



ROAD TO

# PENTECOST

BY DR. STEVEN JONES & CLAIRE MUMMERT





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 Kingsland

BY DR. STEVEN JONES & CLAIRE MUMMERT

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# How to use this guide

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Review the context and big picture every week – The goal of a book study is not just to learn each individual lesson, but to build understanding of the Bible, how it fits together, and how to study it.

Try not to use this guide as a script. The purpose of this material isn't to give you exactly what to say. Rather it is to give you the content you need to structure and develop your own lessons. Teach as much as you feel is important for your class. Feel free to go off topic if your own study leads you to approach the passage in a slightly different direction.

Don't feel like you have to cover everything. There is a lot of material in each lesson. Some classes like to cover a lot of ground. Other classes like to camp on one point and drill deep. Start by teaching the Main Point, then teach the Main Bullet Points. Use the extra detail and discussion questions as you see fit. The goal is to generate discussion, specifically regarding life-application. So don't worry if you don't get all the way through a lesson.

## Lesson 1 | Living on the Road to Emmaus

### Luke 24:13-35

by Steve Jones

The Christian songwriter Rich Mullins began one of his songs with the honest and obvious line, “Sometimes our lives just don’t make sense at all. The mountains look so big. And our faith just seems so small.” So many of us find ourselves in the midst of confusing times. Where we are and what is happening to us doesn’t make sense. We wonder how our current situation can be the result of a loving God with a good plan. Something must have gone wrong. Either God isn’t in control. Or maybe we messed things up and God is finally through with us. So, we lament where we are. We beg God to intervene and make some changes. What we need is to realize that God hasn’t abandoned us. He never left. He isn’t bewildered by our circumstances. He is still in control. We need to see things from His perspective. That is exactly what happens on the first Easter. The story of 2 disciples meeting Jesus while walking to Emmaus is a powerful and poignant picture of how we miss Jesus and how we can learn to live our lives seeking Jesus and seeing Him at work all around us, all the time.

#### **Missing Jesus (v13-16)**

In the afternoon on that first Easter Sunday, two followers of Jesus headed home. They weren’t going far, just to the little town of Emmaus about 7 miles outside Jerusalem. They were sad and confused about all that had gone on in the previous days. They were broken hearted about the past. The one they had thought to be the Messiah had been brutally killed. They were confused about the present. Strange things were being reported. They had no idea what to make of it all, so they headed home. And while they were on the road, Jesus met them walking to Emmaus. But they didn’t recognize Him. They were so blinded by their grief and so focused on the calamities they had experienced, that they didn’t realize who was walking with them. They were missing Jesus so much, that they literally missed Jesus.



### **Telling the Story...Wrong (v17-24)**

The two were so noticeably down cast and so vehemently discussing with each other, that Jesus asks them what they are talking about. They give Him the complete run down on who Jesus was, what He did, what had happened to Him, who they were hoping He was, and even the strange things that were being reported. All the information was there: Prophet, Crucified, Redeemer, Empty Tomb, Missing Lord. Looking back on it, they themselves were probably shocked they didn't see it. But they simply didn't have the framework to understand what was going on. They had a story about the oppression of Israel and they understood the Messiah and what He was going to do in that context. When Jesus didn't fit into that model, they were shocked, and bewildered. They didn't understand, but not because they didn't have all the facts. They didn't understand, because they didn't see how the facts fit together in a way that made sense. They didn't have the right frame. They didn't see how the story that was unfolding was different than the one they had been telling.

### **Telling the Story...Right (v25-28)**

Jesus, still not recognized by them, showed them how everything in the Old Testament points to what happened to Jesus. He shows them how none of this should be a surprise. They just couldn't see it. They didn't understand. They thought they did, but they didn't. Jesus scolded the Pharisees regarding this same thing when they claimed to be students of the Word of God in John 5:39, 46 <sup>39</sup> You examine the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, and it is those very Scriptures that testify about Me... <sup>46</sup> For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me." Jesus doesn't scold these 2 on the road like he did the Pharisees. They weren't hard hearted just "slow of heart." They needed someone to explain it to them. So, Jesus does. He starts at the beginning. And shows how everything is going according to plan.

### **Recognizing Jesus**

As Jesus talked, they kept walking and eventually they came to the village where they were going. The passage says Jesus "acted like He was going further." This isn't trying to suggest Jesus was lying or misleading them. It is more like Jesus was not going to invite Himself in. They went into the house where they were going. He, uninvited,



planned to keep on walking. But they invited Him in. They didn't just invite Him in, probably out of respect for this wise man who has instructed them along the way, they also asked Him to bless the food. As He blessed the bread and started giving it to them, they realized who it was. They will later tell the other disciples (in v35) that "He was recognized by them in the breaking of the bread." That is what gave it away. They had seen Him do this before at the feeding of the 5000 (Luke 9:16) and at the Last Supper (Luke 22:19).

