What kind of foundation does this store up and prepare for us in the world to come?

Our possessions will always let us down at the point we need them the most—when we die. Instead we have a rich inheritance in Jesus Christ. All believers, regardless of their poverty or wealth in this world, are truly rich. Living in light of those riches causes us to reorient our thinking concerning earthly treasures. God has blessed us to be a blessing to others. All Christians, without exception, should give of their resources to help reach the lost and dying world.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How can you better steward what God has given you to radically give to the desperate physical and spiritual needs in the world? What are one or two things you could do differently?

How should the gospel affect how we relate to the good things God gives? How do we remain appreciative for all the things God gives?

What is God leading you to share? To sell? To sacrifice?

PRAYER

Pray for God to help you be content in Him alone and avoid the dangers of excess and continually seeking after more. Close by asking God to show you those areas where you can sacrifice to give more of your material wealth to build His kingdom.

COMMENTARY

1 TIMOTHY 6:6-21.

Paul expanded his brief reference to materialism among the false teachers (v. 5) into a pointed review of the dangers of greed. Addressing his words specifically to those who willed to become rich, he affirmed that godliness and not wealth brings great gain (v. 6). He explained two reasons for which contentment should be a companion of godliness (vv. 7-8). In vv. 9-10 he presented the desire for wealth as a trap that plunges the unwary into spiritual ruin.

6:6. Paul commended the benefits of godliness with contentment in v. 6 (see Ps 37:3-5). Paul used the word "contentment" to refer to an attitude of mind independent of externals and dependent only on God. He was not advocating godless self-sufficiency as a source of contentment. Paul believed that true sufficiency is Christ-sufficiency (Phil 4:13). Paul was affirming that those who felt that godliness leads to gain were indeed correct, for there is great profit (spiritual profit) in a brand of godliness that possesses a contentment in the realm of its material possessions. True godliness is a means of much gain, for it promises benefits for this life and the next (4:8). Adding contentment to this godliness would promote gratitude for God's gracious gifts in this life (see 1 Tim 4:4-5).

6:7-8. Why do godliness and contentment represent great gain? Paul's "for" clause introduced an eschatological reason for this contentment. Since after a brief stay we shall depart this life as we came in, it is sheer folly to concern ourselves with earthly matters. Material gain is irrelevant, and greed is irrational (see Job 1:21). The second reason (v. 8) is that we must be content when we possess life's necessities. The term "clothing" is general enough to include both clothing and shelter, but the immediate context favors limiting it to personal possessions such as dress. Paul's words reflect the teaching of Jesus (Matt 6:25-34; Luke 12:22-31). Paul referred to food and clothing as symbols of life's necessities. What is actually a necessity will vary somewhat in different societies. However, all of us face the temptation of greedily coveting more than we need.

In these verses Paul warned that godliness is not a trait from which to make material profit (v. 5). True godliness has contentment for its companion (v. 6). Since we cannot take life's luxuries into God's presence, we should be content with life's necessities (vv. 7-8). Greed can find no place in an attitude like this.

6:9-10. Paul spoke the words of vv. 9-10 to those who "want to get rich" ("men who keep planning to get rich," Williams). There is no condemnation of wealth as such, and the words do not apply to someone who wistfully longs, "It would be nice to have more money." In v. 9 Paul painted three progressive pitfalls in which the willful wealth-seeker becomes entangled. The "desires" are "foolish" because instead of bringing gain, they only produce harm. Paul supported this warning about wealth with a contemporary proverb. We can make three comments about the proverb. First, it does not condemn money but the love of money. Second, it does not state that all evil comes from the love of money, but such misplaced love can cause a great variety of ("all kinds of") evil. It is incorrect to say that the love of money causes all sins. Ambition and sexual lust are also fertile breeding grounds of sin. Third, the wandering elders from Ephesus who had sold out to greed were living proof of this maxim. The concern about materialism Paul had expressed in v. 5 had become a reality in the false teachers. Judas and Ananias and Sapphira were New Testament figures who "drowned" because of this inordinate love.

There is a link between the "faith" of the gospel and the blessedness God promises to his people (6:10b; Ps 1). The denial of one negates the other. Some translations (e.g., "spiked themselves on many thorny griefs," NEB) capture the intensely painful idea behind the word "pierced." With these graphic words Paul concluded his description of the heretics, their false teaching, and their false practice. He now turned his attention to specific words of guidance for his beloved Timothy.

6:11. The beginning words, "But you," show that Timothy's behavior was to provide an utter contrast to that of the false teachers mentioned in vv. 3–10. The twin commands of v. 11 contain a warning and a challenge. Timothy was warned to flee the heresy, divisiveness, and greed that Paul

had denounced in vv. 3–10. He was challenged to “pursue” six virtues mentioned in three pairs. Each trait represents a must to insure Timothy’s effectiveness in his ministry. The term “righteousness” refers primarily to upright conduct before human beings, and “godliness” describes an open and obedient relationship before God. The words “faith” and “love” reflect trust in God and benevolence and goodwill toward others (see 2 Thess 1:3; Titus 2:2). Timothy would need “endurance” in order to guarantee staying power for his difficult task. He needed “gentleness” in order to deal effectively with cantankerous heretics and wavering believers.

