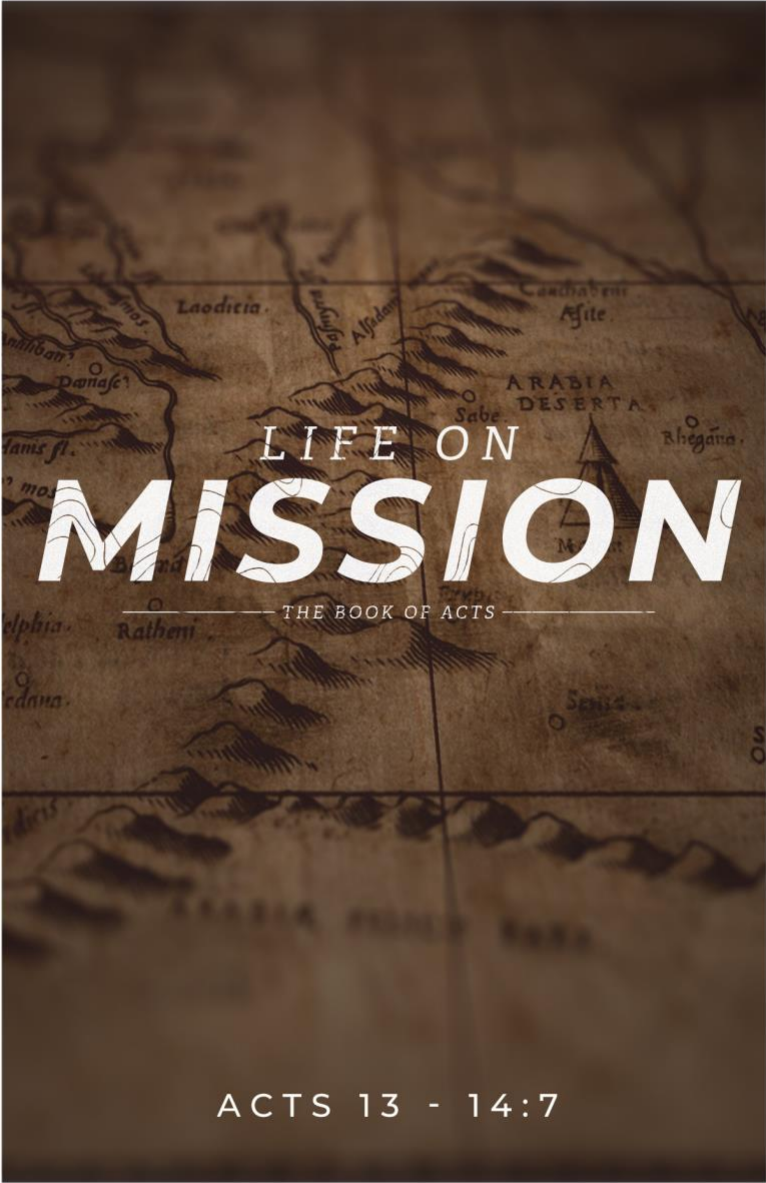




WORD TO LIFE

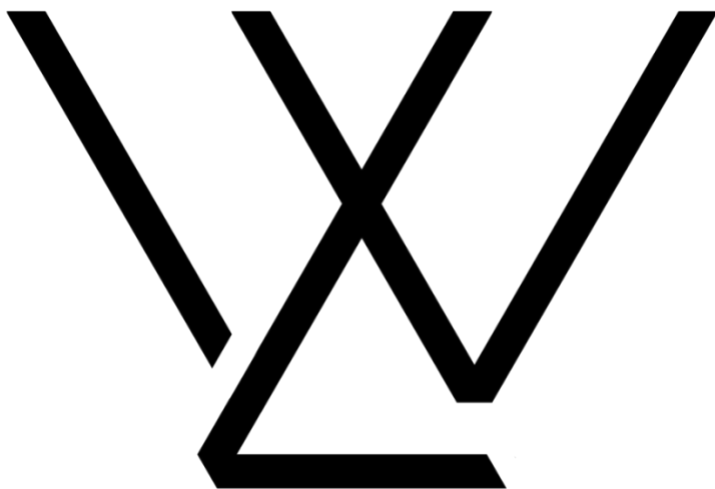
WEEKS 1 - 4



LIFE ON
MISSION

— THE BOOK OF ACTS —

ACTS 13 - 14:7



Word to Life's are sermon-aligned study guides, created to help the church dive even deeper into the passages we study together on Sundays.

Each week there will be five studies to help you prepare for the upcoming weekend sermon. This will also be a great discussion tool at your next LifeGroup meeting.

We hope you enjoy and grow deeper in your faith!

— **WEEK 1** —

- JAN. 3
- JAN. 4
- JAN. 5
- JAN. 6
- JAN. 7

— **WEEK 2** —

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- JAN. 13
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— **NO WORD TO LIFE** —
— **JANUARY 17-21** —
— **SANCTITY OF LIFE WEEK** —

— **WEEK 3** —

- JAN. 24
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— **WEEK 4** —

- JAN. 31
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Week 1: Acts 13:1-12

Day 1: Exploring Biblical Contexts

READ: Acts 13:1-12

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Acts 13:1-12 and completing the various activities below.

- **Activity:** After you have read Acts 13:1-12, take a moment to read the preceding story in Acts 12:20-25
 - How does the background story of Acts 12 help to reframe the punishment that was distributed on Elymas?

- **Question:** Where did the apostles go to preach when they first arrived in Salamis?¹ Why do you think they chose to go there instead of other potential places?

- **Question:** When you read Acts 13:1-4, 9 what do you notice about how the Holy Spirit works?

¹ See Acts 13:4 for reference.

- **Question:** One of the things that Paul accused Bar-Jesus of doing was *making crooked the straight paths of the Lord*.²
 - How would you Paul's language in your own words?

 - What are some examples of making the straight paths of the Lord crooked?

- **Activity:** After briefly reading and studying Acts 13:1-12, spend some time in prayer that God would reveal His truth and enable you to apply it in everyday life.

² See Acts 13:10 for reference.