Then Jesus departed. With the revelation that Jesus lives, His visible presence was no longer necessary. And they reflected that while Jesus was explaining the scriptures, their "hearts were burning" within them. They immediately get up and go back to the city that they had just journeyed from. They tell their story and hear from the others that Jesus has already appeared to many as well.

### **Lessons on the Road to Emmaus**

#### Focusing on Problems Blinds Us

These two disciples were so confused, bewildered, and focused on their confusion and bewilderment that they missed the fact that the one they were looking for was walking with them. Not to fault or cast blame, but that is what we all do. When things don't turn out the way we had imagined, we often times descend into a combination of depression, anxiety, worry, bitterness, and despair. Bitterness over the past and what we wish would have happened and didn't. Depression over our current situation. Anxiety and worry about the future and what we will do in the state of affairs we weren't prepared for and didn't predict. Perhaps we also mix in a little bit of anger at people we think are to blame, maybe even save some anger for God whom we think should have done something different. All along, by focusing on our problems, we miss the fact that God is with us now, in our current situation, walking with us, caring for us, directing us. He isn't shocked or startled by how things are turning out. He is still working all things out according to His plan that is both for His glory and our good.

## We Need God's Perspective

Sometimes in the midst of trials, we beg God to change our circumstance. There is nothing wrong with that. We are encouraged in scripture to tell God what is on our hearts. But sometimes, the problem isn't our circumstances but our perspective. We aren't looking at something from God's vantage point. These two travelers had all the right information but were missing the point because Jesus failed to do what they had anticipated. When Jesus meets them on the road, He doesn't change what happened, He changed how they saw what had happened. He showed them that God hadn't abandoned Jesus, that Jesus hadn't failed as Messiah, that everything had happened and was happening according to plan.

This is precisely the point of the passage of scripture that opens the book of James.

James 1:2-8 says “<sup>2</sup> Consider it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you encounter various trials, <sup>3</sup> knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. <sup>4</sup> And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.<sup>5</sup> But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. <sup>6</sup> But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup> For that person ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, <sup>8</sup> being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

Many of us know this scripture in 2 parts: verses 2-4 about rejoicing in the midst of trials and verses 5-8 about asking God for wisdom. But the truth is that they are part of the same progression of thought. This passage is about trusting God in the midst of trials. Rejoice in trials because God is at work to make you into the person He created you to be. But if you are having a hard time doing that, ask Him to help you see things from His perspective. The wisdom mentioned in verse 5 is the ability to see and understand how God is at work even in the midst of difficult circumstances. That is what the two people on the road received. That is what we often need in the midst of our difficult circumstances.

### We meet Jesus in Worship

They didn't recognize Jesus until He broke bread. They recognized their teacher as they asked Him to give thanks. They realized the burning heart they had felt while He explained Scripture to them was Jesus revealing Himself to them.

The same is true for us. We won't meet Jesus as long as our hearts are focused on our problems or our minds are looking to know about God in a dry, detached, cerebral way. The God of the Bible, the God revealed most perfectly in Jesus Christ, is a living, personal God who enters into relationship with us. We will meet Him when we focus our hearts in an attitude of worship and center our minds on the truth of who He has revealed Himself to be.

### Shared Stories have Power

The two travelers were so energized by their encounter with the risen Lord that they immediately redid their entire journey. They ran back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples what had happened to them. When they did, they were immediately greeted with even more stories of what else Jesus had been up to.

The same is true for us. We need to share our stories of God at work in our lives. Not to brag, not to compare, but to show how God does work in the lives of those who humbly seek Him. In doing so, we will learn the power that comes from shared stories. We will find ourselves being strengthened and encouraged by what God is doing in other people's lives. We will become sources of hope for other people as we reveal what God has done, shown, and taught us in our lives.



## **Discussion Questions**

1. Have you ever been in situation like the 2 on the Emmaus Road, confused and brokenhearted by what appeared to be God letting you down or leaving you alone? In those moments, how can we learn to turn our hearts away from our situation and towards God?
2. Have you ever had your sorrow turn to joy not by having your circumstances change but by having your perspective changed? What helped you change your perspective?
3. Have you ever been in a situation where you felt alone but looking back you see the hand of God leading you the whole time? How can we be more aware of Jesus in the present?
4. What are ways to focus our hearts in an attitude of worship and center our minds on the truth of Scripture?
5. Have you ever seen the power of sharing your story with others or having others tell you their story? Why are we so reluctant to talk about what we see God doing in our own lives?







## Lesson 2 | Doubting Jesus: *Thomas*

### John 20:19-29

by Steve Jones

If I could add a “holiday” to the Christian calendar, a day that all Christians would celebrate, it would be Doubting Thomas Sunday, and it would occur every year on the Sunday after Easter. There are a couple of reasons for this. First, it was one week after the resurrection that Jesus appears to Thomas and erased his doubt. Second, it teaches us an important lesson in how to handle our own doubt and the doubt of others.

For some reason, the church in recent years has not been good at dealing with those who doubt. Instead of pointing people in the right direction towards resources to get their questions answered, we sometimes tell them they just need to “have faith.”

