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salvation for its end; and truth, without any
mixture of error, for its matter and that all
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FROM THE EDITOR



Andy McLean

Editor

*The Gospel Project
for Students*

The classical notion of a letter is lost on many of us today, because we have grown up in a digital culture where email and texting are more common than pen and paper. While these modern means of communication are quick and efficient—which is certainly a good thing—there is still something special and unique about receiving a personalized, handwritten letter from someone. Not a neatly typed letter on official letterhead, but a handwritten one. These are the ones you store in a keepsake box and reread from time to time.

Writing letters was a common means of communication in the first century, and with the church spreading throughout the near east and beyond, biblical instruction about how to live the Christian life was needed. The churches that were springing up from the missionary efforts from the apostles were in a constant need to learn Jesus' teachings, to be trained in sound doctrine, and to be aware of the false teachings around them. This is why we have Paul's letters to the house churches of Rome, the church at Corinth, the church of Ephesus, and so on. This is why we have letters from Peter, John, and James, giving specific instructions to a group of first century Christians who needed to be encouraged, warned, or rebuked in some way.

Of course, these letters aren't just for first century followers of Jesus. Yes, we should read them and study them, asking the questions about what the authors were communicating to their first century readers. However, the letters weren't just for their benefit, but for all centuries of Christians afterward as these letters became an important section of the New Testament. Much like they did for first century readers, today these letters instruct us in the gospel, encourage us to missional living, and ground us in biblical doctrine so as to guard us from false teachings that still linger.

AUTHORS

UNIT 1



Katie Orr (sessions 2-5), creator of the FOCUSed15 Bible study method, is passionate about equipping busy women to experience God daily. She is a Bible teacher, speaker, and prolific writer for blogs, magazines, and Sunday School curriculum. A former Cru (Campus Crusade for Christ) staff member and mother to three young children, she and pastor-husband Chris are part of the church revitalization movement.



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THIS STUDY

- **Essential Doctrines:** Each session will also contain an essential doctrine that directly relates to the Bible study material. The essential doctrine is also located in the student's personal study guide, though in an abbreviated format.
- **Christ Connection:** Each session will end with a direct look at how the content studied connects with Christ, emphasizing to students how all of Scripture is pointing to Him. The material in the Christ Connection will also be provided in the student's personal study guide.

▶ YOUR STORY

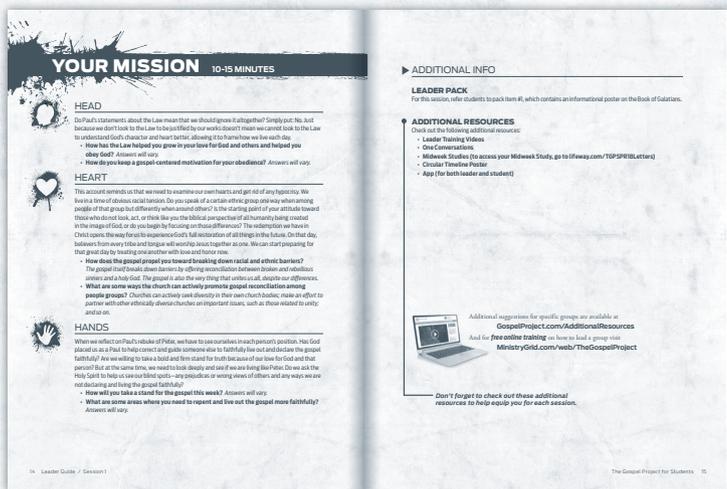
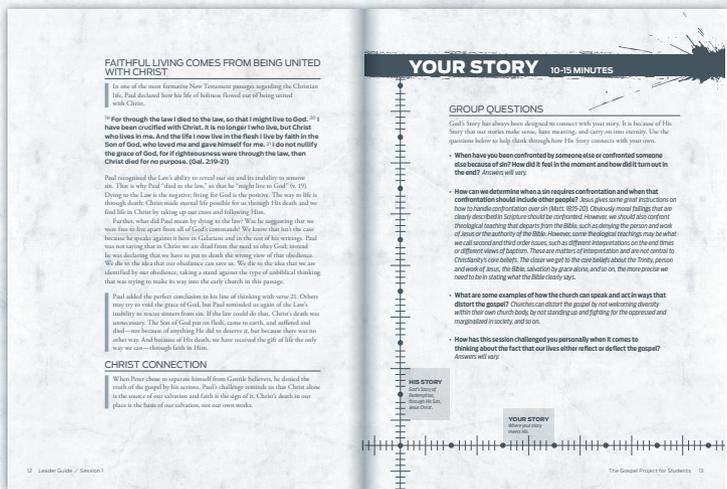
The Your Story section is designed to connect what God has done in the past to students' lives today by introducing group discussion questions that highlight how God's Story connects with their story. There are lead-ins with each question in the Leader Guide to help the leader walk students through each question.

