

# The Church Grows

## TEACHING NOTES

### KEY VERSES

Acts 11, Acts 12:1-17, Acts 13:1-3,  
Acts 13:13-37

### KEY THEMES

The Gospel is spread, the church grows  
God uses people of faith  
God's ways are not our ways

 **Jews and Gentiles (Acts 11:1-3)**

**Peter's response (Acts 11:4-14)**

 **A worldview change (Acts 11:15-18)**

 God's ways are not ours

**Persecution, the Church grows (Acts 11:19-30)**

**Peter and James are imprisoned (Acts 12:1-17)**

Don't look to circumstance as evidence of God's love, care, or goodness. (Hebrews 11)

 **The Church is led to send, pray, give and go (Acts 13:1-3)****God has a plan to use the Church to reach the World**

Every believer

**Acts and the Epistles****Chronological, foundational, thematic teaching (Acts 13:13-37)** **The power of the Gospel (Acts 14:1-3)****The task is ours (Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15)**

*For “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is why the Scriptures say, “How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!” But not everyone welcomes the Good News, for Isaiah the prophet said, “Lord, who has believed our message?” So faith comes from hearing, that is, hearing the Good News about Christ. (Romans 10:13-17)*

**Lesson Objective**

*To see how God uses people and the preaching of the Gospel to build His Church.*

**PERSONAL STUDY****Study 1****Prepare your heart and mind**

Take a moment to just be silent before God. Try to push away all of life's distractions. Ask God to focus your attention on Him and His Word during this time.

**Read Acts 11:1-3**

Why did the Jewish believers give Peter such a hard time?

The Jewish believers were outraged that Peter had entered the house of a Gentile. They couldn't understand why he would do something like that – it broke Jewish rules. Rather than rejoicing over God's grace and love demonstrated in seeing Gentiles come to saving faith in Jesus, the Jewish believers got hung up on their old way of living.

Have you ever been so focused on following the rules, or doing everything right, that you've missed what God was doing and wanted you to do with Him? Reflect on that situation.

**Read Acts 11:4-14**

In this section of the story we see that God communicated both with Peter and with Cornelius, the Gentile who sent for him. We've seen over and over again in *Equipping the Church* that God communicates. He communicated with people like Moses and Peter, and He wants to communicate with you.

Cornelius responded to God's communicating by sending the three men to Peter. And Peter responded to God's communicating by going with the men to meet Cornelius. When God communicates we need to respond in faith like Peter and Cornelius.

How has God communicated with you?

How have you responded to Him?

 **Read Acts 11:15-18**

This was a big moment in the life of the first church. They realized they were wrong in their prejudice and had been getting in the way of what God wanted to do in their lives and the lives of the Gentiles. Peter's question in verse 17 perfectly points that out, "Who was I to stand in God's way?" God's ways are not ours – and we should be thankful for that. God's plans are so much bigger than we could ever imagine. Who are we to stand in His way?

When have you gotten in the way of what God was doing? After you realized your mistake what did you do?

When Peter got over his prejudices (his incorrect worldview) and got out of the way, the Gospel was spread and the Church grew.

Take a moment now to thank God for how He works in you, through you, and in spite of you. Consider your response to how He has spread the Gospel and grown the Church and how He will continue to do so.

**Key verse**

Put to memory Isaiah 55:8. Write it out on a notecard or Post-It and put it somewhere you can see it throughout the day.

**Prayer time**

Thank the Lord for this time you've spent with Him in His Word. Ask Him to continue to speak to you this week about what you've learned from Acts 11 about Him and how He works.

**Study 2****Prepare your heart and mind**

Using the truth found in Ephesians 1:17-18, personalize Paul's prayer for yourself. Here is an example: "God, may you give me spiritual wisdom and insight so that I might grow in your knowledge. I pray that my heart will be flooded with light so that I can understand the confident hope You have given me."

 **Read Acts 12:1-17**

How would you describe the setting of this passage? (Recall from previous lessons, thinking about what has led up to the persecution and what has taken place.)

In order to help gain popularity and satisfy the Jewish leaders, King Herod arrests and plans to execute Peter during one of the biggest Jewish festivals, Passover. How does the early church respond?

As part of the body of Christ we do not stand alone. The best weapon available to the early church was the power of prayer. They recognized their responsibility and believed in the ability and power of God to intervene. They prayed in unity as Peter was in jail.