6:12. Having urged Timothy to avoid the false vagaries of the heretics and to develop needed Christian graces, Paul gave directives for perseverance. First, he borrowed an image from the athletic sphere to urge Timothy to “keep up the good fight for the faith.” The metaphor can imply either running or boxing or wrestling. The use of the present tense for “fight” suggests a continuous struggle. Second, Paul used a command focusing on eschatology urging Timothy to continue in the contest. Depending on the context, Paul could present eternal life as a blessing to be realized at the end (here and in Rom 6:22) or as a present experience (2 Cor 4:10-12, though the expression differs in this passage). The fact that God had “called” Timothy to eternal life suggests that it was already in his grasp but not completely held. Paul’s command was intended to stir up Timothy to renewed vigor, but it does not imply that Timothy earned eternal life by self-effort. It suggests that “eternal life” is more of a goal toward which Timothy was to orient his efforts rather than a prize that God would give him as a reward for that effort. The fact that God had called him was an incentive for his response.

Paul turned from a series of admonitions to Timothy to give advice to those already rich. The preceding words on wealth in vv. 6-10 were spoken to those who aspired to wealth. As a final thought Paul spoke a word to those who already had it. The constructive advice here balances the more extreme prohibitions of the earlier passage. He did not condemn wealth, but he showed the added temptations the wealthy face. He was vitally concerned that Christians have the right attitude toward their wealth and make the proper use of it (cf. Luke 12:13-21; Ps 52:7).

6:17. Paul’s beginning reference to the “present world” suggests that the wealthy can have their wealth only in this age. It is good for this present world, but it does not convert automatically into blessedness in the world beyond. In this verse Paul contrasted right and wrong responses to the possession of wealth. A wrong response involves an arrogant attitude and the making of wealth as the “hope” of one’s life. As a deterrent to trusting in riches, Paul mentioned the transitory, uncertain nature of wealth. The word “uncertain” contains a reminder that it is by no means clear that riches will continue with the one who has them. The right response is to hope in a God who lavishes on his people all their needs. The statement implies that God does not give wealth to promote pride but that we might use and enjoy it in his will (cf. Jas 2:5; 4:13-14; 5:2-3). Paul’s sound advice walks the straight line between a world-denying asceticism and a self-centered indulgence. The advice promotes gratitude toward God for the benefits he bestows.

6:18. Paul mentioned four ways to use wealth wisely. “To do good” involves using wealth in a positive way instead of letting it feed a life of personal luxury. “To be rich in good deeds” pointed the wealthy in the direction in which they were to be truly rich, in the doing of good deeds. These two verbs probably include more than benevolence. The need for benevolence is emphasized in the next pair of terms. “To be generous” demands a liberal sharing of wealth with others. One who is “willing to share” shows that the generous act of giving is to spring from internal generosity. Paul was suggesting that genuine wealth is found in what we give, not what we have.

6:19. Paul outlined the outcome of such generosity by stressing two truths. First, he stressed that giving generously to the needy stores for the giver a future treasure. Paul was not advocating that the giver could earn salvation or favors from God. Good works are solid evidence of salvation and assure us that we have eternal life. Paul may have based these thoughts on such words as contained in Matt 6:19-21. The godless, on the other hand, lay up treasures for themselves of a different kind (Jas 5:1-5). Second, Paul stressed that generous actions allow the giver to lay hold of eternal life in the here and now. Paul had urged Timothy to lay hold of this

in v. 12. Here Paul expressed that taking hold of eternal life is a goal of the unselfish giving he had commanded. Christians who enter the life of love by unselfish behavior will enter gloriously into God's presence in the life to come.

HUMAN LIFE

GENESIS 3:1-24

MAIN POINT

We oppose sinful practices like abortion, slavery, and pornography because they distort the value of human life.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

> **In what ways does out society demonsrate how it values human life? In what ways does our society show that it does not value human life?**
>
> **How does the gospel compel action related to issues of human life?**

God is the Creator of all things, and human beings are the pinnacle of His creative work. Before sin entered the world, God created man and woman and said that it was “very good.” Human beings alone bear the image of their Creator. Each of us has a relationship with God that is distinct from all other created things. Though sin has marred the image of God in human life, we continue to recognize life, from beginning to end, as a precious gift from a God who loves us. From the unborn baby to the most elderly adult, human life is a good gift from God that the gospel compels us to defend.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

WATCH SESSION THREE OF COUNTERCULTURE.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GENESIS 1:1; 20-31.

What are the spiritual and practical implications of saying God is the Creator of all life?