Week 1: Acts 13:1-12

Day 2: Together on Mission

READ: Acts 13:1-4

EXPLORE:

Sometimes, we unintentionally miss out on the depth of Scripture because of the lens through which we read it. We view the world from a particular vantage point that shapes the way we interpret and apply the Bible. Because the biblical text was written in a drastically different cultural setting, this can often present us with challenges. Take, for example, our text today. In it, we see that Barnabas and Saul are called by the Holy Spirit for missions. Inherent in the mission of God, there is a theme of community that could easily be missed. One of the reasons we miss the themes of communal togetherness is because we consistently read the biblical text through a western, individualized lens. It could be summarized as, “We are *me* centered instead of *we* centered.” When we begin to acknowledge how the biblical view of mission challenges our hyper-individualized sense of purpose, we can begin to understand Acts well. Let’s take a closer look at the theme of community and togetherness in today’s passage.

Together seeking God. The text begins with companions worshipping God and fasting together. It is in this setting that the Holy Spirit shows up to set them apart for a specific ministry assignment. There is something to be said about our need to engage in corporate worship *and*, as the text specifically indicates, corporate fasting as we seek God together.

Together set apart. When the Holy Spirit issues the assignment, it is for both Barnabas and Saul. They are not sent out alone. Rather, they are sent out as companions. This is reminiscent of how Jesus sent out the disciples in pairs to go and minister.³ We need support, encouragement, someone to correct us, and someone to balance out our weaknesses in the difficult task of ministry. The wisdom of Ecclesiastes 4:12 rings true that “*though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will*

³ See Mark 6:7 and Luke 10:1 for reference.

withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”

Together sending out. Barnabas and Saul were affirmed, blessed, and commissioned into the mission field by their immediate community. Their commissioning was not an act of a sole individual; it was affirmed by the prayer-filled church community. We lose a great deal when individuals embrace a calling to ministry apart from the wisdom, blessing, and support from the local body of Christ. We should take note that *even* spiritual giants like Barnabas and Saul were under the blessing and commission of a local church.

Together the Spirit’s instruments. Do not miss this amazing detail. In verse 4 we are told that they were “sent out by the Holy Spirit”, but just one verse earlier we are told that the church “sent them off.” Consider the deep meaning of our actions together as the church of Jesus Christ. As we work, give, send, love, and teach, it is the Holy Spirit of God working through us.

BIG IDEA: The calling to live a life on mission is an essentially communal endeavor.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Does your worship and pursuit of God ever include fasting? Explain, why or why not.

- **Question:** Does the rhythm of your life involve consistent time with the community of God? How do you think the answer to this question might impact your understanding the will of God for your life?

Week 1: Acts 13:1-12

Day 3: Missionary or Imposter?

READ: Acts 13:1-4 and Acts 8:1-4

EXPLORE:

Prolific preacher and Christian thinker, Charles Spurgeon once remarked, *“Every Christian is a missionary or an imposter.”* In only a few simple words, Spurgeon highlighted the essentially Christian calling to live a life on mission for the sake of the gospel. People who have profoundly experienced the grace of God in Christ will, by the Holy Spirit, be sent out as witnesses of that very same grace. To see this principle exemplified, we do not need to look any farther than the early church history recorded in Acts.

The last stone had brought a sudden end to the life of Stephen, but the persecution at the hand of the once-defiant Saul was only getting started.⁴ Luke records that, in the days and weeks that followed Stephen’s tragic death, *“Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.”*⁵ The church was not silenced because of the persecution they experienced; they were sent!

With the earlier example from Acts in mind, we can now see that the church in Acts 13 was not sent on mission because of violence or persecution, but something far more powerful. The church in Acts 13 was sent on mission because of the powerful leading of the Holy Spirit in their community. Be reminded that a praying church will become a missional church under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

Pause for just a moment and read again Acts 13:1-4. Take a moment to notice all the ways in which the Holy Spirit was active in only a few verses. The Holy Spirit speaks, instructs, appoints, affirms, and commissions. Interestingly, Luke writes this passage so that we can see how the ministry of the early church goes hand in hand with the work of

⁴ See Acts 7 for reference.

⁵ See Acts 8:4 for reference.

the Holy Spirit. Their synergy can be seen in the commissioning of Barnabas and Saul.

At first glance, it appears as though the church commissioned the pair after fasting and praying.⁶ However, Acts 13:4 asserts that it was the Holy Spirit who sent them out. This begs the question, “Who really sent Paul and Barnabas?” Was it the church or the Holy Spirit that commissioned the pair? The answer to this question should not come as a surprise, but it should arrive as a powerful reminder.

The Holy Spirit appointed and commissioned Paul and Barnabas through the church community and its leadership. The church of Acts 13 put into practice what churches throughout time have been called to do as well. Namely, they demonstrated a profound dependence upon the Holy Spirit and a willingness to participate in God’s mission to the world.

BIG IDEA: A praying church will become a sending church under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What did the church do before the Holy Spirit spoke and after He gave direction? What does that teach us about spiritual disciplines and the Lord’s leading?

- **Activity:** As we continue to read and study the biblical text this week, pray that the Lord would expand your heart for Him and your willingness to be sent out for the glory of God.
 - Spend time in prayer.
 - Spend time brainstorming what it might look like for you to share the gospel in your life.
 - Ask your LifeGroup to help hold you accountable to live faithfully.

⁶ See Acts 13:3 for reference.

Week 1: Acts 13:1-12

Day 4: The Formerly Blind Leading the Blind

READ: Acts 13:6-12 and Romans 1:18-23

EXPLORE:

For those familiar with the earlier sections of Acts, it should appear slightly ironic that Saul, who was also called Paul, would call down temporary blindness on Elymas.⁷ This irony is primarily rooted in the fact that Paul's own conversion story came through an encounter with the resurrected Christ and a season without sight. To slightly modify the popular English idiom, Paul's words to Elymas embody the *formerly* blind who now leads the blind. Now, let's set the scene and explore it further.

We are told that an intelligent proconsul named Sergius Paulus wanted to meet Barnabas and Saul to hear the Word of God.⁸ A proconsul was a governing official in the Roman senate who would have been responsible for ruling over a certain province. It was a powerful position, but his status did not keep him from the perils of sorcery and false prophecy. Sergius had an attendant who was set on keeping the proconsul from hearing and responding to the gospel of Christ. His name was Elymas.

