

THE CHURCH INSIDE THE FENCE



CROSSROADS
PRISON MINISTRIES

ANSWER KEY

Cover artwork by Alex R., Crossroads student



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STUDY TOOLS

Throughout this course, students will be provided the tools listed below to assist them in their studies. These tools provide ways that you can interact with students.



CONVERSATION BOXES: We have included some spaces throughout the print versions of lessons that we call **conversation boxes**. Students can share questions or thoughts about the lesson or life. Students completing digital lessons can use the comment box at the end of the lesson for the same purpose. You may respond in any open space.



ACTION STEPS: At the end of each lesson, we have included a challenge called an **action step**. It asks the student to apply what they have learned. If they feel that they need help or encouragement to complete it, they may simply write down what they plan to do. You can follow up with the student by asking if they have completed it.

Glossary of Terms

Each lesson contains Bible names, terms, and ideas that may be new to students. We will do our best to provide definitions that are easy to understand. The list below includes all of the terms found in this course. In each lesson, we have included an asterisk (*) the first time each term appears.

Align – To put things in their proper order or position.

Apologetics – A religious discipline of defending religious beliefs through systemic debate and discourse.

Consistent – Doing or demonstrating something over and over again. The basketball player was consistent. Every day she spent 30 minutes practicing shooting free throws.

Divine Appointment – An event orchestrated by God to place us in the right place at the right time to do something specific for God, like share the Gospel.

Eloquence – Skillful language and impressive presenting of ourselves.

Ethiopian – A person from Ethiopia, an east-central African nation to the south of Israel and Egypt.

Jerusalem – The capital city in Judea where the Temple was and where Jewish people would go to worship.

Judea – In Jesus' time, the area surrounding Jerusalem.

Kingdom of God – The heavens and earth where God rules. This includes the rule we allow God to have in our own lives and hearts.

Martyr – Someone who is put to death or made to suffer because of their religious beliefs.

Mesopotamian Region – The area of present-day Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria.

Pagan – A person holding religious beliefs other than those of the main or recognized religions.

Pagans – Among the nations during the period of the early Christian Church, pagans were those that held religious beliefs other than those of Christianity or Judaism.

Persecuted – Subjected (someone) to hostility and ill-treatment, especially because of their ethnicity, religion, or their political beliefs.

Pharisee – A member of a sect of Jewish teachers of the Law during the 1st Century.

Pledge – A binding promise to do something.

Reconcile – To restore relationships. Through Christ, we are reconciled to God and are brought into a right relationship with our Creator.

Roman Empire – At its height of power, the Roman Empire encompassed most of continental Europe, Britain, much of western Asia, Egypt, Israel, Northern Africa, Mesopotamia, and the Mediterranean islands.

Samaria – In Jesus' time, the area north of Judea and roughly to the west and south of the Sea of Galilee.

Smallpox – A highly contagious viral disease responsible for millions of deaths over centuries.

Sovereign – In theology, God's sovereignty is God's supreme power to do His will in the creation that He has made.

Sufficient – Enough, adequate.

Synagogue – The building where a Jewish assembly or congregation meets for religious worship and instruction.

Testimony – A public sharing of our story of coming to faith in Jesus.

Witness – Having knowledge of an event or change from personal observation or experience.

Zealous – Showing great energy and enthusiasm in pursuit of a cause or objective.

LESSON 1: The Kingdom Come

Lesson Focus:

Jesus came to establish His Kingdom

Read **Luke 1:28-33**.

The Jewish people in Jesus' days on the Earth were eagerly anticipating God sending a messiah, or savior, to free them from the rule of the Romans and to establish His Kingdom in Jerusalem and throughout the world. Centuries before Jesus' arrival, their own prophets had spoken about a future time when God would raise up a King who would rule with justice and establish His Kingdom forever.

A number of political and religious figures in 1st Century Jerusalem were looked at as potential "messiahs" because of promises they made about overthrowing the occupying Roman army. Jesus was different because His message was not about political power. Jesus had no plans to take political power or to take control of the temple in Jerusalem. After clearing the temple of money changers, in John chapter 2, the Jewish leaders wondered what authority Jesus had to do such a thing.

The Jews then responded to him, "What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken. (John 2:18-22)

The temple in Jerusalem was where the presence of God was believed to be in a special way. From the time of Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist, Jesus taught about the Kingdom of God.* The Kingdom of God was not an earthly, political kingdom, but a spiritual kingdom where God was sovereign* and Jesus Christ ruled.

Look up and complete the following verses from the New Testament.

Look up and complete the following verses from the New Testament:

1. Jesus said, "My kingdom is **not of this world**. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place." (John 18:36)
2. The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not **live in temples built by human hands**. (Acts 17:24)

3. Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because **the kingdom of God is in your midst**." (Luke 17:20-21)

In his letter to the Christians in Rome, the Apostle Paul wrote,

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. . . (Romans 14:17)

The Jewish people of the 1st Century had lots of rules about what foods they could or should eat based on the Law and their religious customs. But God's Kingdom has little or nothing to do with our religious preferences. God's Kingdom is a spiritual realm where He rules, His righteousness is reflected, and His people experience His peace and joy through His Holy Spirit. Those of us that have surrendered our lives to God and are pursuing our relationship with Him are already part of God's Kingdom.

4. If someone were to ask you "What is the Kingdom of God?," in your own words, how would you answer them?

The student's answer should reflect an understanding that the Kingdom of God is not an earthly kingdom, but a spiritual kingdom where God rules and reigns. They may or may not quote a verse(s).

Understanding what the Kingdom of God is isn't a simple thing. When Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council, came to Jesus to investigate what people were saying about Jesus, Jesus said to him,

*"Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."
(John 3:3)*

Nicodemus, being himself a Jewish religious teacher, could not understand what Jesus was saying about the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God cannot be seen. We can certainly see the evidence of God in His creation. The stars, sunrise, and teeming life on the earth are evidence to all people of God's nature and glory. But the Kingdom of God is "experienced" by those that are born of the Spirit of God. If you are a Christian, you probably can remember a time when the Bible or the Gospel did not make sense to you. Then, when you surrendered your life to God, your understanding was opened. We can try to describe God's peace or joy to someone, but for them to really understand, they need to experience that peace and joy for themselves. They need to be born again.

