



THE HEIGHTS

CHURCH

LIFE GROUP TEACHING PLANS
THE SIMPLEST WAY TO CHANGE THE WORLD
LESSON 5

THE SIMPLEST WAY TO CHANGE THE WORLD

FROM SURFACE TO SPIRITUAL

LESSON 5

TEACHING PLAN

PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying Colossians 4:2-6; 1 Peter 3:15; Acts 8:26-40. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

HIGHLIGHTS

- > **Series Theme Aim:** Loving our neighbors means choosing to engage rather than unplug, open rather than close, and initiate rather than sit idly.
- > **Biblical Emphasis:** There is no way to predict when God will open the door for a conversation about Jesus, so we need to constantly be ready and listening.
- > **Teaching Aim:** Loving our neighbors means moving from surface conversations to spiritual conversations.
- > **Memorize:** Colossians 4:6

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Notes:

DO NOT SKIP THIS

- 1 Invite members to share whether or not they took the next step with the neighbor they chose last week. Allow time for those who did to share how it went.
- 2 At this point in our study, are you encouraged or discouraged about getting to know your neighbors better? More comfortable or less comfortable? Explain.
- 3 Who is someone in your life that you had an instant connection with when you met him or her? In your experience, are most relationships easy like that, or do you have to start at the surface before you can discuss deeper matters?

Opportunities to share Christ are not reserved for church campuses and Bible studies, but they require intentionality on our part. In a lost world desperately seeking hope, the chance to share your story and your hope can come anywhere, any day. Understanding this, we must constantly be ready and listening, so that we might move from surface to spiritual conversations.

UNDERSTANDING

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

Notes:

DO NOT SKIP THIS

All conversations fit into one of four categories—casual, personal, meaningful, and spiritual.

Casual conversation is normal everyday conversation, sharing life and experiences. “How are you?” is a common question asked in casual conversation.

Personal conversations give you more information about the individual to whom you are speaking. “What do you do for a living?” moves from casual to personal conversation.

We move from personal conversations to meaningful conversations when we seek to gain understanding about challenges, struggles, dreams, and goals that another person is facing. Questions such as, “What do you like or dislike about your work?” move personal conversations to meaningful.

Spiritual conversations move past meaningful conversations to issues of faith and give you the opportunity to share your testimony or present the gospel. Questions like, “Do you know what I finally discovered was the key to contentment in my work?” move a conversation from meaningful to spiritual.

- Which category would you say most often defines your talks with your neighbors? Why?

> Have a volunteer read Colossians 4:2-6.

- From verse 5, what is the value of casual conversation with your neighbors? Personal conversation? Meaningful? Spiritual?

- Can you talk gracefully, using language “seasoned with salt,” if you never move past the surface in conversations? Explain.
- What role does prayer play in moving a conversation from casual to spiritual?

Notes:

On our own, we might never move past the surface and get to the spiritual with our neighbors. But vigilant, perceptive prayer guards against presumption, distraction, and mere performance of duty as we live for God and seek to love our neighbors. Perceptive prayer includes thanksgiving, understanding that God will hear and respond in ways best for us and our neighbors.

- What was the goal of Paul’s life (v. 3)? How would your conversations be different if you shared Paul’s drive?
- What would it look like for you to make the most of the time you have with your neighbors?
- What would it mean to act wisely toward your neighbors in your conversations?
- How can you keep yourself sharp, alert, and ready to share your faith?

The more we try to make “the most of the time” we have, the more we’ll be trained and ready for opportunities to move from surface to spiritual conversations. Paul’s evangelistic training regimen included constantly thinking about how we relate to the people around us. In so doing, we’re aware of and prepared for any opportunity to share our faith intelligibly.

> Have a volunteer read 1 Peter 3:15.

- If we're commanded to tell the story of Jesus to others, why do we often avoid conversations that might lead to that?
- Do Peter's words here mean that if no one asks you about Jesus, you don't need to tell? Explain.
- How does this verse relay the importance of moving from casual to personal to meaningful to spiritual conversation with your neighbors?
- How can hope come across in the four different types of conversation? Why is it important that it does?

Notes:

One of the distinguishing marks of believers in Christ is their possession of hope. A Christian's hope is to be so real and distinctive that non-Christians will be puzzled by it and ask for an explanation. We should seize the opportunities of witness presented in these kinds of situations. Our response should be characterized by gentleness and respect.

> Have a volunteer read Acts 8:26-40.

- How was Philip's situation similar to one you could run into in your everyday life?
- If Philip hadn't been looking to move from surface to spiritual, how might the conversation have gone, instead?

- What connection is there between familiarity with the Scripture and readiness to move from surface to spiritual conversations?

Notes:

Philip's approach to sharing the gospel showed his obedience to the leadership of the Holy Spirit, willingness to approach people in real life circumstances, and the ability to ask the right question and share the truth of the gospel clearly. These are all things we should ask God for and work to develop in our lives as followers of Christ.