What is typically your first response when faced with difficult circumstances? Why?

Why do you think the praying Christians responded with amazement to Peter's return? (verse 16)

How have you seen God answer prayer in your life? What has been your response to answered prayer?

### **God's ways are not our ways**

As we see in this lesson's reading, not every prayer is answered dramatically or immediately. Peter was rescued, but James was put to death. It's natural to wonder why sometimes when we pray, we do not receive the answers we desire. Do you sometimes base the character of God on whether a prayer is answered or not?

When have you seen your prayers seemingly unanswered?

What truths and themes do you know and believe about the character of God that you can rest in?

Here are a few of the themes we have seen in God's Word that should give us confidence in whether or not He answers our prayers: God has a plan, God does what He says He is going to do, believe God when we don't understand, God is sovereign, God is in control, His ways are not our ways, God has the power to act.

### **Key verse**

Continue learning Isaiah 55:8. See if you can write it out from memory.

### **Prayer time**

As you spend time in prayer today, be mindful that God is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. (Ephesians 3:20)

## PARENT GUIDE

This week you heard an amazing story of Peter being imprisoned and then miraculously saved by an angel. We are told in this story that the Church prayed earnestly for him and was amazed when he appeared at the door of the house they were in. This story illustrates the incredible power of prayer. We see that God knew what was needed by releasing Peter from prison. Although you may not be praying for a situation that is as dramatic as Peter's, we have a God who knows exactly what we need. Our role is to continually put our requests before Him.

*Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere. (Ephesians 6:18)*

*Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. (Philippians 4:6)*

How do you personally approach prayer? Do you approach prayer with the truth in mind that God's ways are not our ways? Prayer is a key element in our relationship with God. It allows us to have two-way communication with Him. It is also important for us to know that prayer should be about more than our requests. It should be an opportunity to express our thankfulness and submit our concerns for others. Use the following Table Talk questions to talk to your children about prayer.

### Table Talk

#### **What is prayer and why do we do it?**

*(Prayer is a conversation between God and us. We pray so we can talk to and hear from God. Doing this builds our relationship with Him.)*

#### **What should we talk about when we pray?**

*(When we pray we should treat it like a conversation with a good friend. We can talk to Him about life and what is going on. It is an opportunity to adore Him. We can confess our sins and trust that He is faithful to forgive us. It is a time to be thankful and express our gratitude to God. We can also lift up our needs and the needs of others.)*

#### **What should we expect when we pray?**

*(We should expect an answer. It could be as simple as yes or no. It could also be something we aren't expecting. It is important to be patient and listen and watch for God to answer. His timing is perfect and He will always give an answer.)*

**Take some time at the end of your discussion to pray with your child.**

**OPTIONAL STUDY**

Isaiah 55:8-9 says, “*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ says the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts higher than your thoughts.’*” If we truly believe these words spoken by God to the prophet Isaiah, then they have great implications for the way we, as the Church, make plans and decisions on how to take the Gospel to the nations.

The world’s wisdom teaches us to allow our minds, common sense, and rational thinking to act as our guides for strategies and future planning. In fact, the business world has perfected a process of logical thinking that will guarantee the future success of anyone willing to follow a proven systematic model. But, the kingdom of God operates much differently and the final product of God’s will is much greater than the sum total of what we can see with our eyes. It is a kingdom in which a sovereign God uses the weak things of the world and irrational methods to accomplish supernatural things by His power. Because God’s thoughts are so foreign to our earthly minds, we need His Word and His Spirit to share with us the higher ways of the Father.

 **God’s ways are not our ways** **Read Acts 13:1-3**

What were the prophets and teachers of the Antioch church doing when the Holy Spirit spoke?

How do we see them involving the Holy Spirit throughout this whole process? Why did they do this?

How are you allowing the Holy Spirit to direct your involvement with Him?

We see once again that the Lord is the driving force behind the spreading of the Gospel and has a specific plan to accomplish His purposes. After a time of prayer and fasting, the church leaders at Antioch were told by the Holy Spirit to set apart Saul and Barnabas for the special work of taking the Gospel to the Gentiles. The leaders at Antioch could proceed with great confidence in choosing the two men because they had received their orders from the Spirit of God. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit so that the Church could accomplish the plans of God in great power. Will you take the time to seek the Lord, making sure you are not limiting yourself to just rational thinking when it comes to carrying out God’s plans?