It is at this point in the story that Luke chooses to re-introduce the apostle Saul who was also named Paul. Saul was his Jewish name and Paul was his Greek name. The apostle is referred to as Paul here and throughout the remainder of Acts because he was ministering in increasingly Gentile contexts. This switch in title also indicates that Paul was becoming the prominent and leading member of the Gentile mission.

Luke positioned the growing influence of Paul against the deception of Elymas. We need to remember that Ananias and Herod⁹ had suffered far more severe judgments, but now the devious false prophet was only given a temporary loss of sight. We ought to ask, "Why was blindness the appropriate punishment for Elymas?"

⁷ His name is Bar-Jesus initially, but subsequently Elymas. For this reason, he will be referenced here as Elymas.

⁸ See Acts 13:7 for reference.

⁹ See Acts 5 and 12 respectively for reference.

First, blindness was purposefully chosen as a specific punishment upon the life of one who was not only deceived but deceiving. May the story of Elymas remind us that although few are physically blind, all opposition to God and His work stems from a place of spiritual blindness.

Second, we need to understand that Paul's actions toward Elymas are a stark reminder of where the true, spiritual power resides. This judgment was designed to help Elymas and the onlookers realize that the power of Jesus is supreme and unrivaled. The establishment of the Holy Spirit's power through Paul was fundamental to his unfolding mission in the Gentile world.

Finally, we must be reminded that before the apostle ever called down blindness on the sorcerer, he had his own season of divinely provided blindness. We need to remember Paul had experienced blindness on the road to Damascus as a profound means of God's grace upon his life. Although Paul was certainly calling down judgment on Elymas, the punishment and its duration made space for the false prophet to turn his heart toward God. In this text and others like it, be reminded that living a life on mission will necessarily involve confronting the forces of evil and their representatives in the world. Even in those encounters, the power of God is supreme.

BIG IDEA: God's punishment on the life of Elymas was purposeful. It was designed to display God's unrivaled power, His invitation to repentance, and the church's unstoppable mission.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What do you notice about what happened in the aftermath of God's judgment upon the life of Elymas?¹⁰

- **Activity:** Read Romans 1:18-23 and prayerfully reflect again on today's text.

¹⁰ See Acts 13:11-12 for reference.

Week 1: Acts 13:1-12

Day 5: The First Missionary Journey

READ TOGETHER: Acts 13:4-12

Instructions: We believe that biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, Day 5 of each week is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.

EXPLORE TOGETHER:

Imagine setting out on one of the greatest adventures of your life! If you have ever seen Star Wars, this adventure is like Luke Skywalker being asked by Obi-Wan Kenobi to follow him and train to become a Jedi. For those who are familiar with Paw Patrol, it is like the pups being called out for a rescue. Maybe you could think of an adventure or two, but it is hard to imagine a greater adventure than the one that we just read in the Bible (Acts 13:4-12).

The Bible story of Paul and Barnabas that we read is a great adventure. It is better than Paw Patrol and it is better than Star Wars. The adventure we read in Acts 13 was one of the first missionary journey in the early days of Christ's church.

Let me ask you a question, "What does it mean to be a missionary?"

It means that we are willing to tell others about Jesus with our words and in our lives. Sometimes, being a missionary means that we are willing to go to far off places so that we can tell others about the good news about Jesus. We are supposed to share our faith even when it can be hard or uncomfortable. In the Bible, Jesus gave His followers a Great Commission. In the Great Commission, Jesus sent His followers to go and make disciples in all nations.

We are supposed to share the good news about Jesus with people who are near and far away. Now, this does not mean that every single Christian must leave the place they were born and become a missionary in a different country, but it does mean that we have a responsibility to share our faith wherever we are. The story in Acts 13 is an example of the incredible adventure that awaits those who are willing to be sent to others to share their faith.

Paul and Barnabas were the first full-time missionaries of the church, and our Bible story describes their journey. Our passage tells us that they first went to Cyprus, which was Barnabas' hometown. In Cyprus they encountered opposition from Elymas the magician, but God's power overcame Satan's power. Elymas was blinded and Sergius Paulus was converted to Christianity! God's adventures are always the best ones to take.

What is the purpose of this missionary journey? The short answer is to seek and save the lost. God has an eternal plan to bring people from all tribes, languages, and nations to a saving knowledge of His Son, Jesus Christ. In other words, God wants to see people from all over the world become Christians. Will you join this great adventure by telling others the good news of Jesus Christ?

BIG IDEA: The first missionary journey is a great adventure that we can all be a part of.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** What do you think John Mark's responsibilities were as an assistant to Paul and Barnabas?

- **Question:** Why do you think Elymas was blinded for opposing the ways of God?

- **Question:** Paul and Barnabas were faithful to preach the gospel. Who can you share the gospel of Jesus Christ with? Name the person and spend some time praying for them.

- **Question:** What do you notice about the crowd's response to Paul's speech in Acts 13:42-43?
 - How would you compare their response to your own?

- **Question:** What do you think it means to "*continue in the grace of God?*"¹¹
 - In view of what he had preached earlier, why do you think that Paul encouraged the Jewish crowd to continue in the grace of God? (Observe Acts 13:38-39)

¹¹ See Acts 13:43 for reference

Week 2: Acts 13:13-43

Day 2: Damaging Decision

READ: Acts 13:13; Acts 15:36-41

EXPLORE:

Decisions we make impact our relationships with other people. Sometimes the decisions we make even impact other people's relationships with each other. As we explore today's text, we will see how a decision that was made by John, who was also called Mark, had far-reaching significance on the missional trajectory of the early church. If you have not done so already, please read the above sections of Acts 13 and 15.

As we begin, we should take special notice of three words, "John left them." These words sum up the decision made by John that had damaging effects for years to come. Paul, Barnabas, and John planned to continue their journey from Perga toward Antioch. At this critical point in the story, John decided to leave his companions, head back toward Jerusalem, and end his participation in the missionary journey.

It is important that we note that we do not know why John decided to depart from the company and head back to Jerusalem. This has been a topic of much discussion and resulted in several theories presented below.

John might have been fearful of the dangerous journey to cross the mountains of Tarsus on the way to Antioch. It is possible that he got sick with malaria in the lowlands of Pamphylia. Perhaps he was upset because Paul was steadily gaining more influence and authority than his cousin Barnabas. Maybe John disagreed with Paul's approach to Gentile ministry because the apostle excluded any requirement of the law.