This causes many people in the church either to leave in order to find answers to the questions that plague them, or else spend their lives wondering if they are “losing their faith” every time they have a question.

But Christianity is an evidence giving religion. At every stage, Christianity offers proof that what it claims is worth believing. There are answers out there. I am always encouraged that the questions people ask today about the truth of Christianity are the same questions people have been asking for two thousand years. Answers are out there. We just don’t know to look for them.

It’s important to start by looking at how the early church handled someone who doubted. Not just anyone, one of the original disciples. Thomas. Known to later generations, perhaps unfairly, as “doubting Thomas.” He is the patron saint of those with questions. Looking at how he dealt with his doubt can help us deal with our own doubt as well as the doubt of those around us.

### **A Living Lord (John 20:19-23)**

In the evening of that first Easter Sunday, the disciples were gathered together. They were probably confused, bewildered, and astonished about what had happened. The text says they were definitely afraid. It says they locked the door out of fear of the Jews. While they were sitting there in a locked room, Jesus appeared to them. The same Jesus they had followed for several years. The same Jesus they had seen brutally murdered a few days earlier. The same Jesus because He had the nail marks on His hands and side. The same Jesus... and yet different. He was alive again. This wasn't His ghost or a spirit. This was a fully physical Jesus, not just restored to the kind of life He had previous, raised to a new sort of life. He had the marks on His hands and side, but He was not injured by them. The disciples were in a locked room, but He was able to come stand in their midst.

### **A Missing Disciple (John 20:24-25)**

An interesting twist in the story. For some reason, Thomas wasn't there. When the other disciples tell their story, he refuses to believe. He doesn't do so out of hardness of heart. Thomas isn't being difficult. He isn't a half-hearted believer. Look back at John 11. During the story of Lazarus, when the other disciples think Jesus is refusing to go to help Lazarus because it is too dangerous to leave Galilee and go back to Judea, Thomas says in John 11:16 "Let's also go, so that we may die with Him." Thomas wasn't lukewarm. He knew what was at stake if the stories the others were telling were true. He simply needed more information or evidence before he was able to believe.

### **A Miraculous Encounter (John 20:26-29)**

A week passed. The text says eight days. It means Sunday to Sunday. People in the ancient world counted days like rental car companies instead of cruise agencies. If I rent a car today and return it tomorrow, even if I keep it less than 24 hours, the rental company will charge me for two days. If I go on a 5-day cruise, it is more like five 24-hour periods. You don't count the day you leave. The rental car company method is called "inclusive counting" and it is the way that ancient people counted time. That is why we say Jesus rose on the third day, even though He was in the tomb from Friday afternoon to Sunday morning which isn't even 48 hours. Inclusive counting means Friday+Saturday+Sunday = 3 days. So, "8 days later" means Sunday to Sunday.

What else is cool is that though Thomas doubted that Jesus had risen from the dead, he didn't separate himself from the other disciples, it shows he was seeking. And the disciples didn't exclude him, which shows they were patient and understanding.

On the eighth day, Jesus meets Thomas. He shows up and shows Thomas He is alive. And what follows is the first true confession of faith. Thomas had doubted because he realized what was at stake. When he sees the risen Jesus, he is the first one to put it all together and realize what this means. He acknowledges Jesus as "My Lord and My God."

When you look at the story of Thomas whether you are the one doing the doubting or are someone trying to love a "doubter," you get a window into a biblical approach to dealing with doubt.

### **What Thomas Did with His Doubt**

1. Thomas stated his problem – many times we keep our doubts secret. We are afraid that we will be mocked or excluded for voicing our problems. But the problem is that when we keep silent, though we may avoid ostracism, we also keep ourselves from finding answers. Thomas voiced his problems. It put him one step closer to finding answers.
2. Thomas stayed convincible – Sometimes people use doubt as a covering for sin. They want to stay in the life they have constructed for themselves, so they pretend to doubt. A sure sign of dishonest doubt is that no matter what answers you give, they are never able to be convinced. You answer an objection, they raise another. Thomas doesn't just state his doubt, he states what it would take to convince him. It may sound like a lot but give him credit for saying what it would take to convince him. He wanted to be convinced.
3. Thomas sought answers – Dishonest doubters use their doubts as a reason to stay put. People with honest doubt are hungry for answers, they seek. Thomas was seeking. The reason he met Jesus was because he was praying and hoping and seeking. He was hoping to find answers. He didn't use his doubt as an opportunity to divide. Instead, he remained in fellowship with those he disagreed with.



4. Thomas submitted – The surest sign of dishonest doubt is what happens when confronted with answers. Some people use their doubt as a way of demonstrating their superior intellect or their arrogance. Such people are not convincible and are never convinced. But Thomas, when confronted with enough evidence, didn't just accept, he submitted. He didn't just acknowledge that the disciples were right, he acknowledged Jesus as his Lord.