5. Describe a time when you experienced God's presence in your life. (If you have never experienced God's presence, what do you think prevents you from doing so?)

The student's answer may describe a time when they felt peace, when they knew that God had done a miracle for them or someone they were praying for, when the

Holy Spirit convicted them of sin, or a similar time. Affirm their experience unless it contradicts Scripture.

Thy Kingdom Come

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When He finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

He said to them, "When you pray, say:

*"Father,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come." (Luke 11:1-2)*

In Matthew's Gospel what has become known as the "Lord's Prayer" or the "Our Father" is stated slightly differently:

*"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6:9-10)*

Jesus said to His disciples that when they pray, they should not just keep babbling on with many words like the pagans.* The words Jesus taught the disciples to pray are powerful, but what does it mean that we should pray for God's Kingdom to come and His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven? Why do we need to ask for God's Kingdom to come when God does what He wants anyway?

God desires that His people will partner with Him in seeing His will done on the earth. When we pray for God's will to be done, we are surrendering ourselves to God, inviting Him to establish His Kingdom in our hearts and a pledge* we are making to cooperate with God in spreading His Kingdom throughout the world. It's a prayer that aligns* us with God's Spirit and will.

6. How, specifically, do you think God wants to establish His Kingdom in your own heart and life?

The student's answer will provide the mentor with an opportunity to learn what the student thinks God desires for their life. Examples could be through: repentance, peace, forgiveness, love for others, a calling to ministry, and/or reconciliation with someone. Reflect on the student's answer and provide the student with feedback or encouragement.

7. At your correctional facility, where or how do you see God's Kingdom being displayed?

The student's answer will tell the mentor what the student perceives about God's activity where they live. Provide feedback and affirmation if appropriate.

Build My Church

If the Kingdom of God is not a religion or a building, why did Jesus speak so often about His Church? When we think of "church" we may be thinking about the church down the road from where we grew up. We may think about the church that we attended as a child or adult. When Jesus spoke about His Church, He was describing a spiritual church that is populated with those that hear the Gospel and respond to Jesus' invitation to follow Him. The Church that Jesus was talking about was all people that God has given a gift of faith to believe and place their trust in Him and His Son. If we are a follower of Jesus, we are part of His Church, regardless of where we are.

Complete these verses from Paul's letter to the Ephesian church (Ephesians 2:19-22).

8. *Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and **also members of his household**, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with **Christ Jesus** himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a **holy temple** in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22)*

These verses above tell us that we too are being built together, with Jesus, His apostles, and prophets to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit. This is His Church.

Once, when Jesus was traveling with His disciples, He asked them what people were saying about Him. Their response was that some people were saying Jesus was John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets of old come back to life. When Jesus pressed them further, He asked, "Who do you say I am?" The disciple Peter spoke up and said:

"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:16)

Jesus told Peter that he was blessed because God Himself had revealed Jesus' true identity to him. We can assume that, up to this point, Jesus had not told Peter that He was the Messiah and the Son of God. Jesus then says to Peter:

"And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16:18-19)

These two short verses that Jesus spoke have been discussed and debated for centuries. What did Jesus mean by saying, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18)?

In this verse, knowing the original Greek language the New Testament was written in makes what Jesus was saying to Peter make more sense. Jesus said, "You are Petros (a masculine-singular noun) and upon this 'petra' (a feminine-singular noun) I will build my church." The name Peter means a stone, but the rock Jesus would build His Church on was the truth and revelation that Peter proclaimed, that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. This truth is the foundation that Jesus' Church is being built on. His Church includes us when we are brought into God's family.

What did Jesus mean when He said that He would give Peter the keys to the Kingdom of heaven and were the keys to the Kingdom of heaven only given to Peter?

The keys to the Kingdom are not literal keys. Keys symbolize power and authority. Think of those people at your facility who walk around with a set of keys on their belts. They have been given the power and authority to open the doors of the facility to get people from one part of the facility to another. In Matthew chapter 6, Jesus tells Peter he has the keys to the Kingdom. Jesus gave Peter, and we will later see that this applies to all believers, the power and authority to invite others into God's Kingdom. This does not mean that Peter can decide who gets into God's Kingdom. God has already made the path clear for us to enter the Kingdom through Jesus. One way to think about this is that the warden of a facility has the power to decide who moves where in a facility, but that new correctional officer that gets a set of keys is given the responsibility and power from the warden to exercise the warden's power and authority to put the key in to physically open the facility doors.

9. What do you think it means that you, too, if you are a follower of Jesus, have been given the keys to the Kingdom of God?

The student's answer should reflect an understanding that, as a Christian, they have been called to share in the work of Jesus and given spiritual authority by God to speak and act on His behalf.

Jesus' desire and will is that His people, the Church, have the power and authority to represent Him on the earth. He gives this power and authority not only to Peter. In Matthew chapter 18, Jesus, speaking to all His disciples with Him says:

"Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 18:18)

And in John's Gospel, after Jesus' death and resurrection from the dead, Jesus says to the disciples the following:

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." (John 20:21-23)

This may seem like a lot of power that Jesus gave to His Church. It is, but God has already opened the door for sins to be forgiven and others to become part of His Kingdom and Jesus'

Church. Think of someone giving you a million dollars with instructions to give anyone who will accept it a free gift of \$1000 dollars. The million dollars isn't your money, but the person giving it to you has given you the power and authority to share their gift with others.

This is the work of Jesus' Church (all of us who believe). We can with confidence say to someone, "If you are willing to accept this free gift of forgiveness, grace, and participation in God's Kingdom, "welcome in." When they accept the invitation, we can with confidence say to them, "Your sins are forgiven," because we understand what God has done through Jesus.

Believing that God can use us to pray for healing for others, proclaim the Gospel and tell others their sins are forgiven when they invited Jesus to be their Lord, though it might be hard to believe.

10. Complete the following statement that Jesus made to His followers:

*"Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works **I have been doing**, and they will do **even greater things than these**, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for **anything in my name**, and I will do it." (John 14:12-14)*

Jesus' Church is the visible extension of what God has done already in the heavenly realm. The word translated as "church" in the New Testament is "ekklesia." Ekklesia literally means "those that have been called out." Jesus called us out of the world and invited us into the Kingdom. He continues to call people out of the world to be part of His Kingdom. The Church is simply all of those, including us, whom God has called out of sin to understand and participate in His grace, love, and eternal Kingdom.