Although we don't know why John decided to leave the missionary journey, we can see that Paul was outraged by this decision. When John eventually attempted to rejoin the group in Acts 15, Paul emphatically rejected him as a companion. Paul's opposition was not unanimous, however. Barnabas disagreed with Paul and believed that John should

have been able to rejoin the team. Eventually, this disagreement was so sharp that Paul and Barnabas decided to part ways.

We will give attention to the details of the separation and eventual reconciliation at another time, but we should recognize here how one decision caused so much relational damage. As we pause to meditate upon this moment in Scripture, we need to recognize that decisions can often have far-reaching ramifications. Sometimes, decisions are made for good reasons. Others are made from a place of brokenness or insecurity. Regardless of the motive, these three simple words in Acts 13 ought to make us pause and consider the impact of our decisions on those around us.

BIG IDEA: The decisions we make often have unanticipated and long-lasting relational ramifications.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Has anyone ever made a decision, good or bad, that drastically impacted your relationship with someone else? Explain.
- **Question:** When making major decisions in life, do you have a process by that helps guides you along the decision-making journey? Write down your responses and discuss godly decision-making with your LifeGroup this week.

Week 2: Acts 13:13-43

Day 3: Synagogue Practice

READ: Acts 13:13-43

EXPLORE: Part of this week’s reading places Paul as a guest speaker in a synagogue service in Pisidian Antioch. There is much to learn from this event, but first, it is important to understand how a typical synagogue service would have looked.

The synagogue service took place on the Sabbath day and began with the Shema, which was a recitation of Deuteronomy 6:4; *“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.”* This was recited by Jews multiple times every day in remembrance that the Israelites stood apart from the rest of the world in their belief that there is only one true God. It was an important reminder for hundreds of years as they were surrounded by nations that worshiped many false gods.

After the Shema, prayer was offered, followed by readings from Scripture (what we now call the Old Testament). The first reading was a selection from one of the first five books of the Old Testament (the Law). After this, a selection from the remaining 34 books of the Old Testament (the Prophets) was read. While the reading of the Law and Prophets would serve as a reminder and illustration of God’s prescribed manner of living, its primary function was to highlight the need for a Savior and to await Him expectantly.

Lastly, the leader of the synagogue would select someone to address the congregation. This would typically be a local. On the occasions in which visiting rabbis were present, however, it was customary that they be invited to speak. Guest speaking in the synagogues was the usual starting point of ministry as Paul, and his companions traveled.

In an age of constant information and connectivity, it can be hard to appreciate the excitement of a visitor from out of town.¹² Verse 15 tells us, *“After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the*

¹² See Acts 22:3 for an example of a visitor reading in the synagogue.

synagogue sent a message to them, saying, ‘Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it.’”

You can imagine the crowd's anticipation as they waited to hear what Paul would say. Would he speak of events in Jerusalem, give insights from the reading, or perhaps inform them of additional laws now being practiced? What encouragement would he bring? Indeed, Paul would talk about the law but not to add to it. Instead, he would give them the life-changing news of the gospel, the reality that the Law and Prophets had been fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ.¹³

Paul’s words, the words of the Gospel, still bring encouragement today as we recognize our inability to fulfill the requirements of the Law and, instead, accept forgiveness and new life from the only One who could, Jesus Christ.

BIG IDEA: As believers, God invites us to share the same “word of encouragement” that changed our lives with a world in desperate need of salvation.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How do Paul’s words in verses 38-40 connect back to the practice of reading from the Law and Prophets?

- **Question:** Paul did not always receive a warm welcome when he preached the Gospel. When you consider sharing the Gospel with others, how much does the anticipated reception of it influence your willingness to share?

¹³ See Acts 13:38-39 for reference to this truth.

Week 2: Acts 13:13-43

Day 4: Why does Paul quote Habakkuk?

READ: Acts 13:38-43 and Habakkuk 1:1-5

EXPLORE:

*“Look among the nations and see;
wonder and be astounded.*

*For I am doing a work in your days
that you would not believe if told.”¹⁴*

At the close of his sermon in Pisidian Antioch, the Apostle Paul chose to conclude his thoughts by referring to the work of Habakkuk. The direct quotation from the prophet can be viewed above. Paul chose to incorporate this prophetic text in his sermon so that the full weight of his message could be seen in light of its historic significance. Let’s take a closer look.

Habakkuk is a powerfully painful conversation between the prophet, whose book bears his name, and God. For much of the book, Habakkuk identifies aspect of his world and experience that are not right. For example, the people of Israel will experience exile and oppression under the Babylonian empire. Habakkuk rightly admits that that the Israelites have wronged God and deserve judgment, but he understandably asks why the Babylonians, a nation far worse, can take over the Lord’s covenant people.

Throughout the book, Habakkuk does not merely lament the way that things are, he calls upon God to see and act on Israel’s behalf. Habakkuk 1:5, which is recorded above, represents one of the God’s responses in His conversation with the prophet. With this brief context in mind, we need to look again at why and how Paul chooses to incorporate the ancient prophet into his sermon.

Primarily, Paul chose to include the words of God to Habakkuk because it sharpens the call for repentance for the audience in Pisidian Antioch.

¹⁴ See Habakkuk 1:5 for reference.

By making a reference to Habakkuk and the context of Babylonian captivity, Paul reminds the people of the seriousness of responding rightly to the Lord. In a very real sense, Paul is reminding his audience of a painful, historic situation to encourage a different response from God's people.

Paul exhorts them to beware so that what was spoken of by the prophet would not occur.¹⁵ We should not miss the fact that the good news of God's freedom through forgiveness of sins comes with a stern warning. Beware! Paul quotes Habakkuk to communicate the sensitivity and the opportunity that exists in the gospel-sharing moment. In this moment, the audience has a chance to respond rightly to the work of God in Christ. Paul's gospel presentation was compelling, his caution was clear, and the people responded rightly.

BIG IDEA: Paul's application of God's words to Habakkuk ought to encourage us to respond rightly to God and His work.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What do you think enabled the crowd to hear and respond rightly to Paul's warning?

- **Activity:** Habakkuk 3:17-19 represents a powerful conclusion of the prophet after his conversation with God. Spend time reading and reflecting on his conclusions and pray that your heart would respond likewise.

¹⁵ See Acts 13:40 for reference.