▶ YOUR MISSION

The Your Mission section is designed to show how God's Story is capable of creating lasting transformation into how we think, feel, and live from day to day. By doing so, we emphasize to students that every session goes beyond mere Bible study to a calling to be on mission with God.

▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

The final page of each session points leaders to additional resources that can be used in conjunction with each study. The resources listed, such as teaching tips videos and One Conversations, are designed to help leaders prepare for each session. There is also information about the leader pack posters that can be used with each session.



01

SESSION ONE

Standing Firm on the Gospel

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we will see how the apostle Paul confronted the apostle Peter for being *two-faced*, or *hypocritical*. Peter acted one way with one group of Christians, and another with a different group. Peter's hypocrisy wasn't a small problem. When he chose to separate himself from Gentile believers, his actions denied the truth of the gospel. This is why Paul had to challenge Peter to act in a way that reflected the truth of the gospel to all people. Paul's challenge reminds us that our salvation rests in our faith in Christ alone. Christ's death in our place and resurrection is the basis of our salvation, not our own works.

SCRIPTURE

Galatians 2:11-21

THE POINT

God calls us to stand our ground, refusing to compromise when the truth of the gospel is at stake.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

No one likes to be called two-faced, but here's the problem: We live in a world of selfies and social media status updates where we present the best version of ourselves for others to see, even if that image isn't quite accurate. We care about what others think of us, so we only post what we think others will like. *Happy. Social. Smart. Caring. Spiritual.* It's easy to stretch facts and exaggerate to make ourselves look good to others. However, when we do that, we can easily become two-faced, acting a certain way with one group and differently with another.

Apart from social media, this reveals another problem: Our hearts are bent towards pleasing people. We like certain people and want those people to like us. It does not matter if we are talkative and extroverted or shy and introverted, we all struggle with how we are perceived by others. This struggle causes us to aim our actions, either directly or indirectly, at being noticed and gaining approval from others.

Worries about our image and people pleasing can create conflict when we have to choose between pleasing ourselves or someone else instead of pleasing God. Relationships matter. Scripture teaches that. However, when the truth of the gospel is at stake, we must take a strong stand.

- **What are some ways you struggle with presenting an image of yourself that isn't quite accurate?**
- **What are some ways you seek the praise and approval of those around you?**

Option 2

Place students in groups of three to four and ask them to come up with two wacky rules. Tell students they should also come up with a defense for the necessity of each rule. Allow about 5 minutes for students to create their rules and defenses and then allow time for each group to present their ideas.

Then ask:

- **What was the wackiest rule you heard and why?**

The church's early days were filled with figuring things out—especially when it came to the Law. Jesus came to fulfill the Law, not to destroy it; however, the religious leaders had placed extra rules and burdens on the people, which Jesus constantly confronted them about. Even for the disciples, like Peter, it was difficult to move away from practices that were no longer necessary because of what Jesus did on the cross. When we place extra rules on people, we ignore the truth of the gospel: Only Jesus is sufficient for salvation.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

God calls us to stand our ground, refusing to compromise when the truth of the gospel is at stake.