The Church Inside the Fence

The "church" inside of the facility where you currently live is not the just the Lutherans, Pentecostals, or Catholics. The church inside the fence of your facility is all of those that have been called out of the world to experience and participate in a relationship with the creator of the universe through His Son Jesus Christ (the ekklesia).

The "church" includes everyone at your facility who is a follower of Jesus. The correctional officers or administrators that have a relationship with Jesus are your brothers and sisters. The Lutherans, Pentecostals, or Methodists that are seeking after Jesus are your brothers and sisters. The work supervisors that work in the kitchen or canteen are your brothers and sisters. Together, with us, they are the "Church."

11. If someone asked you, "What is the 'Church'?", how would you answer them?

The student's answer should reflect an understanding that the Church is all of those people that have surrendered their lives to Christ and are trying to follow God. Their answer may or may not include that Jesus is the head of the Church.

As a believer in Jesus, you are given the task, like Peter, and all believers up to the present time, to build Jesus' Church. You have been given the keys to the Kingdom. Jesus has entrusted us as believers to continue the work. In the following lessons we will dig deep into what it means to serve God where we are at, inside or outside of prison. Whether we are inside prison or outside, the work of building Jesus' Church is the same. We have been given a stack of invitations to the banquet that God has prepared for us. We have the power, authority, and joy of handing those invitations to all who would come to God.

12. We may not feel that we are good enough to invite others to know Jesus, but through the blood of Jesus, we are made righteous, not through our own good deeds. This is "good news." This is the Gospel. How can you share Jesus today at your facility?

The student should name or describe something concrete that they can do to share their faith at their jail or prison.

Action Step

This week, keep a log and write down everywhere you can see God's Kingdom being expressed at your facility. This could be in the caring action of others, in the staff that live out their Christian faith at their workplace, in the expression of Christian believers, or in God's grace and peace being poured out.

LESSON 2: The Gospel That Brings Salvation

Lesson Focus:

The Gospel is the Power of God that Brings Salvation

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes. . . (Romans 1:16)

The Gospel is the “good news” that God loves the world and sent His Son to die so that we can have forgiveness of our sins and a life with Him now and for eternity. In his letter to the Roman Christians, Paul said the Gospel is the power of God. Sharing this “good news” with others is powerful because it can change their lives forever.

In the Book of Acts, the writer Luke records some of the events in the days following Jesus’ death and resurrection. Luke says that in the forty days after His death on the cross, Jesus appeared to His disciples and spoke to them about the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). His disciples asked Jesus when He would restore the kingdom to Israel. The disciples still did not understand God’s plan. Having seen Jesus’ death and resurrection, they were hopeful again that Jesus would set up an earthly kingdom in Jerusalem.* Jesus tells them that it was not for them to know the times of future events. Instead, He told them:

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria,* and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)*

Rather than establishing an earthly kingdom, Jesus tells them that the work ahead for them was to be His witnesses throughout the earth.

1. Why do you think the disciples still did not understand the mission of Jesus after witnessing His death and resurrection from the dead?

While we don’t fully know why the disciples were slow to understand, students’ answers might reflect one of the following ideas:

- **Based on the cultural and religious views of the Jewish people at the time, Jesus’ actions were not what people were expecting from the Messiah. The disciples lived in this culture and had their own preconceived ideas.**
- **The disciples were human, and like us, were sometimes slow to understand or believe.**
- **The events of the week of Jesus’ last week were traumatic for the disciples. They were grieving and in shock. When Jesus first appeared to them after His resurrection, they thought He was a ghost.**

- **Jesus sometimes taught in parables that were hard to understand, particularly when they related to what Jesus would have to suffer.**
- **It takes spiritual discernment to understand spiritual matters. After His resurrection Luke tells us that Jesus opened their minds to understand.**

Luke 24:44-45 says:

He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. (emphasis added)

This question is designed to spur the student to consider why the disciples might not have had understanding. There is not a right and wrong answer, but the student’s answer should reflect a plausible reason for the disciples’ lack of understanding.

We are Called to be Witnesses

In court, a witness* is someone who testifies about what they know or have seen that pertains to the trial taking place. The disciples that were with Jesus after His resurrection from the dead were called to be witnesses to the remarkable events they had seen.

As Christians, we are called to continue to spread the Gospel and to be witnesses for Jesus. While we weren’t alive to witness Jesus’ death and resurrection, we have experienced the power of God in our own lives. We have experienced God’s grace and forgiveness. We have experienced the peace that comes with new life in Christ. Knowing that others can also experience this new life is “good news” and a message that we can joyfully share.

Witnesses in Our Facility

There is a famous quote credited to the 13th Century Italian Christian Francis of Assisi. The quote, which he may not have really said, but contains some truth is:

“Preach the Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary.”

God will certainly make opportunities to share our story with others. But this quote, attributed to Francis, contains a truth that is particularly important to us as we look to be witnesses in the facilities where we live. Our lives demonstrate God’s love before we even have a chance to speak about God’s love.

2. In your own words, how would you say what Francis was reported to have said? (*“Preach the Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary.”*)

Some possible responses could be:

- **People don’t care what you say. They watch what you do.**

- **When we love others, we are demonstrating who God is.**
- **Our words are sometimes not clear. They need to “see” Jesus in us.**

Living in a Fishbowl

Living in a prison is in many ways like living in a fishbowl. Day in and day out people are watching us live our lives. In our living units, people know who the Christians are. They see them going to chapel or reading their Bibles. They know who is breaking the facility rules or is involved in illegal activities. They learn whom they need to avoid to stay out of trouble themselves.

Whether we like it or not, the Gospel we believe is seen in our actions before we even have a chance to share our stories. In his New Testament letter, James wrote the verses listed below.

Complete the following verses from James’ letter (James 2:14-18):

3. *What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? (James 2:14)*
4. *Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. (James 2:15-17)*
5. *But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds and I will show you my faith by my deeds. (James 2:18)*

In these verses, James is not saying that we are saved by our actions or deeds. He is saying that if we are followers of Jesus, the things we say and do will reflect our faith. If we say we are Christians, those around us will judge by our actions if we are what we profess to be.