### **What the Disciples Did with Thomas' Doubt**

Almost as important as how Thomas handled his doubt is the question of how the other disciples dealt with Thomas in the midst of his doubting. Sometimes we have a tendency to respond nervously or harshly to those who have honest but difficult questions. The disciples reveal the best way to respond when confronted with sincere questions.

1. They shared their story – Sometimes, in the face of doubt, those who believe can start feeling naïve or unintelligent. Or they can try to overwhelm the “doubter” in a deluge of answers. The disciples took the humble and honest approach of telling their story. Whether Thomas believed or not, they knew what they had seen, and they kept telling people about it. Never allow doubt to keep you from telling your story of what Jesus has done in your life.
2. They stayed with Thomas – Sometimes people feel the need to exclude the doubter from fellowship. What's interesting is that the disciples didn't do so. Thomas didn't leave. He stayed seeking. And the disciples evidently kept Thomas close, always praying and hoping he would come to believe.

### **What Jesus Did with Thomas' Doubt**

He showed up – The most important, and often overlooked, factor in dealing with doubt...God Himself. We actually believe that God is real, personal, and close. Thomas was honestly seeking. The disciples were hoping and praying for Thomas. And Jesus showed up. We forget that certain things are not up to us. We are called to love people and share out stories. But if God is real, and if He really does call people to Himself, then we can trust that He is at work in the lives of people who are honestly seeking answers to their doubts. Our job isn't to compel. Our job is to tell our stories, to love people, and to provide opportunity for the real, personal, living God of the universe to show up.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What experiences do you have of people expressing doubt in the church?
2. What is the difference between honest and dishonest doubt?
3. How can we encourage honest seeking like Thomas?
4. How can we be faithful to share our stories without being ashamed?
5. How can we help people who doubt not just get answers but meet Jesus?



## Lesson 3 | The Restoration of Peter

### John 21:1-17

by Steve Jones

The feeling of condemnation and failure is an easy ditch to fall in sometimes. When, despite our best efforts, we continue to fail miserably, we can come to view ourselves as unfixable, useless, or even worthless. We feel like we have let everyone, including God, down and there is therefore no part for us to play in the plan of God. But Romans 8:1 says “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

One of the most moving pictures of the power of Jesus to know our failings and lovingly restore us to fruitful service is found at the end of John’s gospel when the risen Jesus meets His disciples by the sea of Galilee and talks with Peter.

You see, if anybody knew the feeling of failure, it was Peter. On the night before Jesus was crucified, Jesus gathered His followers in the upper room to share the Lord’s Supper with them. He also spoke to them words of both comfort and conviction. He talked of His betrayal and coming crucifixion. Peter spoke boldly about his own willingness to lay down his life for Jesus (John 13:37). In response to such boldness, Jesus predicts that Peter will deny that He even knows Jesus three times before the night is over (John 13:38). And sure enough, Jesus is proved correct.

Now, after the resurrection, one wonders the thoughts that were racing through Peter’s mind. Thoughts of worthlessness and exclusion, wondering what Jesus thinks of him, and what use he could be to someone He failed when it mattered most. But Jesus doesn’t abandon Peter. He comes to him and shows him he has not been cast aside and restores him to his role in the kingdom of God.

#### **The Context**

Return to Work (v1-3) – The restoration of Peter takes place along the shores of the sea of Galilee. One day, maybe out of sense of resignation that his life as a disciple and spiritual leader are done, Peter decides to go

fishing again. This isn't just a weekend fishing trip to relax. This is Peter returning to the life of commercial fishing. Peter is headed back to his old life, back to where he was before Jesus, back to all he knew; back to what probably felt like all he was good for anymore.

Jesus Appears (v4-6) – They had fished all night and still hadn't caught anything. Peter's feeling of failure must have compounded. He wasn't a good disciple and turns out he was now also a terrible fisherman. At daybreak, a man walking along the beach calls out to the disciples to cast their nets in a different spot. When they do, they make such a tremendous catch of fish that John (the disciple Jesus loves) remarks that the person on the shore must be Jesus.

Peter Goes to Jesus (v7-11) – Peter, in typical Peter fashion, doesn't stay to help the other disciples haul in the fish. He jumps in the water and swims to shore. I don't know why but I find it humorously emphatic that it says Peter “threw himself into the sea.”

Jesus and the Disciples eat (v12-15) – When they get to shore, they find a fire going and Jesus cooking breakfast. They ate and spoke with Jesus. Though it may seem like an insignificant fact, it is important to note that the resurrected Jesus has a body, He wasn't a ghost or spirit. His body was new and transformed, but it was a body. It could be touched. Evidently, He still ate. And as they sat by the fire, eating their breakfast and watching the sun rise over the sea of Galilee, Jesus begins to ask Peter some questions.