- Would Philip's visit with the man still have been worthwhile even if he hadn't committed to following Christ on the spot? Explain your thoughts.

NEXT STEPS

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

- 1 **DO NOT SKIP THIS**
Next week is the midpoint in our study, and we will review and see how we're doing with the steps we've been encouraged to take. Give a block map (week 1) to anyone who doesn't have one. Continue learning neighbors' names, praying, and determining next steps you can take to develop relationships. Try to move from one level of conversation with a neighbor to the next, whether that's from surface to personal, personal to meaningful, or meaningful to spiritual.

- 2 Based on today's passages, what advice would you give someone looking to move from surface to personal, meaningful, and, ultimately, spiritual conversation with another person?

- 3 How can we pray for you in your process of loving your actual neighbors this week?

Notes:

PRAY

Thank God for His call on our lives to share with Him in His kingdom purposes by sharing the gospel with others. Ask Him to help you begin to open yourself up to deeper conversations with people, so that you might have opportunities to tell them about Jesus.

FOR NEXT WEEK

- > **REMINDE:** Before you dismiss, remind group members to read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-18.
- > **EMAIL:** Midway through the week, send a reminder email with the following information:
 - Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-18.
 - Think through these questions before we get together again: 1) Have you moved from one type of conversation with a neighbor to the next? 2) What do you want to share with the group about what you have learned and/or experienced so far?

COLOSSIANS 4:2-6

Paul ended his epistle as he opened it, urging his readers to prayer. The structure of these verses resembles the opening prayers of the epistles. The only direct statement in these verses is, “Devote yourselves to prayer.” The command to pray concerned general watchfulness and Paul’s ministry. Paul hoped for an open door to be faithful to his calling and for clarity in communicating the message. In other epistles, Paul said, “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess 5:17) or its equivalent. The same general tone occurs here. The specific word translated “devote yourselves” means “to persist in.” Though the word is different, the meaning is the same. Prayer was to characterize the Colossian church.

Notes:

Paul requested that they pray for an open door for the gospel (4:3). Paul always sought ways to communicate the gospel. In these verses, Paul disclosed the reason for his success in witness as well as the reason he hoped to speak. His success was because he looked to the Lord to supply the wisdom for the opportunity. They were to pray that he would find an open door. The apostle lived for such opportunities that were often the redeeming virtues of his circumstances. He knew, however, that God provided these doors of ministry.

Paul asked for ability to walk through such doors as would open. Consistently in Colossians, the term “manifest” refers to revealing what is hidden (3:4). Paul looked for new situations in which he could make the gospel known. On the one hand, Paul did not pray specifically for a “preaching point,” as though that were the only approved means of spreading the gospel. On the other hand, v. 3 makes clear that Paul thought it imperative to speak the word. He hoped, therefore, for an oral ministry. He hoped further that he would do justice to the nature of the gospel so that the witness would be clear.

Having discussed a door of opportunity in ministry, Paul turned his thoughts to wise conduct. The verb used, which is translated “be wise in the way you act,” occurs frequently to identify proper conduct. Generally, translators use some

form of the word “walk.” Wisdom provides a proper environment for the Christian’s walk. The theme of wisdom occurs frequently in this epistle, and that probably reflects a major concern of the false teachers as well. Literally, Paul said, “In wisdom be walking.” Thus godly wisdom encompasses the life, as well as the words. At the beginning of the epistle, Paul prayed for the Colossians to know wisdom; here he prayed for them to live it.

Notes:

Wisdom was necessary because of their Christian testimony. The “ones outside” needed examples of God’s wisdom. Paul’s concern was the non-Christians’ response to the gospel and the attitude of Christians toward them. Divine wisdom results in a positive witness.

1 PETER 3:15

Instead of running away, Christians need a renewed allegiance. Set apart Christ as Lord means “to treat as holy or to regard with reverence.” Christians are to acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Holy One and also as Lord. “Lord” is the New Testament term for the Old Testament personal name for God (see Exod. 3:14-15; 6:2-3), often transcribed as “Jehovah” but more properly as “Yahweh.” The New Testament applies the Old Testament title for God the Father to Jesus Christ, thus celebrating the deity of Christ.

The believer is to view Christ as holy, as worthy of reverence because of who he is. To reverence Christ as Lord means to believe that Jesus Christ is in control and that those who come against the believer are not. To have such reverence is to maintain a deep-seated confidence in Jesus Christ as the reigning Lord of the universe (see 3:22). When our lives are centered on Christ, who is in control of the universe, then we are able to respond properly to the uncertainties and inconsistencies of life.

When we have made this commitment, we can respond to harm by communicating a positive word regarding our hope in Christ rather than running away. Even while

suffering unjustly, Christians are able to go on because of their hope in the future.