People are watching closely to see if we really believe what we profess to believe. They may be interested in Christianity themselves but want to see what the fruit of our faith is in our lives. Do we really have peace? Are we really sharing the love of Jesus with others? Are we consistent* in our faith, or do we read our Bibles in the day rooms but argue or get angry at others? Do we go to chapel then come back to our living units and stir up trouble?

We are humans and will make mistakes. When we do, are we quick to apologize to those we might have hurt or offended? Do people we live with consistently see us trying to do our best to reflect Jesus in our words, attitudes, and actions?

When people see the love of God exhibited in our lives, they will begin to wonder what God might do in their lives. The lives we live in front of others are a witness of the power that the Gospel has to change lives. People will only want to listen to what you have to say if they believe and trust that you genuinely care about them. When they see God at work in our lives they will want to hear our stories. We are witnesses of the good news of the Gospel when we exhibit that good news in the way we live.

Sharing our Testimonies

God will put people in our lives that will want to hear about our faith and about how our faith in Jesus made a difference in us. This is an opportunity to be “witnesses” for Jesus. Just as Jesus told His disciples that they would be witnesses to the ends of the earth, we are called to continue that mission in those places that we live.

Here is the Apostle Paul’s testimony,* or witness, that he gave summarized in his letter to Timothy (1 Timothy 1:13-16).

Complete the following verses from 1 Timothy 1:13-16:

6. *Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. (1 Timothy 1:13)*
7. *The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 1:14)*
8. *Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners —of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. (1 Timothy 1:15-16)*

Practice writing your own testimony by completing the following sentences.

This exercise may be difficult for some students. Look at their answers to 9 through 13 and give affirmation and suggestions to make their testimony clear and succinct.

Paul’s testimony was that he was a terrible sinner, he says “the worst of sinners,” but God poured out His grace and mercy in Paul’s life to be an example to those people who might come to faith and receive eternal life as part of God’s Kingdom.

We too have stories. Our stories include where we came from and the things we did before we met Jesus. Our stories tell of how God got hold of our lives and gave us faith to believe in His Son Jesus Christ. Our stories tell others how God has made a difference in our lives. Finally, our stories tell others that they too can experience the grace and forgiveness that God gave us.

Here is the testimony of a woman named Beth:

Because of growing up in a home with many problems, I started using drugs at age 15. I lived a life of addiction for seven years. I hurt and disappointed the people in my life that cared about me. I came to understand that God was also hurt by many of the decisions that I made. When I went to jail for the third time, I met a woman in my pod who always read her Bible and seemed to have a peace that I wanted. She shared the Gospel with me and told me that, even though she was going to have to go to prison, she had peace and joy in her

heart. I knew I needed that. I asked her how I could experience that. She prayed with me to ask Jesus into my life to forgive my sins and give me hope. Immediately I felt a peace that was different from anything I had ever had. Everything in my life didn't change right away, but I do have hope now and know that God loves me and has forgiven my sins. I can see I am growing a bit every day in my faith. I know now that God wants everyone to have that same faith and hope.

Paul's testimony is only a few sentences in his letter to Timothy. Beth was able to share what God had done in her life in eleven sentences.

Practice writing your own testimony by completing the following sentences.

9. Before coming to faith in Jesus and surrendering my life to him, I . . .
10. God got my attention by . . .
11. I prayed and asked God . . .
12. After asking God to forgive my sins and help me to follow Him, I . . .
13. Today my life is different. Today, . . .

We do not need to be Bible scholars or preachers to share the Gospel. The apostle Peter wrote:

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. (1 Peter 3:15)

As Christians, we have a great hope for our future, both in this life and the next. People will ask us the reason for that hope. When they do, you have an amazing story of God's grace in your life. Your story doesn't need to be dramatic. Some people think that because they didn't go to prison or live a life of drug addiction, their story is not interesting enough. To simply say, "I was a sinner who didn't know God's peace; but God changed that" will be interesting to anyone who asks us to share why we are a Christian.

Mistakes People Make When Sharing Their Testimonies

We already discussed how important it is for people to see us living our life in a way that demonstrates the presence of God's grace and love. Jesus taught His disciples by having them travel with Him for three years, watching all that He did. Until Jesus' death and resurrection, they didn't understand Jesus' teaching fully. What they did see for three years was God's love being demonstrated by everything Jesus said and did. They had to learn wisdom at the feet of their teacher.

Here are some things that can make it difficult for us to share our testimony with others:

- Using too much Christian language. Avoid words that they might not understand like:

sanctification; anointed; conversion; repentance.

- Using too many words. People don't need a thirty-minute lecture or need to hear every sin you ever committed.
 - Glorifying your past sin. Sometimes Christians might speak about their past in a way that can border on bragging. Saying something like, "I had an exciting life with lots of money, women, and drugs," can be a way to brag about how cool you were in your pre-Christian life.
 - Not praying for wisdom. God will give us opportunities to share our faith with others. Pray that when He does, you will be able to communicate with grace and love. Forcing someone to hear your testimony may be the quickest way to have them shut down. Remember, God's timing is perfect. Learn to see when God is opening a door to share your testimony.
 - Telling people they are sinners and need to repent is usually not helpful. When they hear you confess that you were a sinner in need of God's forgiveness, they will get the message.
14. What is one mistake that either you have made or saw someone else make when they were sharing their testimony?

The student is being asked to reflect on how sharing their personal testimony can be more effective. The student may answer something similar to these examples:

- **Try to share the truth "in love."**
- **Don't come across pushy or arrogant.**
- **Focus on how God changed their life.**
- **Try to live the life they are professing so that others might see God working in their lives.**

God is faithful to draw people to Himself. If God gives you an opportunity to share your testimony, be confident that God wants them to know Him even more than you do. They may have a parent, grandparent, brother, or sister that has been praying for them for years. God may have sent others before you to be His witness to them. They may have rejected God many times in their life. They may have been living with guilt or shame for their past actions for many years and now are ready for God's forgiveness.

15. What are some of the reasons that you rejected God or chose not to surrender your life to God in the past?

Student answers could include, but are not limited to:

- **I never heard or understood the Gospel**
- **I was just rebellious**
- **I wanted to remain in my sin or addiction**
- **I was bitter towards God because of my past experience**

16. Think of someone at your facility that you want to have come to know Jesus. What do you think prevents them now from surrendering their life to God?

The student doesn't have to give a name, but they should identify a specific person, such as their roommate, someone they work or go to school with, a family member, or a friend.