### **The Conversation**

The First Question: Three times Peter swore he didn't know Jesus. Now Jesus asks Peter 3 times “Do you love me?” The first time Jesus asks, “Do you love me more than these?”, it is unclear what “these” refers to. Jesus could be referring either to the other disciples or the fishing gear. Peter had said before that he loved Jesus more than the others and was willing to follow Him to death even if the others fell away. Now Jesus asks Peter if he still think his love is stronger than the disciples. Jesus also could be referring to the fishing tackle. Peter had gone back to work. Now Jesus asks if he is content being a fisherman or if he still wants to be a fisher of men. Do you love me more than your old life? There is a good reason to believe that perhaps Jesus meant both. Maybe Jesus was trying to remind Peter of his previous declarations of superior love and to show him how far he had fallen.



Two things need to be said about Peter's answer. First, the word "yes" isn't in the original text. The word that is translated as "yes" means more accurately "truly." It was the word that was used to mean yes, but here it is important to realize that Peter says "Truly, Lord, you know..." The second thing is that Peter uses a different word for love than Jesus uses. Jesus uses the word agape, and Peter uses the word philos. Though the words mean very similar things and can be used almost interchangeably, it is still an important contrast that Peter refuses to use the word Jesus uses. Peter is still remembering his failure. Peter says Lord you know what I did. You know my love doesn't measure up. You know I don't really agape you, my love for you is philos. I'm not worthy. I messed up and I will keep messing up.

The Second Question: Again, Jesus asks, "do you love me." This time, though, Jesus leaves out the reference to other people or things. Just asks Peter directly, "do you love me". Again, Jesus uses agape for love. Again, Peter replies, "Truly, Lord you know that I love you" and again Peter uses the other word for love. Peter loves Jesus but refuses to acknowledge that his love for Jesus is worthy of Jesus.

The Third Question: The third time around, Jesus changes His word. He asks him "Do you love me" but this time it is Jesus who changes the word for "love." Jesus meets Peter at his level. Jesus tells Peter, look, I want you to know you are forgiven, and useful. You have a place in my plan. You don't have to feel worthy to know that you are wanted. You might consider your gifts small, insignificant, and unworthy, but Jesus doesn't. Jesus will take whatever you have to give.

Peter thought he was finished, that he had failed. Jesus had other plans. But what lessons can we learn from the restoration of Peter. Here are a few that stand out.

**Run to Jesus** – When we sin or fail, we have a tendency to run and hide. We know we did wrong or are worried of being cast aside so we find a corner to slink off and mope. Peter does that. He goes back to his old life, thinking that was all he was good for. But when Peter sees Jesus, he doesn't wait. He throws himself into the sea and hurries to be near Him. Maybe to explain himself, maybe to ask forgiveness. For whatever reason, he runs (or swims) to Jesus...and we should do the same. Jesus is under no illusions that we are perfect. We shouldn't be either.

When we fail, we don't need to hide from Jesus. We need to hurry to Him so that He can pick us up, restore us, heal us, and get us going in the right direction.

**Jesus Knows and Loves** – For some reason, we often equate love with ignorance and knowledge with anger. We say stupid things like “love is blind.” And “when dad finds out he is going to be so mad.” But love isn't blind. That is the last thing love is. Love, real love, the love God has for us, is an eyes-wide-open kind of love. Peter realizes it by prefacing his responses with “You know.” Jesus knows us deeply. And that knowledge produces love for us not anger. We should be under no illusions that Jesus loves the well-constructed, carefully manicured façade we show other people. He knows our weaknesses and our sins. He knows the “us” we try to keep hidden from other people. He knows....and loves.

**Humble Honesty Not Arrogant Boasting** – The arrogant Peter is gone. He has faced his ultimate failure. He knows who he really is. When Jesus asks him if he loves Him. He is humble and honest. No more pretending. We need to do the same. We need to be humble and honest with Jesus. Sometimes we don't want to admit to ourselves or God who we really are. We want to maintain the illusion that we are some sort of superhero and that we did God a favor by joining his team. A person in Peter's position is more useful to God because he knows his limitations and weakness. He knows he can't do it on his own and therefore he is better able to trust God.

**Let Jesus Determine Your Role** – Peter probably thought his days of discipling were done. He figured it was time to go back to all he was good for....catching fish. Jesus had other plans. Jesus met him, Jesus called him, Jesus qualified him. Sometimes, in the midst of failure, we can resist accepting what God is calling us toward because we feel unworthy or because we worry that we will just fail all over again. We need to let Jesus determine the role He has for us and allow Him to grow us up into the maturity we need to perform that function. Peter probably figured that Jesus' prophecy, that He was going to build His church on Peter the rock, was now just a bunch of hot air. What Peter didn't realize is that Jesus' prophecy factored in Peter's frailty. Peter's failure showed Peter what Jesus already knew about him and opened Peter up to the fact that he still had some growing to do. His failure hadn't disqualified him. And neither do ours.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Have you ever felt like a failure? Have you ever felt like you weren't good enough? Have you ever felt the presence of Jesus picking you back up, showing you He loved you, and restoring you to the place He had for you?
2. Why do we sometimes run from Jesus instead of to Jesus when we stumble or fall? What does running from Jesus look like? What does running to Jesus look like?
3. What are some ways that we treat love and knowledge as mutually exclusive? What does it mean that Jesus knows us completely and loves us completely?
4. How can we embrace the humility that comes with our failures without also embracing the worthlessness that we sometimes also embrace? How can we acknowledge our weakness and learn to cheerfully depend on God?
5. Why did Peter go back to fishing? What does it mean that we should let God determine our role?