Instead of saying things like "let the earth" and "let the waters," what did God say when creating humankind? Instead of speaking to creation, to whom was He speaking? Why does this matter?

What likeness do men and women uniquely share with God? What does it mean that we are made in the image of God?

How were man and women set apart with a distinct position among the created order? What did God declare at the end of the sixth day?

God created human life, so He determines its worth and value. Man isn't simply a more sophisticated or better adapted creature. We aren't distinct from other created things by a matter of degree. Humans are created in the image of God. We share a special relationship with God that no other created being experiences. Because of this, all human beings, from the beginning to the end of life, have dignity and worth.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GENESIS 3:1-24.

David mentioned that Genesis 3:1 is the first question in the Bible. Why is this significant?

Read 6:23. How does Paul use the word "wage" in this verse? What are the consequences of sin?

How did sin affect Adam's relationship with God? With Eve? With creation? How have you seen these relationships corrupted in your own life?

Re-read Genesis 3:15. Where do we see the gospel in these verses? How did God plan to use a human to redeem all humans?

In Genesis 3:1, Satan turned a command from God to a question about God, and the results were immediate. Sin has caused each of us to reject God's Word, spurn God's authority, and deny God's character. Sin has destroyed our relationship with God, other people, and the rest of God's creation. It led to immediate spiritual death and will lead to eventual physical death. Yet, tucked into the middle of one of the most devastating chapters in the Bible, we see the hope of the gospel: that a seed from a woman would crush the head of the serpent.

How has sin distorted your own view human life?

What hope does the gospel promise to victims of abortion, slavery, pornography, and other issues that devalue human life?

What are the costs of not standing up for the value of human life?

We oppose abortion because it destroys the beauty of human life, work to end slavery because it denies the equality of human life, and fight pornography because it denigrates the dignity of human life. These issues and many more devalue the intrinsic worth of human beings. Because human life matters to God, it should matter to His church. The gospel calls us to counter culture on these issues because we have confidence in every life that God has chosen to create.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How is the view of human life we talked about today different from the popular cultural views of human life? What makes a Christian view of human life counter cultural?

Virtually no one you encounter is likely to agree with or by sympathetic towards human slavery, while many will have more lenient, accepting, or affirming view points on topics like abortion and pornography. Why must we oppose all three no matter how our culture regards them? How can you consistently affirm the value of human life?

Practically, how can you consistently affirm the value of human life in all your choices?

PRAYER

Pray that we would a people who value human live from the womb to the grave. Thank God for giving you life and the ability to know and follow Him. Ask God to burden your heart for the dignity and the sanctity of human life.

COMMENTARY

GENESIS 1-11 .

GOD'S CREATION GOAL (1:1–2:25)

Primeval history describes the accounts of the creation, the fall, the flood, the tower of Babel, and the distribution of the human race. It embraces all those facets of human experience that led up to and necessitated the call of Abraham to covenant service to the Lord.

The two accounts of creation (1:1–2:3 and 2:4–25) are designed respectively to demonstrate the all-wise and all-powerful sovereignty of God (first account) and His special creation of humanity to rule for Him over all other created things (second account). Though the creation stories are fundamentally theological and not scientific, nothing in them is contradicted by modern scientific understanding. Genesis insists that all the forms of life were created "after their kind" (1:11–12, 21, 24–25); that is, they did not evolve across species lines. Most importantly, the man and the woman were created as "the image of God" (1:26). In other words, humanity was created to represent God on the earth and to rule over all things in His name (1:26–28). God's desire was to bless humanity and to enjoy relationship with them.

SIN'S CONSEQUENCES/GOD'S GRACE (3:1–11:32)

The privilege of dominion also carried responsibility and limitation. Being placed in the garden to "work it and watch over it" represented human responsibility (2:15). The tree in the midst of the garden from which humans should not eat represented those areas of dominion reserved to Yahweh alone. The man and woman, however, disobeyed God and ate of the tree. They "died" with respect to their covenant privileges (2:17) and suffered the indictment and judgment of their Sovereign. This entailed suffering and sorrow and eventual physical death. God had created man and woman to enjoy fellowship with Himself and with each other. Their disobedience alienated them from God and each other.

The pattern of sin and its consequences set in the garden is replayed throughout Genesis in the accounts of Cain, the generation of the flood, and the men of Sodom. The fall means that we humans are predisposed to sin. Though God punishes sin, sin does not thwart God's ultimate, gracious purpose for His human creation. Embedded in the curse was the gleam of a promise that the offspring of the woman would someday lead the human race to triumph.

The consequences of sin became clear in the second generation when Cain, the oldest son, killed Abel his brother. Just as his parents had been expelled from the presence of God in the garden, so now Cain was expelled from human society to undertake a nomadic life in the east. Embedded in the curse was the gleam of grace, the "mark on Cain," symbolizing God's protection.