In the next lesson we are going to look more specifically at the apostle Paul. He is known as the apostle to the gentiles. The gentiles were the non-Jewish people outside of what we know today as the country of Israel. The word "gentile" simply means the nations. Christianity started as a Jewish movement of people that became followers of Jesus. God's plan was always that His Kingdom would come to all the nations of the earth.

Paul was one of the most educated Christians in the first century of Christianity. He is responsible for the writing of almost 1/3 of the New Testament. Paul was responsible for spreading the Gospel and establishing churches in many areas among the gentiles. There is a lot to be learned from studying Paul's strategy for spreading the Gospel.

Action Step

In the next weeks, make several attempts at writing down your testimony in a way that is clear. With each attempt, try to make improvements. When you have a version that you think communicates clearly, have one of your Christian friends at your facility listen to you share your testimony verbally. Ask them for feedback and suggestions on how to make your testimony as clear and effective as possible.

LESSON 3: Paul: The Missionary Evangelist

Lesson Focus:

Building the Church Inside the Fence

Strength In Weakness

Arguably, no one in history has had a greater impact on the spread of the Christian faith than the apostle Paul (Saul before his conversion). A man who persecuted* Christians and did all he could to stop the spread of the Gospel became the man God used to bring the message of Jesus to the nations. Paul, calling himself the chief of sinners before he met Jesus, was a highly educated and zealous* Pharisee.* Full of pride and self-confidence, he was radically changed by God from the inside out. In one of his letters to the church he started in Corinth, we are given a glimpse of the humble and focused servant of Christ that Paul became.

And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power. (1 Corinthians 2:1-5)*

Before coming to faith in Jesus, Paul was able to debate with the smartest teachers of his day on religious matters. He came to understand that all of his "human wisdom" was worthless for the purposes of God. He reminded the Corinthians that he came to proclaim Jesus to them in "weakness" and "great fear." Once a prideful and self-confident man, Paul learned to rely on God's wisdom. Learning to trust and rely on God is at times fearful. Think about how Jesus' disciples may have felt when He told them the following:

"On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." (Matthew 10:18-20)

Being told that you would be arrested, and when you are, trusting that God will give you the words to speak in your defense, would make most people fearful. If we have been Christians for a while, we have probably experienced times when trusting in God was not easy. Our own thinking and strength may have served us well in the past to get out of difficult situations. Trusting God means that we willingly allow ourselves to embrace our own weaknesses and let God fight our battles.

Paul not only allowed himself to be weak, but he also understood that there was a great benefit to not trusting in his own strength. In his second letter to the Corinthian church, he said:

But he [God] said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)*

What does it mean for us that when we are weak we are strong? It means that we can trust in God's grace and strength. Learning to trust in God's strength, rather than in our own strength, is one of the most basic yet difficult things we need to learn as believers in Jesus.

1. As you consider how God has called you to build His Church at the jail or prison where you live, how can you put into practice the lessons of trusting in God's strength, not your own?

The student's answer should reflect an understanding that God is already working things toward His purposes. Seeking and listening for God's leading is preferable to forcing the Gospel on others who may not be ready or willing to hear. The student might answer that trusting in God's strength helps them to be anxious for nothing.

Psalms 91 provides a summary of trusting in God's strength.

2. Complete the following verses from Psalm 91:

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust."

Surely he will save you
from the fowler's snare
and from the deadly pestilence.
He will cover you with his feathers,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

You will not fear the terror of night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,
nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness,
nor the plague that destroys at midday.

A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.

*You will only observe with your eyes
and see the punishment of the wicked.*

*If you say, "The LORD is my refuge,"
and you make the Most High your dwelling,
no **harm** will overtake you,
no disaster will come near your tent.*

*For he will command his angels concerning you
to **guard you** in all your ways;
they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.
You will tread on the lion and the cobra;
you will trample the great lion and the serpent.*

*"Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will **rescue him** ;
I will **protect him** for he acknowledges **my name** .
He will call on me, and I will answer him;
I will **be with him** in trouble,
I will **deliver** him and honor him.
With long life I will satisfy him
and show him my salvation."*

Divine Appointments*

When we are willing to share our faith, God will put people in our path at the right time. God is already preparing people to hear the Gospel and "believe" in Jesus. It is God who sets these "divine appointments." Knowing that God is ordering our steps is a good reason to be prepared to share the Gospel when a "divine appointment" occurs. Think back to the person(s) whom God used to witness to you about new life in Jesus.

3. Who was the person that God used to share the message of the Gospel in your life? Looking back, what was going on in your life that made you willing to consider this message?

The student is sharing their experience. Use this question to learn about your student's journey. Affirm their story if appropriate.

Read the story of Philip and the important Ethiopian* official in Acts 8:26-39 and answer the following questions.

4. Why did Philip travel from Jerusalem to Gaza (Acts 8:26)?

An angel of the Lord instructed him to go to Gaza.

5. What was the Ethiopian official's position in his country (Acts 8:27)?

He was in charge of the “Kandake” (the queen’s treasury).

6. What did the Spirit tell Philip in Acts 8:29?

Go to the chariot and stay near it.

7. What was the passage of Scripture that the Ethiopian was reading in his chariot? Rewrite the Scripture here in verses 8:32-33.

He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.

8. After Philip explained to the Ethiopian what the passage of Scripture he was reading meant, what did the Ethiopian ask Philip to do (Acts 8:36-38)?

He asked him to baptize him.

Another Divine Appointment

Michael went to prison with a 20-year sentence to serve. In his first months in prison, he began praying that God would change him. He knew that he had made a mess of his life and needed help getting through many years of prison. He was a broken man. One day he was told to pack up his property because he was being transferred. When he got to his next facility he was assigned a cell with Mark, a committed Christian. Mark didn’t waste any time telling Michael about how God had changed his life and would change Michael’s too. Michael understood that being transferred and having Mark as a cellmate was God’s intervention in his life. Michael became a believer and spent the next months praying and studying the Bible with Mark.

9. How has God used you to share your faith with the right person at the right time (divine appointment*)?

The student may not have ever shared their faith with someone else. If that is the case, encourage them to be watching for a divine appointment to share Jesus. If the student has an example, it should reflect that the person they shared with was prepared by God to hear the Gospel. Affirm their story if appropriate.