Week 2: Acts 13:13-43

Day 5: The Law and Gospel

READ TOGETHER: Acts 13:38-39, 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

Instructions: We believe that biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, Day 5 of each week is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.

EXPLORE TOGETHER:

Let's start today's Word to Life Bible Study with a quick question and some brainstorming. Question: What are some of the first things that come to mind if you were asked to give examples of pairs...?

You may have thought of the fact that we have two eyes, two ears, two arms, or two legs. You may have thought about a married couple that forms a pair. If you were thinking scientifically, you might have highlighted how two hydrogens can combine with oxygen to make water or hydrogen peroxide. It's even possible that you misunderstood the question and thought of the pear fruit... There are a lot of examples of pairs in life and a lot that are in the Bible as well.

One of the pairs that the apostle Paul highlighted in his speech in Acts 13 was the law and the gospel. In fact, the law and the gospel are two of the most important themes in the whole bible. We find the law given by God and explained in the Old Testament and we find the gospel given and explained in the New Testament. Before we go any further, let's ask two important questions.

Question 1: What is the law in the Bible?

- The law is God's command he gave to Israel. One spot to directly see the law is in Exodus 20:3-17. The law was given by God to lead us toward Him, but we constantly disobey His good design and sin against Him.

Question 2: What is the gospel?

- The gospel is the good news that Jesus had fulfilled the requirements of the law that we could not. He paid the penalty that we deserved, died for our sins, was buried, and raised from the dead three days later.

Paul mentions the law so that we, like the ancient listeners, can see our sin before the standard of a Holy God. The good news of the gospel is that Jesus obeyed God's standard without failure! The gospel tells us that Christ has atoned for our sins. In other words, Christ's great sacrifice on the cross paid the debt and penalty for all our law-breaking ways. May we keep both the law and gospel ever before us that we might continuously praise and glorify God!

BIG IDEA: The Law and Gospel are the two big themes that run throughout the whole Bible. They need to be understood in light of each other.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** The Ten Commandments are found in Exodus 20:3-17. How many of them can you name? Have each member in your family take a turn and try and memorize them together.

- **Question:** Why can the law not save us?

- **Question:** What is the gospel? Let each able member of the family give an answer. Use I Corinthians 15:3-4 as a helpful summary.

Week 3: Acts 13:44-52

Day 1: Exploring the Biblical Text

READ: Acts 13:44-52

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Acts 13:44-52 and complete the activities below.

- **Question:** After hearing the words of Paul in Acts 13:16-41, the people asked to be taught again on the Sabbath.¹⁶ What do you think are some of the reasons why they wanted to be taught specifically on the Sabbath?

- **Question:** What was the response of the Jewish religious leaders to the crowds that had come to hear from Paul and Barnabas? Why do you think they had this reaction?

- **Questions:** The biblical text seems to associate the idea of being jealous with reviling another person.¹⁷ How would you describe the connection between jealousy and despising another person?

¹⁶ See Acts 13:42 for reference.

¹⁷ See Acts 13:45 for this connection.

- **Question:** How does jealousy of others lead us to a place where we revile them?

- **Question:** When Paul and Barnabas spoke boldly against their opposition they used the phrase, "*Judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life.*"¹⁸ What do you think this phrase means?

¹⁸ See Acts 13:46 recorded in the English Standard Version.

Week 3: Acts 13:44-52

Day 2: The Destructive Power of Jealousy

READ: Acts 13:44-52 James 3:14-18

EXPLORE:

This week's study in the book of Acts picks up in the immediate aftermath of Paul's synagogue sermon in Pisidian Antioch.¹⁹ Initially, the apostles' ministry and preaching were met with eager expectancy. The crowds begged the apostles to share with them again about the graciousness of God in Christ. As those in the city began to gather again on the Sabbath to hear the word of the Lord, the once subtle undercurrent of religious animosity against Paul and Barnabas became a wave of jealousy and opposition. The opposing Jewish leaders saw the crowd that gathered, and they were filled with jealousy.

Few things are more dangerous and often neglected than the destructive power of jealousy in the hearts of humanity. In this text specifically, the onlooking crowd of Jewish leaders became jealous when they saw the traction of the apostles' movement.²⁰ They saw the numerical increase and instead of responding well, they were overrun with jealousy. Unfortunately, Acts will continue to establish a pattern of jealousy rising in opposition to the missional work of God in a new place or with a new people. The truth is that unrepentant jealousy will destroy our relationships with one another and distort our view of God.

We need to notice that some Jewish leaders opposed the liberating truth of the gospel because it challenged their own sense of authority and status. If the message of Christ gained traction in their city, it would mean a radical disruption for the status quo. Instead of responding rightly, they allowed themselves to be filled with jealousy. In their disheartening example we can see how jealousy makes us incapable of rightly receiving truth and wisdom from another.

The life of Christ ought to have been fundamentally good news for them, but their jealousy caused them to oppose something they should have embraced. Although our context today is very different from theirs, the

¹⁹ See Acts 13:16-43 for reference.

²⁰ See Acts 13:45 for reference.

truth is that jealousy works in the same ways. When we allow jealousy to overtake our hearts, we render ourselves incapable of responding humbly to wisdom and we oppose those to whom we ought to be connected. Ultimately, jealousy does not just destroy our relationships with others; it distorts our view of God.

Like the defiant Jewish leaders who opposed the gospel, when we allow jealousy to take root in our lives, we decentralize God from the story. Jealousy tempts us to inappropriately place ourselves as the main character in a story that rightly belongs to the creator and sustainer God. Because jealousy places ourselves above God and His ways, it essentially numbs our sense of gratitude toward God and His work in our world. Even though we are far removed from the context of the first century Greco-Roman world, our struggle with jealousy is much the same. Let us be careful to acknowledge and repent of all areas in which sinful jealousy has damaged our relationships with God and others.

BIG IDEA: Jealousy damages our relationship with God and others. It hinders our ability to live with gratitude, respond rightly to wisdom, and keep God as the rightful center of His story.

APPLY:

- **Question:** When have you struggled with jealousy and how did it affect your spiritual life?

- **Question:** Exodus 34:14 describes God as a jealous. What is the difference between the sinless jealousy of God and the sinful jealousy of humanity?