CHARACTERS

- **Paul:** former persecutor who became a Christ-follower and apostle to the Gentiles
- **Peter:** one of the original twelve disciples; became an apostle and one of the key leaders of the first-century church

PLOT

This session begins with a quick look into an intense conversation between the apostle Paul and the apostle Peter. These two giants of the faith—key leaders in the first century church—were having a difficult conversation that was necessary because of the seriousness of the issue.

Remember, these sections are optional and can be skipped if preferred.

PAUL CHALLENGED PETER'S BEHAVIOR

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

The church at Antioch demonstrated one of the more remarkable church planting episodes in the New Testament (Acts 11:19-26). After Stephen was martyred, the early church scattered and some of the believers went to Antioch. These Jewish believers who had been speaking only to Jews began speaking to Gentiles as well and many came to Christ (11:19-21). Barnabas was dispatched from Jerusalem to lead this fledgling congregation, and he took along a new convert named Paul (11:25-26). Not long after, the young church would send out Paul and Barnabas as the church's first missionaries (13:1-3). Paul and Barnabas later returned to Antioch to report what God had done on their journey, after which they remained at the church for an extended time (Acts 14:26-28).

In the Book of Galatians, Paul referred back to the Antioch church. Antioch was a key city in the Roman Empire with more than a half-million people of diverse nationalities, making it the Empire's third largest city. Like its city, the church at Antioch was diverse, filled with both Jewish and Gentile believers. It was here that Peter's (called Cephas in Aramaic) hypocrisy led to a sharp rebuke from Paul.

¹¹ But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹² For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. ¹³ And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. ¹⁴ But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?" (Gal. 2:11-14)

The early church was still grappling with the different ways Jewish and Gentile Christians lived out their faith and how a unified church could work through these differences (Acts 15). These differences—the more Jewish-focused Christianity coming out of Jerusalem and the newer, more Gentile-focused Christianity coming from the large number of Gentile believers in Antioch—created the environment for Peter's hypocrisy.

TIMELINE

STANDING STRONG

Refuse compromise when the truth of the gospel is at stake.

UNITY IN THE CROSS

Believers are united together in Christ.

SHOWING MERCY

Those who know mercy show mercy to others.

Remember, every time you see this bar in the leader guide, it indicates the same material is also found in the personal study guide as well.

Whenever you see PSG page numbers listed, it indicates that there is a section in the personal study guide for students to interact with.

Imagine a small, rural First Baptist Church congregation consisting mainly of families related to one another and having an organ, a piano, and a robed choir. Now, picture an urban, young, multiethnic congregation in a major city named Grace Community Church that has contemporary dress and music. Both churches preach the Word, share the gospel, love Jesus, and support missions. These two churches are very different, with very different cultures. Now, imagine what it would be like to merge these two churches together. That might help you understand what was going on in Antioch—a clash between two ways of understanding Christianity. Still, that was no excuse for hypocrisy. Indeed, there is never an excuse for it.

- **What are some ways churches today understand and practice Christianity differently? Are any of these differences reasons to divide? Why or why not? (p. 10, PSG)**

Paul saw Peter acting differently with two different groups of people. First, Peter would “regularly” eat with Gentile believers. Peter had witnessed the conversion of Cornelius and his family (Acts 10) and knew without a doubt that Gentiles could follow Jesus. But something changed when “certain men came from James” (v. 12). These men were likely shocked to see the way Peter made no distinction between Jewish and Gentile Christians. The verb tense of “withdrew” and “separated” gives the idea that Peter gradually gave into the pressure of the group after they arrived.

Eventually, even the other Jewish believers followed Peter’s example. Church leaders have an incredibly powerful influence! Paul’s frustration with Peter’s example was made evident in his statement in verse 13: “even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.” Even Barnabas, the earliest leader of the church at Antioch and a man known for his encouragement (Acts 4:36), gave into the peer pressure from Peter and the Jewish Christians.