All Things in Order

The apostle Paul was a brilliant strategist in his spread of the Gospel. As Paul sought direction from the Holy Spirit, he learned that God was a God of order. Paul did not go on to a new city and begin preaching in the city square. Read how Paul approached each new city where he established churches.

Paul in Thessalonica

When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah," he said. Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women. (Acts 17:1-4)*

10. What was Paul's custom (Acts 17:1-4)?

He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath and reasoned with the Jews from Scripture about Jesus as the Messiah.

Paul In Berea

As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. As a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men. (Acts 17:10-12)

11. Why were the Bereans called more noble than the people in Thessalonica?

They received the message of the Gospel with eagerness and examined the Scriptures to see if what Paul was teaching about Jesus was true.

In Roman 1:16, Paul wrote:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

God's intent has always been to first bring salvation to His chosen people, the Jews. Paul understood God's authority and will. Paul made it his practice to first go to the synagogues in the cities he entered to reason with them through their own Scriptures that Jesus was the fulfillment of the promises made centuries before to their own prophets. By going first to the synagogues, the Jewish leaders in those cities could not say that Paul was trying to be deceptive about his message. The Jews had their own Scriptures that told how God planned to save his people through a messiah. Many Jews, like those in Berea, studied the Scriptures closely to examine if Paul's message was consistent with their own beliefs. Because they were willing to listen to Paul and their own writings, they came to believe in the Gospel through Paul.

Paul the Tentmaker

Paul's life before becoming a follower of Jesus was well known to the earliest Christians. They knew of him as Saul, the man who hunted down and persecuted believers.

In Acts 22, we have this account of Paul's own confession to God:

"When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance and saw the Lord speaking to me. 'Quick!' he said. 'Leave Jerusalem immediately, because the people here will not accept your testimony about me.'

'Lord,' I replied, 'these people know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.'"
(Acts 22:17-20)

Paul understood that he had a lot to do to gain the trust of Jesus' followers. As Christianity grew, there were men who were preaching Jesus for their own personal and financial gain. Others infiltrated the first churches to bring confusion and draw Jewish converts back to Judaism. Many lies and accusations were circulated about Paul and his motives. Paul understood that people were watching and judging him for everything he said and did. Because of this, he paid careful attention not to do anything that would make people doubt his motives and message.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote the following:

Don't you know that those who serve in the temple get their food from the temple, and that those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.

But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me, for I would rather die than allow anyone to deprive me of this boast. (1 Corinthians 9:13-15)

We see in Acts 18:1-3 that when he was with the Corinthians he earned his income making tents. By refusing his God-given right of financial support from the preaching of the Gospel, he was demonstrating to the believers that his motives were pure. He did not want even the appearance of evil, financial motives.

In prison, people are watching. They are watching Christians to see if their life matches up with the faith they are professing. People are watching the things you do so they can claim you are a fake or to hinder your testimony. At times it may not seem fair, but your words and actions are being watched and judged. The righteousness of Christ needs to be demonstrated in your life before people will believe what you share with them about Jesus.

Do you do any of the following?

- Use profane or harsh language
- Break facility rules
- Disrespect the C.O.'s or staff
- Run a 2-for-1 store, profiting off of others
- Steal from the chow hall or your work assignment
- Gossip about others
- Argue with people
- Treat others unkindly
- Judge or preach "at" others

The above list is not meant to make you feel guilty. Understand that people will only hear what you have to say if they believe you care about them and are "walking the talk."

12. Do you need to build a better reputation and the trust of others so that people will be willing to hear your testimony of coming to faith in Christ? Explain:

Every one of us should be gaining the trust of others by our integrity and faithfulness to God. The student should give an example of something concrete they can do to build trust with others and be a living testimony of God's saving grace.

13. What are some ways that you can demonstrate the "changed life" that you have experienced through Jesus?

The student should articulate ways that their Christian witness can be improved by demonstrating the kindness and character of God in their attitudes and behavior. They may note being consistent in their walk with Christ. Challenge the student if their answer does not demonstrate an understanding of how others, especially non-Christians, see the sincerity of their commitment to God.

Does God have a plan for my facility?

When you first came to prison, you learned it was like going to a foreign country. In prison, the politics, food, language, rules, and customs were much different than outside of prison. It probably took a while before you understood your surroundings. Like Paul entering a new city, you looked around to see who had authority and power. You wanted to know who the decision makers were. Like Paul, you wanted to avoid having someone make up lies about who you were and why you were in prison.

As a Christian in prison, who are the people that are following Jesus? Ask yourself, "What is God doing in my facility?" A popular book in the 1990's, "Experiencing God" by Henry Blackaby was written around the idea that God is already working around us. We should look to see where God is already working and join in with that (we recommend Blackaby's book).

14. As you think about and look around your facility, where do you see God working?

This is a broad, open question. The question should spur the student to look at their facility and identify God's work in their midst.

Paul in Athens

When Paul entered the great city of Athens, Greece, the Bible says he was greatly distressed

because of all the idols and statues to many gods. Paul did not start knocking over statues and preaching that the Athenians needed to repent. He looked for common ground with them. In this section of Acts 17, we see Paul's skill at connecting with people through relational bridge building. The Areopagus was a rock outcropping in the north of Athens near the famous Acropolis where leaders, philosophers, and politicians would go to speak and debate.

Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you. (Acts 17:22-23)

There was a statue in Athens built to the "unknown god." This was the Greeks' understanding of a god that was unknown and beyond their understanding, who created all that can be seen. The idea of a great god that was beyond knowing was an important part of the philosophy of the Greeks going back hundreds of years before Jesus with the famous philosophers like Plato and Socrates.

Notice how Paul masterfully looked around the city to understand the people and to look for a way to make the Gospel relevant to their own beliefs and customs. For centuries, the people of Greece wondered who this great unknown god could be. Paul said to them,

"... and this is what I am going to proclaim to you."

There are many ways to find common ground with others to help open the door to share the Gospel with them. Most everyone shares common experiences and life questions. For instance:

- Who am I? Why am I here? And where am I going?
- Grieving over a lost loved one
- Having a hope for the future
- Remorse over past bad decisions
- Having a philosophy or religion to try to understand their life

Think about the following people and how you might find common ground to build a connection to share the Gospel with them:

15. People at your facility who have a different religion from Christianity
16. People that you work with
17. People in your living unit

The student's answers to questions 15-17 should reflect an understanding that finding common ground or shared interests with others can build connections that could open the door to share the Gospel.