- **Activity:** Read the biblical text below and write down some observations about jealousy and its effects.
 - *But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. – James 3:14-16*

Week 3: Acts 13:44-52

Day 3: Judging Yourself Unworthy

READ: Acts 13:44-52, 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, and Romans 1:16

EXPLORE:

When Paul's sermon about Jesus was forcefully rejected by the Jewish leaders in Pisidian Antioch, the apostles boldly spoke ominous words. Referencing the stubbornness of the leadership's rejection of the gospel, Paul said, "*Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.*"²¹ In today's Word to Life study we are going to unpack the meaning of the phrase, "*Judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life.*"

The weight and tragedy of these few words cannot be overstated. The Jewish people had been given a precious opportunity to be called out and set apart by God as a light to the nations. If the Jewish leadership had responded rightly, they would have had the incredible opportunity to share the good news of the promised Messiah not only with their people, but with the Gentiles also. Since they rejected the messengers and the message, they had shown their obstinate unwillingness to embrace the hope in Christ and steward their calling to the world. It is clear in Paul's words that the opposing Jewish leaders did not passively overlook the hope offered in Christ, they actively rejected it.²²

The synagogue leaders thought of Paul as one who poached their people and harmed their community. Paul, Barnabas, and their message collectively represented a false message in their eyes and a movement away from the Jewish faith. As we have already studied, Paul organized his teaching so that those who were interested in the story of Christ could see how he was indeed the promised deliverer and hope of Israel. Instead of responding well, they forcefully pushed the message aside and repudiated it. Through this action, they *judged themselves unworthy of eternal life*.

We ought to pause and soberly consider the weight of Paul's words. Most notably, this is one of the few explicit references to eternal life in the book

²¹ See Acts 13:46 for reference.

²² Luke records Paul using the term apothēsthe (ἀπωθεῖσθε) in the original Greek to convey a strong sense of rejection and/or refusal.

of Acts. In no uncertain terms, Paul connected the severity of their rejection of the promised Christ with eternal ramifications. The good news of Jesus who came, died for sinners, and rose again was a message for Israel first. It was a privilege. It was meant to be stewarded. Those who rejected Jesus missed an opportunity to receive the very embodiment of hope that was promised in the Hebrew Scriptures which they prized so dearly.

Now, before we ever point the proverbial finger in their direction or scoff at their seemingly apparent foolishness, we should humbly acknowledge our own weakness, failure, and thoughtlessness. This is the heart of the matter. The good news of Christ came to liberate us from our own inadequacy and failure by clothing us in the surpassing worthiness of Jesus alone by grace through faith.

When I think about Paul's words concerning unworthiness, I (Stephen) am reminded of Jesus' encounter with the Centurion in Luke 7. The Centurion confessed, "*Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof.*" In response to the Centurion's words, Jesus replied, "*Not even in Israel have I found such faith.*"²³ These words ought to bring profound hope and peace. The truth is that our worthiness is founded not in our own performance, but in the perfection of the One of infinite worth!²⁴

BIG IDEA: Worthiness of eternal life is founded not on our performance, but on the perfection of the One of infinite worth.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** Read the text below and make observations. Pray that the Lord, by the Holy Spirit would enable you to apply His Word in everyday life.
 - o *To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. —II Thessalonians 1:11-12*

²³ See Luke 7:6-9 and the surrounding context for reference.

²⁴ See Ephesians 2:8-9 for reference.

Week 3: Acts 13:44-52

Day 4: Shake Off the Dust

READ: Acts 13:44-52 and Matthew 10:1-15

EXPLORE:

Rejection, opposition, and obstacles... Jesus warned His followers that they would experience all these things as they lived a life on mission amongst the nations. In view of this hostility, Jesus' encouragement to His disciples was that they would sometimes have to *shake the dust off their feet* to continue faithfully on the mission He had given them. Interestingly, this idea of *shaking the dust off* belonged to Jewish priests before it was ever encouraged by Jesus.

Throughout Jewish history and law, there were numerous regulations pertaining to customs, ceremonies, and ritual purification. For example, Jews were forbidden to eat with the Gentiles, to enter their homes, and to intermarry with them. Jewish rabbis even adopted the phrase and practice of *shaking the dust off their feet* when they returned to Jerusalem from traveling through Gentile territory. It was, in a sense, shaking the uncleanness off before coming back to holy territory.

As is his custom, Jesus took this phrase and used it in a different and quite ironic way. In the text we have been studying this week, we can see that Paul and Barnabas brought the gospel to the primarily Gentile crowd in Pisidian Antioch. In short, Paul was explaining how God had always intended to bring the good news of the saving Messiah to them as well. The Gentiles believed in the gospel of Jesus Christ and rejoiced at the message of salvation that was offered to them.

The Jewish leadership responded quite differently. It is no accident that Luke decided to record that the two missionaries *shook off the dust from their feet* and continued their journey. The high-and-mighty Jewish leaders were now being brought low and the biblical text wants us to see and experience it firsthand. It was no longer the Gentiles that were considered unclean, but those that were rejecting and hindering the message of Jesus Christ.

As we meditate on this text, we ought to be reminded that there will always be opposition to the gospel on this side of eternity. What you believe, how you worship, how you live, celebrate holidays, and even what you choose to *not* do, will all be under attack at various times in various ways. Certainly, there is a biblical calling to persevere at times and endure, but there are other circumstances in which we ought to continue moving onward to remain faithful in ministry to the Lord. In all things, we should seek the Lord for wisdom, discernment, and courage.

A wise Christ follower once said, "If you are going to offend people, please do it because of the gospel and not your personality."

Remember, at no point does the mission of Christ call us to be brash or belligerent toward others. It does mean that we ought to understand how to navigate past obstacles and opposition in our faith so that we can focus on the assignment into which God desires to bring us.

BIG IDEA: Christ followers will experience opposition and they ought to learn how to navigate through it and into what is next.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Have you experienced any opposition to your faith or lifestyle that would require you to shake the dust off your feet?

- **Question:** Have you been in a situation where a Christian didn't shake the proverbial dust off their feet and instead made matters worse?

- **Question:** What is one area of your life you are receiving opposition for your faith? How should you prayerfully apply this principle in a way that is balanced and God-honoring?