## Lesson 4 | The Great Commission

### Matthew 28:16-20

by Steve Jones

Have you ever missed the forest for the trees? Have you ever been so focused on the details that you missed the big picture? Sometimes we do it out of fascination with some unique and intriguing aspect or detail of something we have discovered. Sometimes we do it because we are worried that some small detail will be overlooked or left out. The trees are important.... all of them...each of them. There wouldn't be a forest without them.

Such is the case with God and His plan for the world. Sometimes we miss His big plan because we are focused on His plan for us...our salvation. When we recognize our need for the saving power of God in our lives, we respond with gratitude. But sometimes what comes next is the equivalent of "well, glad I got that taken care of...now what." Our individual salvation is an important part of God's plan. But they are trees, and we are missing the forest unless we zoom out and realize that God has a bigger plan that includes us.

God's plan is the fulfillment of His purpose for the world He created good, but which fell because of our sin. It is about Him fulfilling the promise made in Revelation 21 that says, "Behold I am making all things new." It is about us praying the Lord's Prayer that God's kingdom would come, and His will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. Our salvation is the beginning not the end of God's plan for us. He calls us to co-labor with Him and to see His kingdom come on earth.

The last few verses of Matthew provide an amazing summary of our invitation to be a part of the work of God in the world. We call it the Great Commission because in it, Jesus commissions us as His ambassadors to go bring others into the kingdom.



## **Source of our Mission - The Authority of Jesus (v18)**

When Jesus meets His disciples, He starts by telling them in verse 18, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." In Matthew 4:8-9, during the temptations, Satan offered Jesus "all the kingdoms of the world and their glory" if He would worship him. Jesus, by enduring the cross has gained far more. He has all the authority in heaven and earth. What this means is that Jesus is the rightful Lord of everything. Abraham Kuyper once famously said, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!" And Jesus is calling all people to enter into right relationship with their true Lord. The great commission is about Jesus enlisting us in the great ongoing mission of announcing the Lordship of Jesus and calling all people to following Him.

## **Substance of our Mission (v19-20)**

After announcing His authority, He gives His followers a command.

### Go and Make Disciples (v19)

Though in English, it reads like 2 commands, the word "go" is actually a participle...going. "Make disciples" is the command. The best translation is more like, as you go, make disciples. Or, wherever you go, make disciples. Jesus is telling His followers to look for opportunities to make more followers of Jesus wherever they happen to find themselves.

Disciple literally means student. Jesus had called disciples to Himself. Now He was calling His disciples to make more disciples, students. He goes on to describe in detail who and how.

### Of All the Nations (v19)

Jesus came as the Jewish Messiah to fulfill the promises God made to Israel. He also came to fulfill the mission God gave to Israel to be a light to the nations. Now with the authority Jesus has, He is calling all people, everywhere to come into His kingdom. He is building a kingdom that reaches beyond the borders of a single nation. Revelation 5:9 says that gathered around the throne in heaven will be people "from every tribe and tongue and people and nation."

### Baptizing Them – Declaring Your Allegiance (v19)

Baptism in the early church was not some additional act that was performed after your profession of faith; it was the profession of faith itself. By being baptized you were taking a stand on the side of Christ, planting your flag, declaring your allegiance and your intent to serve your Lord and become like Him. We live in a world today where taking sides is frowned upon. Even in church, we try so hard to be open and welcoming to non-Christians that it can sometimes be hard to tell who the Christians are. We don't want to offend so we end up shrinking back into anonymity. No more anonymous Christians. A disciple is someone who takes a stand and declares to other Christians and to the world his intention to follow and become like Christ.

### Obedient – Follow Your Lord (v20)

Jesus says at the beginning of the Great Commission that He possesses all authority. Authority is the right, because of one's position, to give commands and enforce obedience. Most of us don't like the idea of authority or of someone else telling us what to do. This creates a problem because Jesus possesses authority, Jesus gives commands, and Jesus makes demands. A disciple is someone who obeys, someone who recognizes and willingly submits to the authority of Christ.

The good news is that we have a loving Lord who desires the best for His followers. We serve a Lord who says in Matthew 11:28-30 “<sup>28</sup> Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your weary souls, <sup>30</sup> For My yoke is comfortable, and My burden is light.” He is gentle. His yoke is easy. His burden is light. His commands are not to crush us but to free us and help us find joy, purpose, love, and rest.