The apostle Paul was led by the Holy Spirit. God taught him wisdom and gave him a special gift to reach the nations with the Gospel of Jesus. The Holy Spirit may be leading you to be one of God's witnesses at your facility. God will equip you with wisdom, understanding, and eyes to see

what He is doing and where He is opening doors for you. At Crossroads, we are dedicated to the advancement of the Gospel in jails and prisons. As a Crossroads' student, we are your partners in this high calling of Jesus. People are praying for you. Your mentors are here to pray and encourage you as you seek to follow Jesus.

Action Step

This week, spend time praying for wisdom and guidance from God to become an effective ambassador for Jesus. Make a list of where you see God moving at your facility and whom God may be directing you to share His great love with.

LESSON 4: Building the Church Inside the Fence

Lesson Focus:

Serving within the Church

Service

Earlier in this course we discussed the importance of serving others as a primary function of the church. If there is only one Bible passage you write down and put somewhere that you will see it often as a reminder of your calling, this section from Matthew 20 is a good one:

“Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:26-28)

Jesus wasn’t talking about being great in the eyes of people. He was talking about spiritual growth. As we stop focusing on ourselves and think first about the needs of others, we are surrendering our own wills and conforming to the heart and will of God.

1. How are you working to meet the needs of others at your facility?

The student’s answer should reflect an awareness of some of the needs of the people they live and work with at their facility.

The disciple John wrote the following:

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. (1 John 4:7-8)

God cares for and loves all of His creation. We do not need to pray about who God loves. In his Roman letter, Paul wrote: *“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8). This is an important truth. It teaches us that it was not because of how good we were that God gave us the gift to believe in Jesus. We cannot earn God’s favor. If God loved us enough, even at our worst, we can be sure that He loves even the people that we find unlovable. Serving others does not just mean that we are called to serve Christians only.

2. Who are the people that you find the hardest to love? Explain:

Some possible responses could be:

- **My family**
- **My enemies**
- **People that are annoying**
- **Prison or jail staff**
- **People of other races**
- **People that betrayed my trust**

The student should offer an explanation about why that particular person or group of people is difficult for them to love.

In the early centuries of the Church, Christian martyrs* were willing to be put to death for the Gospel. Pagans* and non-believers marveled at the courage and faith of men and women that were willing to die for their faith. Their courage was a witness to the world. The 2nd Century Christian writer Tertullian wrote: *"The blood of martyrs is the seed of the church."* By this he meant while the devil was trying to silence the message of Christ, the killing of Christians and the demonstration of their faith and courage caused many people to believe in Jesus.

3. Who is someone you admire for their faith and willingness to suffer or be persecuted for their beliefs? How have they been an example to you?

The student's example could be someone they know, a biblical figure, or an historical figure.

In 165 A.D., the Roman army returned from a war in the Mesopotamian region.* When they returned, they brought with them a plague that some historians believed was a type of smallpox.* Estimates are that anywhere from 10-70 million people died as a result of the virus. Many people thought the virus was a divine punishment because Christians refused to worship the pagan gods of the Romans. Many people fled to faraway places to avoid the plague. But Christians remained behind to care for the sick, providing medical care, spiritual comfort, and food and water. The courage, love, and service of the Christians changed people's opinions about them. The faith that the Christians had about an afterlife, where they would dwell for eternity with God, was appealing to a people who were dying in large numbers without hope. While the Roman army was nearly wiped out, contributing to the downfall of the Roman Empire,* Christianity quickly spread. By 381 A.D., Christianity had become the official religion of the Roman Empire.

Study to Show Yourself Approved

As a Crossroads' student, you are actively studying the Bible. Learning God's Word is one of the most important things we can do to build the Church inside the fence of prison. There are a number of important reasons that Bible study is so important:

- A primary way God speaks to us is through His Word.
- Our thinking, attitudes, and hearts are changed as we read God's Word.
- When we read the Bible we learn what pleases God and what His will for humanity is.

- Knowing the Bible well protects us from false teachings.
 - When people come to us with questions about God or their own lives, knowing God's Word will help us give sound and true answers.
 - As Christians, we are involved in spiritual warfare.
4. How has studying the Bible impacted your life?

The student is giving their mentor a window into their life and way that studying God's Word has made a difference to them. It could be that they write about their Crossroads experience. Affirm and encourage as appropriate.

Complete the following verses (NIV):

5. For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)
6. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18)
7. Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord and who meditates on his law day and night. (Psalm 1:1-2)
8. Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. (1 John 4:1-3)
9. But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. (1 Peter 3:15)
10. For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have power to demolish strongholds. (2 Corinthians 10:3-4)

Apologetics

Apologetics* is the study of how to defend and support the Christian faith to unbelievers. The apostle Paul would reason with the Jews in every town he visited. When they challenged the truth of the Gospel, Paul expertly was able to explain from the Jew's own Scriptures the truth and consistency of his message. John's Gospel was a masterful explanation to the Greeks of

how Jesus was the answer to their own centuries of philosophical questioning.

Every Christian does not need to become an expert in apologetics. But for those Christians that have a burden to show non-believers the way to God, apologetics can be a valuable tool.

Here are some of the types of questions that apologetics aims to address and that non-believers ask Christians:

- Why would God allow evil to exist?
- How can Christians claim that they have “the truth”?
- Don’t all religions lead to the same God?
- Jesus didn’t really claim to be God, did He?
- Isn’t the Bible just a book written by men?
- If Christianity is true, why does it seem that Christians don’t love everyone?

These are just a few of the difficult questions that non-Christians ask Christians. Their questions might be formulated to win an argument, or they may genuinely have questions that are preventing them from faith in Jesus.

Studying apologetics does not replace Bible study. In this course, we will not be doing a detailed study of apologetics. But for someone who wants to sharpen their knowledge of Biblical truth, apologetics can be a beneficial and satisfying academic challenge. If you have access to a library at your facility or the ability to acquire books, here are some books that have helped others answer the big questions of life from a Biblical perspective:

- *The Case for Christ* - Lee Strobel
- *More Than a Carpenter* - Josh McDowell
- *Mere Christianity* - C.S. Lewis
- *The 10 Most Common Objections to Christianity* - Alex McFarland
- *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions* - Greg Koukl

11. What are two common arguments you have heard from people against Christianity?

The student should provide two arguments that people make against faith in Jesus.