From the opening words of chapter 1, Peter has emphasized the living hope of the believer (see 1:3). The unbeliever does not enjoy this hope but is connected only to an empty way of life, and a life of spiritual darkness (see 1:18; 2:9). One of the distinguishing marks of believers in Christ is their possession of hope. Christian hope is to be so real and distinctive that non-Christians will be puzzled by it and ask for an explanation. We should seize the opportunities of witness presented in these kinds of situations. Our response should be characterized not by smugness or vindictiveness but by gentleness and respect.

Notes:

These words suggest that the believer should approach others carefully and kindly. A Christian should not attempt to ram the truth down someone's throat or to speak patronizingly or critically to them.

ACTS 8:26-40

The Pharisees instigated persecution against the Jerusalem church (Acts 8:1). The apostles remained in Jerusalem, but other believers scattered into Judea and Samaria. Philip, a believer, traveled to a Samaritan city, preached the gospel, and performed signs. The Samaritans responded positively to his work (vv. 4-8). Simon, a sorcerer, "believed" and was baptized (vv. 9-13). Simon was amazed at the miracles Philip performed.

The apostles in Jerusalem heard about events in Samaria and sent Peter and John to investigate. The two apostles prayed that the Samaritan converts would receive the Spirit. When Peter and John laid hands on them, the Spirit came (vv. 14-17). Simon saw what transpired and offered to buy the ability to bestow the Spirit. Peter rebuked Simon, telling him to repent and to pray for forgiveness. Simon asked Peter to pray for him (vv. 18-24). Afterward, the apostles returned to Jerusalem, preaching in Samaritan villages along the way (v. 25).

8:26-40. An angel directed Philip to go to the road that led from Jerusalem to Gaza (v. 26). Stephen obeyed and encountered an Ethiopian eunuch returning home from worshiping in Jerusalem (vv. 27-28). Philip seized the opportunity to proclaim the good news about salvation in Jesus (vv. 29-35). The eunuch responded positively, and Philip baptized him (vv. 36-38). The Spirit took Philip away, but the eunuch continued his journey home, elated at finding Christ (v. 39). Philip preached in the coastal cities of the Mediterranean Sea on the way to Caesarea (v. 40).

Notes:

8:29. An angel instructed Philip to leave Samaria and travel south to the road that led to Gaza on the route to Egypt. There God would provide him a special situation. Philip immediately obeyed, and on the road to Gaza he met an Ethiopian eunuch, the treasurer of Candace, queen of Ethiopia (see v. 27). Ethiopia was an area south of Egypt.

The eunuch was returning home after worshiping in Jerusalem. The term “eunuch” could refer to a man who had been castrated or could mean “treasurer.” He was a God-fearer, a worshiper of the one true God; but if he had been deprived of his manhood, then his physical condition prevented him from converting to Judaism. He may have been attracted to Judaism’s moral and ethical teachings. In his chariot he was reading from a large scroll, from a portion of the prophet Isaiah.

This eunuch was a high official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, and was in charge of her entire treasury. Candace is the hereditary title for all the queens of Ethiopia. The eunuch was sitting in his chariot, perhaps an ox-drawn wagon.

8:30-31. Philip’s question and the Ethiopian’s response imply that the Old Testament passage the eunuch was reading (Isa 53:7-8) required interpretation in light of what God had done in Jesus of Nazareth. The eunuch’s response to Philip’s question was suggestive: How can I . . . unless someone guides me? This question underscores a prominent theme in Luke-Acts: the need for Christian interpreters of Old Testament prophetic texts. Jesus had done this for the apostles (see Luke 24:44-45); in turn, they had interpreted Old Testament texts for the Jews in Jerusalem.

8:32-34. The Ethiopian was reading Isaiah 53:7-8, apparently from the Greek text. It is likely that he was reading the entire Suffering Servant section of Isaiah (52:13–53:12). The eunuch’s question, who is the prophet saying this about, allowed Philip to explain Jesus as the subject of the passage. It is Jesus, not Isaiah, who suffered for the sins of humanity (Isa 53:6). From the earliest days of the church, the Suffering Servant section has been seen as an ideal starting place for explaining the gospel.

Notes:

8:35 Philip’s words were good news to the eunuch, for he was included in the gospel and had access to God’s grace in Christ. Although he could not be accepted as a Jewish convert, he would be accepted by God if he placed his faith in Christ. After Philip explained Isaiah 53:7-8, he moved to other passages that pointed to Jesus, probably using such texts as Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1-5; 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; and 52:13–53:12.

8:38-40. The Ethiopian requested and was granted baptism just as soon as he believed. That they went into the water and then came up out of the water apparently indicates baptism by immersion. A miracle is indicated by carried Philip away, for the eunuch came “up out of the water” and found himself alone. The Holy Spirit had taken Philip to his next appointment, a place called Azotus.