SEXUALITY

EPHESIANS 5:22-33

MAIN POINT

God has designed the headship of men and the help of women to display the gospel of Christ to the culture around us.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

> **What does the word "complementary" mean? How is God's design of man and women complementary?**
>
> **How have ideas about gender, sexuality, and marriage changed since you were younger?**

Recently, there has been a massive shift in the way our society views issues like gender, marriage, and sexuality. These changes are evident in culture and in the church. But amidst the changing attitudes of culture, God's Word is not silent on these issues. God designed men and women with equal value but differing roles. This idea may often be thought of as offensive or even dangerous today, but we do not have the option to abandon God's revealed truth about gender. God's Word compels us to action.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> WATCH SESSION FOUR OF COUNTERCULTURE.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GENESIS 1:26-31; 2:4-25.

David said in this session that every conversation about sexuality must begin with the equality of men and women before God. How do we see men and women created with equal dignity in these verses?

While men and women have equal value, they also have different roles. How did God design men and women differently? How do these differences complement each other?

God designed man to be the head and women to be the helper, what does the Bible mean when it uses this language?

We live in a society that says to be equal in value means to be equal in every other way. This is an unbiblical assumption. Men and women were created in a loving act of God to complement each other and worship God. God designed man to be the head or leader in the home and woman to be a helper fit for Him. We were designed like this before the fall, and God said this was very good. As believers, we must get our view of sexuality from God's Word.

How was God's creation of man different than all other creatures? What does this suggest about man's value?

Read Genesis 1:26 again. Men and women were created by the action of all three members of the Godhead. In what ways do men and women reflect the image of God in the way they have been made?

As discussed in the previous lesson, all human life has value. God does nothing by accident. Unlike every other created thing, God has made us in His image. With the rest of creation, He spoke. With men and women, God was physically involved. There was a Trinitarian council that resulted in the creation of man and woman. Just as each member of the Trinity is equal in value, they serve different roles. Jesus submits to the will of God the Father. We mirror this pattern of leadership and submission in our relationships.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 5:22-33.

What about these verses may be offensive in broader culture? Which part is most offensive?

What are men told to do in these verses? What are women told to do? How would you define the differences between these roles? Is it bad that they're different?

What is marriage ultimately supposed to demonstrate? Why is this crucial to understand in a culture that devalues traditional marriage?

Why did Paul quote Genesis 2:24 in these verses? What was he trying to illustrate?

How can embracing roles in marriage as God designed them help create a strong and healthy marriage?

Marriage is a picture of the gospel of Christ. Christ is the head of the church who died and gave Himself for her. Husbands die to themselves and live for the sake of their wives. Likewise, wives represent the church, the bride of Christ who lovingly submits to His leadership. Paul called this a mystery. Ultimately our marriages are not about us but about God. They reveal something deep and meaningful about the gospel. We counter culture by cultivating marriages that reflect God's glory and God's design.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How do issues of sexuality open a door to conversations about the gospel? Give examples of statements that relate the gospel to sexuality, gender, and marriage?

If you are married, how can you make your marriage a clear picture of the gospel?

PRAYER

Praise Jesus for the gift of marriage. Thank Him for His good design of human sexuality. Pray for your marriage and other you know of, that they would demonstrate God's good design and gospel driven purpose for marriage.

COMMENTARY

GENESIS 1:26-31; 2:4-25.

Primeval history describes the accounts of the creation, the fall, the flood, the tower of Babel, and the distribution of the human race. It embraces all those facets of human experience that led up to and necessitated the call of Abraham to covenant service to the Lord.

The two accounts of creation (1:1–2:3 and 2:4–25) are designed respectively to demonstrate the all-wise and all-powerful sovereignty of God (first account) and His special creation of humanity to rule for Him over all other created things (second account). Though the creation stories are fundamentally theological and not scientific, nothing in them is contradicted by modern scientific understanding. Genesis insists that all the forms of life were created "after their kind" (1:11–12, 21, 24–25); that is, they did not evolve across species lines. Most importantly, the man and the woman were created as "the image of God" (1:26). In other words, humanity was created to represent God on the earth and to rule over all things in His name (1:26–28). God's desire was to bless humanity and to enjoy relationship with them.

EPHESIANS 5:22-33.

5:22 Wives submit directs wives to be submissive to their own (Gk idios; "one's own") husbands (cp. Col 3:18-4:1). The distinctive feature here is that the relationship between husband and wife is compared with that between Christ and the church. No verb is in the original language of verse 22. The imperative "submit" is understood from verse 21.

5:22-24 Paul addressed wives first. They were to be voluntarily submissive to their husbands. No external coercion should be involved, nor should submission imply that the wife is a lesser partner in the marital union. The submission is governed by the phrase as to the Lord. Christian wives' submission to their husbands is one aspect of their obedience to Christ. Submission is a person's yielding his or her own rights and losing self for another. Submission is patterned after Christ's example (Php 2:5-8) and reflects the essence of the gospel. Submission distinguishes the lifestyle of all Christians.