Week 3: Acts 13:44-52

Day 5: Bravery Despite Rejection

READ TOGETHER: Acts 13:44-52

***Instructions:** We believe that biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, Day 5 of each week is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.*

EXPLORE TOGETHER:

As Christians we all know that we are called to share the gospel with unbelievers. This is a simple command but often seems to be a difficult task to carry out. Why is this? It is because of the different responses that people can give. Some are quite happy to hear you speak and receive your words warmly. Some get agitated by your words and want you to stop talking immediately. Some people even get angry and may share some harsh words that they shouldn't.

In our passage today, we saw two responses from two different groups. The first response was from the Jews. They were irritated when they heard Paul and Barnabas preaching the gospel and responded by insulting them. The second response was from the Gentiles. They received Paul and Barnabas' words warmly and rejoiced in God.

There are only two responses that people can give when they are given the gospel. They can either receive it or reject it. There are no other options. Now there are different ways they might reject it. They may do this quietly or they may do it loudly. There are also different ways they might receive it. They may do it quietly pondering the words that you say within their heart. Or they may do it loudly, rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord.

Either way our job is to simply share God's word. God is in charge of the results. We are in charge of being obedient and God-honoring.

Here is a question: How do we share our faith without fear?

I (Sabino) am afraid that we probably cannot. I do not think God calls us to be completely fearless when we share our faith. I think God calls us to be brave. Bravery is about facing our fears and taking them on to the extent that we can. May God give us boldness as we face our fears and share our faith!

BIG IDEA: Because people will either receive or reject the good news about Jesus, we ought to be brave and obedient despite the fears we may have.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** What are some ways that people have responded when you shared about your faith with them?

- **Question:** Why do you think the Jews were not receptive to God's word and why do you think the Gentiles were receptive to God's word?

- **Activity:** Role play sharing the gospel with one another. Have each able member share the gospel with another member of the family.

Week 4: Acts 14:1-7

Day 1: Exploring the Biblical Text

READ: Acts 14:1-7

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Acts 14:1-7 and complete the activities below.

- **Question:** Paul and Barnabas communicated in such a way that many Jews and Greeks believed. Certainly, the Holy Spirit was at work in their communication and the listeners' belief, but what would you imagine their communication was like?
 - List some attributes of effective, gospel communication.

- **Question:** According to Acts 14:3, what was the role of signs and wonders in Iconium? What does that teach us about the significance and function of the miraculous?

- **Question:** With the surrounding context in mind, why do you think God granted miracles for the apostles in Iconium?

- **Questions:** The early apostles were consistently in threatening, controversial, and even dangerous positions in life and ministry. What do you think we can learn from their example of responding to danger and controversy in a God-honoring way?

- **Question:** When have you faced opposition because of your faith? How did you respond to that opposition and how would you compare your response to the apostles' example?

Week 4: Acts 14:1-7

Day 2: Communicating for Change

READ: Acts 14:1-7 and Assorted Biblical Passages Below

EXPLORE:

If you were asked to provide an example of a memorable public speech, I (Stephen) wonder what would come to mind. For some, a historic figure or well-known movie might be first among the list of speeches. For others, the notion of powerful speeches might evoke a memory of the kind words of a loved one or the motivational speech of a mentor. I imagine that if we were to ask the question to many in the ancient city of Iconium, they would answer, “Certainly, Paul’s presentation of Jesus, the Messiah, in synagogue.”

In the aftermath of Paul’s sermon, many Jews and Gentiles believed in Christ. Interestingly, Acts does not record the exact language chosen by Paul in his Iconium speech. I certainly wish the biblical text did include those powerful words, but Luke does not give us that luxury. In the absence of Paul’s specific speech, we are left to ask the question, “What would it look like to communicate publicly in a God-honoring way?” It is to this question that we now turn our attention.

Any attempt to discuss God-honoring communication ought to logically include Jesus. A brilliant orator, question-asker, and conversationalist, Jesus embodied sinless communication. With His words he puzzled the proud and encouraged the humble. He captivated thousands with His language and especially His questions. We should be reminded that even though Jesus exemplified speech perfected, His words were not always met with applause or even understanding.

Unlike the initial response to Paul in Iconium, Jesus’ speech was often met with confusion and opposition. For example, after Jesus miraculously fed five thousand people, He spoke in such a way that many left altogether.²⁵ At other times in the life of Christ, his words and actions received a murderous response.²⁶ From Christ’s example we can see that biblical, God-honoring communication can take place and it still not be received. In

²⁵ For full reference to this story, see John 6 with a specific focus on v. 66.

²⁶ See Matthew 26:55-59 for reference.

summary, God-honoring communication ought to be primarily concerned with obedience and not with outcome.

Even though we ought to communicate with life-change in mind, we need to remember that true transformation occurs because of the Holy Spirit's work. With this perspective in view, here are a few truths for God-honoring communication. This list only a start and not comprehensive!

1. Christians ought to be prepared to communicate truth in a variety of circumstances and in a variety of ways.²⁷
2. Christians ought to communicate patiently and reasonably, being assured that God is at work.²⁸
3. Christians ought model grace in their living that matches the wisdom in their communication.²⁹
4. Christians ought to be reliant upon the Holy Spirit and anchored in the commission of God.³⁰
5. Christians ought to rightly understand and communicate the power of the crucified and resurrected Christ.³¹

BIG IDEA: Godly communication will prioritize obedience over outcome and trust the Lord to establish change in the heart of the listener.

APPLY:

- **Question:** In your opinion, what are some attributes of effective communication?
- **Question:** How have you encountered positive and negative responses when sharing your faith?
 - o If you could go back in time and change your method or the way in which you stated the message, what would you do or not do?

²⁷ See II Timothy 4:2-5 for reference.

²⁸ See II Timothy 4:2-5 for reference.

²⁹ See Colossians 4:5-6 for reference.

³⁰ See Acts 1:8 for reference.

³¹ See I Corinthians 1:22-25 for reference.

Week 4: Acts 14:1-7

Day 3: The Battle for Your Mind

READ: Acts 14:1-7 and Amos 6:11-12

EXPLORE:

Let me (Stephen) ask you a question... Is it possible that we guard our phones, homes, and finances more intentionally than we guard our minds?