There was no cover-up here: Peter was wrong and had led others astray. Paul made it unmistakably clear that they were straying from the ultimate truth of the gospel. When our lives openly deny the gospel, rebuke is the necessary response. There is a time to pull someone aside and quietly speak to him or her about error. In this case, due to the public nature of Peter’s sin and the public influence he had, Paul rightly confronted his hypocrisy in front of everyone.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Justification by Faith (p. 12, PSG)

Justification refers to the moment a person is objectively declared righteous before God based on the righteousness of Christ’s atoning death (Rom. 8:33-34). This act of declaration takes place through faith in Christ, not as a result of human works or effort (Eph. 2:8-9). Through justification, a person is made to be in right standing before God, changing what was once an estranged and hostile relationship to one of adoption into the family of God.

PAUL REMINDED THEM OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH, NOT BY WORKS

The ground is level at the cross. Regardless of socioeconomic status or ethnicity, whether we are male or female or young or old, we all come to God through the same door: Jesus.

15 We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; 16 yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. 17 But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! 18 For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. (Gal. 2:15-18)

Earlier, Paul said Peter's actions were a deviation from the truth of the gospel. Then, he unpacked what he meant. When Christians act with prejudice toward others, we deny the very gospel we proclaim. We are justified by faith and nothing else (v. 16)—not our works, our ethnic origin, or any other standard. This is why Paul saw Peter's hypocrisy as being so serious—the gospel was being denied.

The Jewish believers had been given a great advantage in the Law, a key way they were set apart from the Gentiles. It was also through their obedience to the law that they saw the Gentiles as “sinners”—men and women who failed to even attempt keeping a single aspect of the law. It was through this same obedience—or their failure and imperfection in obedience—that led these Jewish Christians to understand the Law could not save them. This realization was proven in their faith in Christ, by their turning away from trusting in their own works and turning to Christ to save them. Then, how could a Jewish Christian, such as Peter, believe himself above his Gentile brothers and sisters? Where does the gospel make room to treat Jewish believers and Gentile believers differently?

Paul asked a question that may have been raised by the Jewish brothers when they led Peter astray (v. 17). If Jewish believers could eat with “Gentile sinners” who didn't follow the law, wouldn't that make the Jewish believers “sinners” too? And if that was the case, wouldn't that make Jesus a promoter of sin since He said that what you eat doesn't make you unclean and He commanded Peter to eat what was unclean (Mark 7:19; Acts 10)? Paul's answer was certain: “Absolutely not!” It would be sin to restore the restrictions Jesus removed.

TIMELINE

A NEW IDENTITY
Peter reminds God's people of their identity in Christ.

**Bonus Session*
THE RESURRECTION IS ESSENTIAL
Christianity stands or falls with the resurrection.

LOVE IN ACTION
Love for God and others is the fruit of Christian living.

FAITHFUL LIVING COMES FROM BEING UNITED WITH CHRIST

In one of the most formative New Testament passages regarding the Christian life, Paul declared how his life of holiness flowed out of being united with Christ.

19 For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. 20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21 I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose. (Gal. 2:19-21)

Paul recognized the Law's ability to reveal our sin and its inability to remove sin. That is why Paul "died to the law," so that he "might live to God" (v. 19). Dying to the Law is the negative; living for God is the positive. The way to life is through death: Christ made eternal life possible for us through His death and we find life in Christ by taking up our cross and following Him.

Further, what did Paul mean by dying to the law? Was he suggesting that we were free to live apart from all of God's commands? We know that isn't the case because he speaks against it here in Galatians and in the rest of his writings. Paul was not saying that in Christ we are dead from the need to obey God; instead he was declaring that we have to put to death the wrong view of that obedience. We die to the idea that our obedience can save us. We die to the idea that we are identified by our obedience, taking a stand against the type of unbiblical thinking that was trying to make its way into the early church in this passage.