5:25 Paul turned to the duties of husbands. The society in which Paul wrote recognized the duties of wives to husbands but not necessarily of husbands to wives. As in Col 3:19, Paul exhorted husbands to love their wives, but Ephesians presents Christ's self-sacrificing love for the church as the pattern for the husband's love for his wife.

Husbands are to love their wives continually as Christ loves the church. The tense of the Greek word translated "love" indicates a love that continues. Love is more than family affection or sexual passion. Rather it is a deliberate attitude leading to action that concerns itself with another's well-being. A husband should love his wife: (1) as Christ loved the church (vv. 25-27); (2) as his own body (vv. 28-30); and (3) with a love transcending all other human relationships (vv. 31-33).

5:26-27 Cleansing her with the washing of water: Paul explains more fully the result of Christ's atonement for the church: it makes the church holy and pure. The purpose of Christ's giving himself up for the church is the church's sanctification and cleansing.

5:28 Since husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church, they give up their personal rights for the good of their wives. It is a solemn picture of covenant love.

5:29-30 On first sight, Paul seems to have descended from the lofty standard of Christ's love to the low standard of self-love when he says no one ever hates his own flesh, but he reminded Christian couples of their oneness, their "one-flesh" relationship. For this reason a husband's obligation to cherish his wife as he does his own body is more than a helpful guide. His sacrificial love is an expression of the sacred marital union. True love is evidenced when husbands and wives have this spiritual, emotional, and physical oneness.

5:31-32 Paul appealed to Gen 2:24, which is God's initial statement in the Scriptures regarding marriage. The marriage commitment takes precedence over every other human relationship.

5:31 One flesh means closely joined. It hallows the biblical standard of covenantal heterosexual marital relations and excludes polygamy and adultery. What is primarily a divine ordinance graciously and lovingly is designed for mutual satisfaction and delight.

5:33 Love... respect concludes and restates this section's theme. The husband's ultimate responsibility is to love his wife with a Christlike love.

RACE

REVELATION 7:9-17

MAIN POINT

One day, people from every nation, tribe, and tongue will worship before the throne of heaven.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

> **Where did you grow up? How has your experience shaped your own views on race?**
>
> **How do we show a tendency, even with the gospel and our churches, to believe that we should focus on people like us?**

When we speak about race, we often do so using terms the Bible does not use. We think of each other in terms of our differences rather than our similarities. Fundamentally, we are all apart of the same race, the human race. When we realize this, we are free to celebrate our equality, unity, and diversity. There is coming a day when people of all races will be shouting in all languages praised to the Lamb. In that day, we will no longer be separated by arbitrary divisions, but united in the worship our God.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> WATCH SESSION FIVE OF COUNTERCULTURE.

What race were Adam and Eve? Why do we equate race with skin color?

In this session, David began by reading a quote from Thabiti Anyabwile. Do you remember what he said? Why is defining people by race difficult but eventually impossible?

Read Genesis 10:32. How does this verse reshape our view of race?

All people share a common ancestor, and we have no idea what they looked like. Were they white or brown or somewhere in between? Or could they have even been different colors? We do not and cannot know the answers to those questions, but today we think about people in that way. We focus on what makes different rather than the common unity we have as human beings made in God's image. Revelation 7 points to a day when these divisions will be obliterated.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ REVELATION 7:9-12.

Where is this scene taking place? What type of diversity is represented here? What unity do we see?

What seems to be the occupation of this multitude as they stand before the throne?

David mentioned there are 6,500 ethnic groups who are unreached with the gospel, and more than 2,000 without the Bible in their own language. What must change about the way we do church in order to get to this scene in heaven?

John's vision of heaven included people from every nation and language worshiping the lamb of God. On that day, we will be fully united despite our differences. Christ shed His blood for every language and every people. With the reality of a desperately lost world, we must seek to go to all nations in difficult places, motivated by our zeal for the glory of God. The gospel that compels us to take a stand in our own culture urges us to go to every culture in the world to share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ REVELATION 7:13-17.

Look at verse 14. What did it cost God to secure these people for Himself? How do we spurn this sacrifice when we create divisions that God does not make?

What does the symbolism of robes washed white represent? Read Romans 3:21-26 for help.

What qualifies this white-robed crowd to stand before God? What is their new role?

What is the future place that God is preparing for those who have washed their robes in the blood of the lamb? What future blessings are promised to them in verses 15-17?

God gave His Son to claim a people from every imaginable race for Himself. The Lamb occupies the central place in God's plan of redemption—in the center of the throne. Heaven is not a place to be around only people like us, so we should give ourselves to helping our churches become more like heaven. Christ is not a tribal deity, but a global Lord and Savior worthy of infinite praise.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Examine your own heart and attitudes about race. Is there anything you need to change as a result of our study today?