### Teaching Them – Renew Your Mind (v20)

But obedience does not come naturally. Our sinful selves kick against the goads (Acts 26:14), telling us to rebel. Jesus tells us in the Great Commission that the way one becomes better able to obey is through being taught: “teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you.” A disciple is therefore someone who is being instructed in how to live as Christ commanded. Again, we resist. We often want Christianity to be about feelings, fellowship, and fun. We make a distinction

between head and heart, then exalt heart over the head. We stress the importance of experience over instruction. Unfortunately, the Bible is crystal clear on this point: Christianity is furthered, and disciples are made through teaching. Romans 12:2 reads, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” 1 Peter 1:13 adds, “Prepare your minds for action.” Colossians 2:6-7 says, “Therefore as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.” Ephesians 4:20 says, “But you did not learn Christ in this way.” The list could go on. The important thing to realize is that teaching (instruction, training, etc.) is not optional. A disciple is someone who has been transformed by having his mind renewed through powerful teaching and instruction.

### **Support for our Mission**

After revealing His authority and commissioning us with an important mission, Jesus gives us the support we need to be effective as we go. He ends the Great Commission, in fact the entire book of Matthew ends in verse 20, with the comforting reassurance that “I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” This promise repeats a similar phrase from the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 31:6 “Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or in dread of them, for the LORD your God is the One who is going with you. He will not desert you or abandon you.”

Jesus Himself promises that He will be with us wherever we go. We can be confident knowing that the one who has commissioned us is also accompanying us along the way. Jesus isn't handing us a mission and leaving us on our own. As John 15:5 reminds us, He is the vine, we are the branches. We are to remain in Him and be extensions of Him. For apart from Him, we can do nothing.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What does it mean that Jesus has authority?
2. How can we make Jesus' command in the Great Commission a priority?
3. How can we be a part of making disciples?
4. What is the difference between teaching people the commands of Jesus and teaching people to obey the commands of Jesus?
5. How can we rely on the comfort offered by Jesus' promise always to be with us?





## Lesson 5 | Wait for Me

# Acts 1

by Claire Mummert

Have you ever had to wait for something? Not just waiting for a few minutes but really waiting? If we look back through the Bible, we see that God frequently gives a promise and then asks His people to wait. Abraham had to wait twenty-five years for the fulfillment of his son Isaac. But that fulfillment is only 25 years after the promise. Abraham was one hundred years old at the birth of Isaac which means he had been waiting and hoping for a son for that long as well. Joseph had to wait for the fulfillment of his dream. He was despised by his family, forced into slavery, wrongfully accused, and jailed before he ever saw a step toward this dream that God had given him. He had to wait. Even Mary, the mother of Jesus, had to wait on the fulfillment of prophesy.

Yet we frequently think that these circumstances will not apply to us. When we pray and ask God to provide for us through our job, to help us find out about a medical condition, to get us through a hardship, we want those answers now. We pray for neon signs and verbal responses, but we forget that there is often times power and purpose in the waiting.

Acts begins with this feeling of waiting. It is really just Luke part two, the second of a two-part compilation by Luke which ended on a cliff hanger. Luke ended with the “now what” question. What will the disciples do in light of all that has happened? Luke chronicled the life and work of Jesus then transitions in Acts to show the life of the disciples and, through their ministry, the church. Acts is the answer to the question “now what” in light of Jesus’ resurrection and ascension. Luke ended as Acts begins, with Jesus’ last words to the disciples and His ascension. And what does He say to them?

“He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father promised, “which,” He said, “you heard of from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” (Acts 1:4-5)

He commands them to wait.

Jesus appeared to His disciples multiple times after the resurrection and tells them they are going to receive power, through the Spirit, and be His witnesses to all the earth (v8). While they will go out to all Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, He asks them to wait here for a minute. He asks them to trust Him and trust what He is doing.

Today, we are going to look not only at the command to wait but at what is happening in this waiting. God is not stagnating during this time nor are His people. We will see that, in fact, He is using this time to unify their purpose, call them to prayer, and heal their community.

### **Unified in Purpose (v3-8)**

Jesus took time to present Himself before His followers many times and to give them proofs throughout the forty days so that they would know He truly was the risen Christ. He did this not just because we are tangible people but because this allowed eyewitnesses to see Him. This allows us to have historical proof about the resurrection since many eyewitnesses could have disproved these things at the time if they had not happened. But He doesn't just show up to give them these proofs. He also spends time teaching them about the kingdom of God and the Spirit of God.

Despite everything that the disciples had been through with Jesus, they are still hoping that His return meant the overthrow of Rome and the return of Israel's rule. After the end of the line of kings, a period of exile, and their return to Israel, Israel saw a brief return of power during the time of the Maccabees (~165 BC), and they are hoping to see that again. They have heard Jesus speak about His reign and kingdom and they are hoping that it will be a physical and political reign. This is why they ask Jesus, "Lord, is it at this time that You are restoring the kingdom to Israel? (v6)" But Jesus is here to establish a different kind of kingdom. The kingdom includes the Holy Spirit as a blessing and sign of the Messiah's rule. They are not receiving political power or social power; they are receiving power from the Holy Spirit.

They are to give loyalty only to Christ and His kingdom, no longer finding their identity primarily in belonging to an earthly kingdom. Jesus responds to the disciples, “It is not for you to know periods of time or appointed times which the Father has set by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and as far as the remotest part of the earth (v7-8).”