Now, in asking that question, I know that there may be a variety of responses. For some, their phone is unguarded, their house is unlocked, and their finances are wildly flexible... For those individuals, I would imagine a far different Word to Life Study might be in order. For most of us, however, the unfortunate reality is that we often guard various, less significant aspects with greater dedication and focus than we do our minds. The story that unfolds in Acts 14:1-7 is a sobering reminder that this should not be the case!

In the days that followed Paul's preaching in Iconium, there was a large responsiveness to the gospel. Sadly, this receptivity was quickly challenged. Luke recorded that that opposition arose to counteract the work of the apostles by *poisoning the minds* of many in Iconium. The choice of words in this text is not accidental. In the same way that poison enters unacknowledged and unrestricted until it fatally compromises the body, the toxic opposition proved incredibly detrimental.

In the Iconium account and other biblical texts like it, we ought to heed the warning and prepare to fight the battle for our minds. Although Luke does not specifically explain what actions and conversations took place on that day, the Scriptures are filled with encouragements to guard our hearts, protect our minds, and watch our tongues. Consider the words of the Paul in II Corinthians 10:3-5:

"Though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ."

Here are a few things to remember as we pursue success in the battle for our minds.

1. A right fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Seek to know God and not just about him and the battle for your mind will be framed in light of God's holiness and power.
2. Pray often and submit to the leading of the Holy Spirit in the church. The key to powerful resiliency is a prayerful dependence upon the work of the Holy Spirit in your heart, mind, words, and actions. Make intentional prayer a habit.
3. Never stop learning and seeking counsel. The life of the Christian ought to be one of continual growth and increasing maturity.
4. Do not fall into the trap of believing everything you think. A wise follower of Christ will carefully weigh his or her thoughts in view of God's Word.
5. Seek consistent help from wise counsel. God has not designed us to live in isolation from each other. We are designed to grow in knowledge, perspective, and mission alongside one another in the community of faith.

BIG IDEA: Christians are called to intentionally guard their minds.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What would you add or emphasize from the list above to win the battle of the mind?

- **Question:** As a Christian, how have you learned to guard your mind in a way that honors Christ?

- **Question:** Is there a difference between guarding your mind from evil and sheltering your mind from worldly influence? If so, what is the difference?

Week 4: Acts 14:1-7

Day 4: Situational Wisdom

READ: Acts 14:1-7

EXPLORE:

Last week we spent a day focused on the instructions from Jesus to His followers on shaking off the dust from their feet when rejected. We saw last that Paul and Barnabas put this into practice when they received opposition in Antioch. Now, the apostles turned to Iconium. Like their previous experiences, they received great opposition from the Jews. This time, however, their response was not to shake the dust off their feet, but to stand fast and continue in bold preaching. They model a principle that is known as situational wisdom.

As we compare texts and see essentially the same situation but with different responses. In fact, often throughout the Bible we will see times in which God's people stand firm in the face of danger and persecution and other times they flee the situation. Why is this the case? How can we know which we ought to do in any given situation?

This is where we should turn our attention to the importance of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. In Acts 1:8 Jesus promises to give us power through the indwelling power of the Spirit. This power from the Spirit affects many things such as sanctification (being made holy)³², changes in our behavior³³, and spiritual gifts to serve.³⁴ We can see also that the Holy Spirit will lead us in and out of various situations³⁵ and provide us with what to say in such times³⁶. Therefore, as you face opposition in life it is vital that you're walking in the Holy Spirit.

Four practical tips that help get a sense of the Holy Spirit's leading:

- 1. Prayer-** What do you sense the Holy Spirit telling you in prayer?

³² See Romans 8:13 for reference.

³³ See Galatians 5:22-23 for reference.

³⁴ See 1 Corinthians 12 for reference.

³⁵ See Matthew 4:1 for reference.

³⁶ See Luke 12:12 for reference.

2. **Scripture**- What has the Holy Spirit spoke through the Word of God?
3. **Community**- What is the Holy Spirit speaking through other brothers and sisters in Christ?
4. **Circumstance**- What opportunities is the situation presenting to press in or move on?

As we journey with the Lord in ongoing discipleship and growth, we ought to already be immersed in the practices above so that we are able to discern and apply God's wisdom in the situations we face.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What situations have you faced in which you needed the Holy Spirit to give you situational wisdom?

- **Question:** Of the four tips given, which do you think or easiest or hardest for you to utilize? (Ex: Prayer, Scripture, Community, Circumstance)

- **Question:** Is there a situation you are facing right now that you need the Holy Spirit's leading? If so, write it down and share it with your LifeGroup.

Week 4: Acts 14:1-7

Day 5: Mixed Reviews

READ TOGETHER: Acts 14:1-7

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EXPLORE TOGETHER:

We live in a world of mixed reviews. Just the other day I (Sabino) went to see the latest Spider-Man movie, *No Way Home*. Have you seen it yet? My son thought it was amazing, and I thought it was just pretty good. This is a mixed review. We didn't exactly agree, but we both certainly enjoyed ourselves.

If you spend any time on the internet or any time around people, you are always going to get mixed reviews. One man's favorite restaurant is another man's worst nightmare. One girl's favorite dress is another girl's mop for the floor. One boy's favorite shirt is another boy's snot rag. Some mixed reviews are more important than others.

Our passage contains the most important mixed review of all time. Some people sided with the Jews. This means that they saw the apostles (Paul and Barnabas) as a threat. They didn't like the message of Christ that Paul and Barnabas were sharing. If it were possible for them to give a google review, they would have given them zero stars out of five. Some people sided with Paul and Barnabas. This means that they believed Paul and Barnabas were sent from God. They liked the message that Paul and Barnabas were sharing. If it were possible for them to give a google review, they would have given Paul and Barnabas five stars.

How we respond to the gospel is most important review we will ever give. It isn't like sharing our opinion on Spider-Man or our favorite restaurant. No, eternal life hangs in the balance when it comes to this review. Our review of the gospel should not be simply just to say that the gospel is good. We must go further than this. We must **believe** the gospel if we are to review it properly.

BIG IDEA: The gospel message receives mixed reviews from people, some positive and some negative.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** Name a movie that the whole family has seen and share your mixed reviews.

- **Question:** What do you think were some of the things that were said against Paul and Barnabas that caused people to oppose them?

- **Question:** Paul and Barnabas fled when they heard that the Jews were plotting to stone them. This teaches us that God does not necessarily mind that we flee if we are under the threat of violence. Why do you believe this is so?



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