Think about your conversations about race over the last few months. Do you focus on unity or diversity? How does the gospel unite and reconcile your own relationships with people of different races?

With 6,500 ethnic groups still unreached with the gospel, what will you change about your life to see that all people of all races have access to the gospel?

PRAYER

Pray that you would not seek to divide people in ways that God has not. Praise God for the coming day when people of every language tribe and tongue will worship Him before the throne. Until that day, ask God that we would be a people zealous for racial reconciliation.

COMMENTARY

REVELATION 7:9-17.

7:9-10. One of the great themes of Scripture is God's election. The 144,000 clearly portrays this as we have already seen. Equally prominent—and the perfect complement—is the theme that God's people are vast in number. Consider Genesis 22:17, in which God promised Abraham, "I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore." This second theme is evident here. That they are beyond number exaggerates for effect, for God numbers them and calls them each by name. Clearly these are multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multilinguistic—people from every nation, tribe, people and language.

John describes them as in heaven before the throne and in front of the Lamb, so his location since the beginning of vision two (Rev. 4:1) has remained unchanged. Perhaps this multitude has dislocated the living creatures, elders, and angels that used to occupy "center stage," although John doesn't offer specific information about this. They are wearing white robes—explained in verse 14—and holding palm branches. Palm branches were the ancient equivalent of balloons at a party, a mark of joy and festivity, palm branches appear only twice in the New Testament: once when a great crowd of Jesus' followers welcomed Him into Jerusalem (John 12:13); and here where another but greater crowd worships Him around His heavenly throne.

Revelation 7:10 contains the first words spoken in heaven by an assembly of redeemed people. (The worship in Rev. 5:13 is offered by all created beings.) Their first praise is for full salvation. Salvation from sin. Salvation from all sorrow and sadness. Salvation from the trials that they endured. Such salvation is wholly God's; they cannot take credit for it. God Almighty on His throne, by His sovereign grace, and Jesus the Lamb by His redemptive work have provided full salvation.

7:11-12. Like a great antiphonal choir, angelic beings echo back the worship of human beings. John noted specifically that the multitude of all the angels standing around the throne responded (see 5:12). They fell down on their faces in worship (as the twenty-four elders had done earlier, 4:10). Their words of worship are similar to the "Creation Song from the Elders" (4:11). Of all the prayers in the New Testament, this is the only one with Amen at both the beginning and the end. The angels ascribe seven attributes to our God for ever and ever. Six of these seven overlap the attributes offered by the angels to the Lamb in Revelation 5:12. The word order is different, however. The only differing item ("thanks" replaces "wealth," as noted by italics) had already been applied to God in Revelation 4:9 by the four living creatures. Surely the main impression we are meant to receive from this is that the heavenly host of angels worship God and the Lamb with exactly the same vocabulary. Both are persons of the Godhead to be worshiped equally for ever and ever.

7:13-14. This is the second and last time that one of the elders spoke directly to John. The first time was to quiet his tears by identifying the one worthy to open the scroll of God (v. 5). Now an elder asked a two-part rhetorical question about the multitude in white robes: Who are they, and where did they come from? Of course, the answer escaped John, so he prudently replied, "Sir, you know." The elder answered the "where" part of his question first. They have come out of the great tribulation. The words have come are more correctly translated "are coming" (present tense in Greek). This crowd has been arriving in heaven from earth and has continued to increase throughout the period of tribulation. There is no indication that these are martyrs, though some surely must be. The blessings promised in verses 15-17 imply they have gone through great personal loss.

The Great Tribulation is the final time of suffering that the earthly Jesus predicted would happen before His return: "There will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equalled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive" (Matt. 24:21-22). As Revelation 8–16 describes the unleashing of the trumpet and the bowl judgments, we can see that Jesus' words are not an exaggeration.

The elder next answers the "who" part of his question. These are redeemed humans, described with an image not found elsewhere in Scripture, although often found in contemporary hymnals. The symbolic portrait of Christians as those who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb is meant to be strange and unnatural. How could washing clothes in blood make them white? This is supernatural washing. Israelite rituals of sprinkling animal blood for purification are the background (see Heb. 9–10). Consider also 1 Peter 1:18-19: "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect." First John 1:7 is also similar: "The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."

7:15-17. The elder's answer to John continues with a wonderful poetic statement of ten eternal blessings enjoyed by this redeemed multitude. Most are described in fuller detail in another part of Revelation. They are before the throne of God. The throne of God is the central focus of Revelation 4. In Revelation 3:21, all overcomers are promised a place with Christ on His throne. And serve Him day and night in His temple. The main reason humans have been redeemed is to serve Him. To be part of the temple of God forever was promised to the overcomers of Revelation 3:12. Revelation 21:22, however, has no temple, for God and the Lamb are themselves the temple. Similarly, Revelation 21:25 has no night, so the phrase "day and night" here means "without end." And He who sits on the throne will spread His tent over them. The verb spread his tent is a form of the Greek noun traditionally translated "tabernacle" (the holy tent of the Israelites during their early days as a nation). After the Israelites had gone through their times of plagues and tribulation, God promised to dwell among them through the tabernacle (Acts 7:11; Lev. 26:1-13). Revelation 21:3 describes the complete heavenly fulfillment of this promise.