Jesus is asking them to wait for a time, but He is doing so to prepare them. To help them to see the truth of the kingdom. To unite them in one purpose. They are to be His witnesses to the entire earth, beginning nearby and spreading outward. This is the pilgrimage of Christians. The Holy Spirit does not just convey salvation but also propels believers throughout the world to share the good news. John Stott affirms this saying that, “Salvation is given to be shared.”

### **Called to Prayer (v12-14)**

So, the disciples see the ascension and go into this waiting period with a renewed sense of purpose and understanding about the kingdom of God. They head to the upper room to wait for the Spirit to arrive and for the power that Jesus has promised them. He told them in John 14 that the Spirit will be a helper “to be with you forever...You know him, for He dwells with you and will be in you...But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. (John 14:16-17; 26)” So they know they will receive power, they know He will be a helper, and they know He is coming in the name of Jesus, but they may still feel unsure. The natural outpouring of that is to pray! “They went up to the upstairs room where they were staying...All these were continually devoting themselves with one mind to prayer (v13-14)”. The people know that if they call on God, He will listen to them (Jeremiah 29:12, Job 22:27). Jesus Himself was the one who taught them to pray and to take their day-to-day to the Father. He was the one who taught them to pray “Your kingdom come” (Luke 11:1-4). They knew that the best way they could wait, the best way they could keep in touch with God’s will, the best way they could further the kingdom of God in this time of stillness, was to pray. How did they pray?

Continually – The disciples did not go to the upper room, utter a quick prayer, and let it go. They prayed continually throughout their time together. They embody the idea that is presented in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to pray “without ceasing”.

Devoted – The devotion of the disciples came with a choice and a cost. It would cost them everything to follow Jesus. Most of the disciples, the exception being John, would die horrific deaths for the Gospel and John would be exiled. They were prepared to lose everything for Christ and this time of prayer solidified that choice. They were not wavering but waiting and praying in obedience to the Lord of their lives.

With one mind – One hallmark of the early church is that they were “of one heart and soul” (Acts 4:32). This time in prayer further unified God’s people to prepare them to be the Church to the world. They would be a model for what it looked to live as the people of God. Paul will say in Philippians 1:27 that the church ought to stand “firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.” This is what we see in the prayer of the disciples as they wait for the Spirit.

This life of prayer becomes a bedrock of the early church and continues into present day. When we have hard times, “look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always” (1 Chronicles 16:11). If we are unsure about our purpose or if we are understanding the Word of God correctly, “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in His holy people” (Ephesians 1:18). This is just the beginning of God’s people turning to Him in prayer as they wait on His will.

### **Healing the Community (v15-26)**

The last thing that we see come out of this time of waiting is that the community of disciples is healed. After the betrayal and death of Judas, the disciples do not fracture but they are still left with brokenness and hurt. They are united in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, but they still are short in their number. The final step to healing this broken part was to replace Judas within their midst and fulfill Psalm 109 that another would take his place. They look to the men who were already following Jesus and had been witness to His work/teaching.

They narrow it down to two men and then they begin to pray again. They look to the Lord “who know[s] the hearts of all people” so that He might “show which one of these two [He has] chosen (v24).”

While some people view this as a flipping of the coin to see which of these men would become one of their number, they were in fact consulting God. Proverbs 16:33 says, “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.” This is meant to be a way to let God decide without any partiality from the people. Proverbs tells us in chapter 18 verse 18 that the “lot puts an end to quarrels and decides between powerful contenders.” This was a way to ask God for His will and avoid arguments or biases.

While we do not traditionally cast lots or do anything of that type now because we have direct access to God through the Spirit, do not get distracted by the casting of lots. Focus on the disciples looking to make their community whole again.

### **Conclusion**

Jesus told the disciples to wait to receive the power of the Spirit and to become His witnesses to the world while still promising them those things. He did not expect them to be stagnate but had intention in their waiting. He wanted to unite their purpose, call them to prayer, and heal their community. While we have His Spirit, we also have times of waiting and can use this model for ourselves as well. We can make sure that we are in line with God’s purpose through His Word, we can spend time in prayer, and we can seek to serve our communities.



## **Discussion Questions**

1. What is it like to have a season of waiting? What is your typical response?
2. Why did the disciples need to have the purpose of the kingdom of God clarified for them? How do we seek after this same political and social power?
3. Why is prayer so important in times of waiting? How do we know that prayer is powerful?
4. Why was it important that the disciples' community was healed after the betrayal of Judas?
5. How can we take these lessons to heart in our times of waiting?

**Road to Pentecost is a Community Group curriculum that walks you through the events and teachings of Jesus between the period of His resurrection and ascension. It begins with Jesus' teachings on the Road to Emmaus and ends with Jesus instructing the disciples to wait for until the Spirit comes. Jesus uses this short amount of time to restore his disciples in community and prepare them to spread the Good News. Jesus takes a group of ordinary men and women and transforms them into passionate missionaries for His name.**

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