Possible examples could be:

- **You can’t prove God’s existence**
- **Christians talk about love but don’t love others**
- **The Bible was written by men, not God**

Supporting Your Chaplain

In earlier lessons, we discussed the “Church inside the fence.” If your facility has a staff chaplain or a volunteer that serves as chaplain, you know that they are responsible for the religious activities in their facility. Every chaplain is unique and has a perspective about what their job is and how to do it. A facility chaplain does not have to be, and frequently is not, a Christian.

They are, though, the person to whom the warden has given the responsibilities and authority to oversee religious matters at the facility. Chaplains are responsible for providing religious services and programs. Some of them personally lead worship services. Some of them provide spiritual counsel. Most of them train volunteers.

Whether or not your facility chaplain believes what you believe or does the things you think are most important for them to do, they are the person the warden--but most importantly the person God-- has put in that job at your prison.

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. (Romans 13:1-2)

Helping in the facility chapel is a way to serve and build the Church. Christians should not be the people in their facility that create problems for the chaplain. Does your chaplain see God demonstrated in your life by your service, attitude, and respect? Do you make the chaplain's life easier by helping with setting up chairs for services, showing respect and kindness to volunteers and not making demands that might seem reasonable to you but give them heartburn?

You do not know all that your chaplain is doing to make sure religious needs are met in their prison or jail. They get stacks of requests for things from all of the various religious groups at the prison. They have to locate, train, and supervise the volunteers that come into their facility. They have endless amounts of paperwork required by their wardens. The last thing they need is to get a report that you were disrupting a service or Bible study because you wanted to debate the volunteer coming in to lead. Build the chaplain's trust by being someone that they can depend on to serve with humility and dedication.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves. (Philippians 2:3)

12. What are some things you can do to assist your facility chaplain?

Possible answers include, but are not limited to:

- **Set up the chapel for services**
- **Volunteer to clean the chapel or chaplain's library**
- **Deliver books from the chapel to living units**
- **Become a chaplain's assistant or librarian**

Devotion to Prayer

There are individuals and groups at every prison facility that are faithful to pray. One of the best ways to help build the Church is by praying for its people, its growth, its health, and its witness to others. Praying for the leaders at your facility, including the warden, correctional officers, chaplain, and program staff can dramatically improve the spiritual climate of the entire jail or prison.

The staff are the gatekeepers at any facility. But they are also human beings who have a life outside of the facility. They have children, spouses, health issues, and things in their lives that are stressful. They probably aren't going to share their personal needs and struggles with you, but you can be sure that every one of them has struggles for which they need God's help.

13. Have you made prayer for the staff that work at your facility a part of your spiritual priorities? Explain:

The student may or may not pray for facility staff. If not, encourage them to do so and provide some Bible references to help them understand why they should pray for the people in authority over them. If they do not pray for the facility staff, their explanation of why not will give the mentor an opportunity to provide spiritual advice.

While you don't know--and don't need to know--specifics, making a list of prayer requests from the men or women you live with is something all believers should be doing. While it may seem strange at first for them to be asked if they have something going on in their lives that they would like prayer for, soon they will be coming to you on their own with prayer requests. You will find that even those people that aren't following Jesus may come to you asking for prayer. To them, you represent Jesus. They may not believe God will hear their prayers, but they are hopeful that God will hear your prayers.

14. Is there currently a group or individuals at your facility to whom people go to ask for prayer? Are you one of those people they come to?

Affirm or advise the student about having others that they pray corporately with at their facility.

Having a "Prayer Closet"

Starting with praying when you are alone with God is important for your own spiritual growth and to learn to listen for God's voice to you. When Jesus was teaching His disciples about prayer, He said the following:

*"But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen."
(Matthew 6:6)*

Christians sometimes speak about having prayer closets. Our prayer closets are the quiet spots where we meet with God without distractions. They are the places where we let God shine His light in our hearts. In our prayer closets we can be vulnerable and confess our sins. It is the place where we make a solemn commitment to our walks with God.

Right after He told His disciples to find quiet places alone with God to pray, Jesus gave them a model for prayer, the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13). Starting our prayer times with this prayer, aligning our hearts and minds with the heart and will of God, will help our times of prayer be fruitful. If we have kept lists of people and circumstances to pray for, we can slowly go through

those lists in prayer. Praying for the Gospel to prosper in the lives of the people at our facilities will set the stage for “divine appointments” to share Jesus.

Private prayer with God is necessary for our spiritual health and growth, but we are also called to pray with other believers. There is great power when Christians join together in prayer.

*“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”
(Matthew 18:20)*

The power of Christians united in prayer, with Jesus in their midst, will move mountains. Having a roommate, friends, or prayer team to pray with is one of the most important things we can do to transform our jails and prisons. If we have any doubt that God has made a way for us to come into His presence, confident that He loves and hears us, these verses from the Book of Hebrews should serve as an encouragement.

15. Complete the following verses from the Book of Hebrews in the New Testament:

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:14-16)

That we can “with confidence” approach God is an amazing truth. In prayer we are in God’s throne room. We have a great and loving God who wants to spend time with each of us. We can have confidence that God listens to our prayers for ourselves and others.

The Ministry of Reconciliation

Building the Church inside of the fence of prison is us cooperating with God to reconcile* the world to Himself.

16. Complete the following verses from Paul’s second letter to the church in Corinth:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. (2 Corinthians 5:17-20)

As Christians, we are part of God’s “new creation.” We have been trusted with the ministry of reconciliation. God uses us to invite people into His Kingdom. Jesus came to reconcile the world back to God. Building the Church inside the fence is about leading people to Jesus. Through our behavior, words, prayers, and service, we are helping to do that.

As a Crossroads' student, you have hopefully grown in your faith to the point where you are actively working to further the Gospel. Know that every day, staff, mentors, and volunteers are praying for you.

Action Steps

- Join or start a small group of Christians who will pray for the people and needs of your jail or prison facility.
- Meet with your facility chaplain to see how you might help in the chapel or chapel library.
- Seek out a book on the topic of apologetics and study how to share your beliefs more effectively.



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