Never again will they hunger. These redeemed people were not spared the ill effects of famine (6:5-6) nor of the pain that resulted because they refused the beast's mark (13:16-17). Their hunger will be satisfied as they eat from the Tree of Life, promised to all overcomers (2:7; 22:14). Never again will they thirst. This parallels the promise concerning not hungering. Most of us cannot imagine the agony of literally dying of thirst. Many of these people had done so. In Revelation 21:6 Christ pledges, "To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life." Revelation 22:1-2 describes this river in some detail. The sun will not beat upon them. The people hostile to God will be "seared by the intense heat" of the sun when the fourth bowl is poured out (16:8). Wicked humans, however, may also force believers out into the literal sun with disastrous effects. One of the striking promises concerning the heavenly city is that "the city does not need the sun" (21:23). Nor any scorching heat. Different kinds of heat, other than the sun, scorch—for instance, fire and lightning. In our time, we know about the destructive heat of sophisticated weapons of warfare. Believers have never been immune to such. Many through the centuries were burned at the stake. In the blessed state of protection, this can never happen again.

The Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd. What a strange and wonderful picture: the Lamb who is also shepherd. Three other times in Revelation the verb for shepherding appears, but the picture is of Christ subduing the nations with His iron rod-scepter (2:27; 12:5; 19:15). Here is the only mention in Revelation of Jesus as gentle Shepherd-Pastor of his flock. Other New Testament texts develop this theme beautifully (John 10:14; Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 2:25). He will lead them to springs of living water. A chief responsibility of shepherds is to find adequate watering. This had been applied symbolically as early as the much-loved Psalm 23. Christ sees it as His personal duty to lead His people to the place where their thirst may be quenched eternally—both their physical thirst and their spiritual thirst (Rev. 21:6). God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. This great promise is found in the Bible only here and in Revelation 21:4. There the removal of tears symbolizes that God's people will never again experience death, mourning, or pain.

In summary, the first three of these blessings mean that the redeemed will be in the direct presence of God. The next four describe an end to the negative effects of sin. The final three blessings focus on the eternal joys of

the redeemed. With this encouraging statement of blessing waiting in heaven, we are ready to move on to think about what is yet to be on earth.

FAITH

2 CORINTHIANS 4:13-18

MAIN POINT

As we believe the gospel with deep-seated conviction in our lives, lets proclaim the gospel with death-defying confidence in the world.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

WATCH SESSION SIX OF COUNTER CULTURE.

David said the reality that billions live without the gospel is the greatest social injustice. Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?

Many people do not share their faith because they say, "It's private." Is it possible to have a private faith?

Those who believe the gospel proclaim the gospel. Every day thousands upon thousands die without ever having the chance to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. This should be intolerable to the church of Jesus Christ. God created every man and woman to be a disciple who makes disciples. If we do not give our life to intentional disciple making we are missing the entire point of what it means to be a Christian. Among all we've discussed in this study, the gospel is the most counter cultural claim of all. The world is too perilous and the gospel is too glorious for us to remain silent.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 2 CORINTHIANS 4:13-15.

What hope do all who believe in Jesus Christ have? What should this hope motivate us to do in response?

According to verse 15, why did Paul share the gospel with the Corinthians? What did he expect the Corinthians to do as well?

What is the difference between being motivated to share the gospel by guilt and by glory? Which approach describes you most often?

Read Romans 1:16. Why should we preach the gospel no matter the cost? What makes it a unique message?

For those who do not know Christ, an eternal, conscious, torment awaits them in hell. But those in Christ will be raised with Him. The resurrection is the foundation of our hope as we share the gospel with the lost. Paul was so consumed with the glory of God, he could not stop speaking about Jesus. This motivation for the glory of God should lead all of us to passionately share the gospel in places where God has put us. The gospel is the power of God for salvation. When we speak the gospel, people will be saved, and God's kingdom will be built.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 2 CORINTHIANS 4:16-18.

Why should we expect suffering as we share the gospel? What is the danger of embracing safety and being unwilling to suffer for the gospel?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:4. Why do unbelievers not recognize the glory of God in Christ? What implications does that have as we go on mission to the lost?

As Christians suffer, what perspective should they maintain? Is it difficult for you to cultivate and maintain this attitude? If so, why?

The word in Greek translated "beyond all comparison" is where we get the English word "hyperbole." What does this help us understand about what awaits every Christian?