Paul added the perfect conclusion to his line of thinking with verse 21. Others may try to void the grace of God, but Paul reminded us again of the Law's inability to rescue sinners from sin. If the law could do that, Christ's death was unnecessary. The Son of God put on flesh, came to earth, and suffered and died—not because of anything He did to deserve it, but because there was no other way. And because of His death, we have received the gift of life the only way we can—through faith in Him.

CHRIST CONNECTION

When Peter chose to separate himself from Gentile believers, he denied the truth of the gospel by his actions. Paul's challenge reminds us that Christ alone is the source of our salvation and faith is the sign of it. Christ's death in our place is the basis of our salvation, not our own works.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **When have you been confronted by someone else or confronted someone else because of sin? How did it feel in the moment and how did it turn out in the end?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How can we determine when a sin requires confrontation and when that confrontation should include other people?** *Jesus gives some great instructions on how to handle confrontation over sin (Matt. 18:15-20). Obviously moral failings that are clearly described in Scripture should be confronted. However, we should also confront theological teaching that departs from the Bible, such as denying the person and work of Jesus or the authority of the Bible. However, some theological teachings may be what we call second and third order issues, such as different interpretations on the end times or different views of baptism. These are matters of interpretation and are not central to Christianity's core beliefs. The closer we get to the core beliefs about the Trinity, person and work of Jesus, the Bible, salvation by grace alone, and so on, the more precise we need to be in stating what the Bible clearly says.*
- **What are some examples of how the church can speak and act in ways that distort the gospel?** *Churches can distort the gospel by not welcoming diversity within their own church body, by not standing up and fighting for the oppressed and marginalized in society, and so on.*
- **How has this session challenged you personally when it comes to thinking about the fact that our lives either reflect or deflect the gospel?** *Answers will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION

10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

Do Paul's statements about the Law mean that we should ignore it altogether? Simply put: No. Just because we don't look to the Law to be justified by our works doesn't mean we cannot look to the Law to understand God's character and heart better, allowing it to frame how we live each day.

- **How has the Law helped you grow in your love for God and others and helped you obey God?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How do you keep a gospel-centered motivation for your obedience?** *Answers will vary.*



HEART

This account reminds us that we need to examine our own hearts and get rid of any hypocrisy. We live in a time of obvious racial tension. Do you speak of a certain ethnic group one way when among people of that group but differently when around others? Is the starting point of your attitude toward those who do not look, act, or think like you the biblical perspective of all humanity being created in the image of God, or do you begin by focusing on those differences? The redemption we have in Christ opens the way for us to experience God's full restoration of all things in the future. On that day, believers from every tribe and tongue will worship Jesus together as one. We can start preparing for that great day by treating one another with love and honor now.

- **How does the gospel propel you toward breaking down racial and ethnic barriers?**
The gospel itself breaks down barriers by offering reconciliation between broken and rebellious sinners and a holy God. The gospel is also the very thing that unites us all, despite our differences.
- **What are some ways the church can actively promote gospel reconciliation among people groups?** *Churches can actively seek diversity in their own church bodies; make an effort to partner with other ethnically diverse churches on important issues, such as those related to unity; and so on.*



HANDS

When we reflect on Paul's rebuke of Peter, we have to see ourselves in each person's position. Has God placed us as a Paul to help correct and guide someone else to faithfully live out and declare the gospel faithfully? Are we willing to take a bold and firm stand for truth because of our love for God and that person? But at the same time, we need to look deeply and see if we are living like Peter. Do we ask the Holy Spirit to help us see our blind spots—any prejudices or wrong views of others and any ways we are not declaring and living the gospel faithfully?

- **How will you take a stand for the gospel this week?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some areas where you need to repent and live out the gospel more faithfully?**
Answers will vary.

▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #3, which contains an informational poster on the Book of Galatians.

● ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPSPR18Letters)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at
GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit
MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject

Don't forget to check out these additional resources to help equip you for each session.