The god of the world has blinded the minds of unbelievers. They cannot see the gospel and do not want to see the gospel. The reason so many people remain unreached is they are hard to reach. They don't want to be reached. They are opposed to the gospel. Taking the gospel to these nations will result in suffering, but through many hardships we enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). We suffer for the gospel because when we do we are preparing for an eternal weight of glory like nothing we can imagine. Our hope is incomparable.

David used the example of Acts 7-8 to talk about how suffering ultimately can be used for God's glory. How did Stephen's suffering build the church?

Does anyone know brother and sisters who serve in difficult places with hard to reach people? What are some unique challenges they face in their context?

Re-read verse 18. How do we maintain perspective of the things unseen when what we see in front of us is difficult and hard?

It has been said, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” Perhaps the most impactful witness we can have is an unshakable faith in our God exhibited through suffering and persecution. Romans 8 makes it clear that if God is for us, who will ultimately stand against us? The purpose of God to build His church is an endeavour He has chosen to involve us in. Let’s embrace hardship and suffering, looking to things unseen and the glory of God among all peoples.,

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Do you really believe this gospel? What will it motivate you to do or change about your life? How does it change the way you relate to and respond to social justice issues?

Who are 3-4 people in your sphere of influence who do not believe the gospel? Will you commit to pray for opportunities to share the gospel with these people?

Have you ever gone to another part of the world to share the gospel? What was that experience like? How did it change the way you live at home?

PRAYER

Pray that God would use you, your small group, and your church to proclaim His eternal glory to all the nations of the world. Ask for an all-consuming passion to see more and more people hear and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ.

COMMENTARY

2 CORINTHIANS 4:13-18. .

4:14-15. Notice Paul's use of you and your in these verses. See also 4:5 and 12. These verses provide evidence of Paul's objective in helping the Corinthian Christians. He acted out of unselfish motives. Paul's experience of salvation motivated him to share the good news with others. After he had believed, he wanted to share the gospel message (see v. 13). Although Paul's critics had accused him of acting out of selfishness, he refuted that charge in verse 15. His statement that all things are for your sakes included not only his preaching ministry but also the abuse he had endured from his enemies. The last part of verse 15 suggests that Paul expected the Corinthian Christians to join him in spreading the gospel. The result would be that more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.

4:16. The Greek word translated "therefore" turns our attention to what Paul had previously written, particularly 4:1-15. His expression we do not lose heart repeats a portion of 4:1. In 4:1 Paul did not lose heart because of God's mercy and because of the greatness of the ministry God had given him. Paul humbly realized that the ministry he was engaged in was a consequence of God's mercy to him. In 4:16 Paul stated that he did not lose heart because even though his outer man was decaying, his inner man was being renewed day by day. By the phrase our outer man is decaying, Paul referred to the aging process of the physical body, perhaps including all its faculties and energies such as mental processes. This reference to the outer man should not be confused with Paul's references elsewhere to the "old self," a reference to the unregenerate nature (see Rom. 6:6).

The form of the word translated is decaying indicates a constant and irreversible process. In contrast to this constant decay, Paul stated that our inner man is being renewed day by day. By use of the expression inner man, Paul referred to the real but unseen aspect of himself. The expression denotes the source of a person's will, emotions, thoughts, and affections. In Ephesians 3:16 Paul prayed that God would grant believers "to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man." In effect, Paul contrasted his deteriorating physical body with his growing spiritual nature. The deterioration of his physical body was related to his afflictions and persecutions (see 4:17). Paradoxically, Paul was wasting away and growing at the same time. We must always remember, however, that Paul anticipated the believer's future existence with God not as disembodied souls but rather as whole persons with resurrection bodies.

4:17-18. Although Paul never invited persecution or bodily pain, he viewed all the suffering he endured as momentary, light affliction. Certainly Paul's sufferings for the sake of Christ were not trivial or inconsequential. Paul's statements in 2 Corinthians 11:24-28 clearly show that his suffering was intense. Why then did Paul refer to his suffering as momentary, light affliction? The key lies in Paul's perspective on life. Paul's afflictions seemed light and insignificant in contrast to the eternal weight of glory he anticipated.

Furthermore, Paul's sufferings for Jesus' sake led him to depend on God instead of on himself. If Christians are prepared to be identified with Christ in this sinful world and accept the sufferings that come as a consequence, they will share Christ's glory (see Rom. 8:17). Paul described this result as an eternal weight of glory, thus making his afflictions seem as nothing in comparison. Although Paul once had acted from the perspective of a zealous Pharisee and a persecutor of Christians, his perspective forever changed on the road to Damascus (see Acts 9). To the Christians at Philippi, he wrote: "More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith" (Phil. 3:8-9).

The Greek verb translated "look . . . at" in 2 Corinthians 4:18 carries the concept of fixing one's gaze intently or concentrating on something. As a Christian, Paul did not value material, temporal things visible to physical eyes. Rather, he valued spiritual, eternal things. Jesus changed Paul's perspective and enabled him to see what really mattered in life.