

CURRICULUM DEVELOPED BY JEREMY MAXFIELD

A COMPASSIONATE CALL TO

COUNTER CULTURE

IN A WORLD OF

POVERTY • SAME-SEX MARRIAGE • RACISM
SEX SLAVERY • IMMIGRATION • PERSECUTION
ABORTION • ORPHANS • PORNOGRAPHY

DAVID PLATT

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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THE AUTHOR

Dr. David Platt, the president of the International Mission Board, is deeply devoted to Christ and His Word. David's first love in ministry is making disciples and sharing, showing, and teaching God's Word in everyday life. He has traveled extensively to serve alongside church leaders throughout the United States and around the world.

A lifelong learner, David has earned two undergraduate and three advanced degrees. He holds a bachelor of arts and bachelor of arts in journalism from the University of Georgia and a master of divinity, a master of theology, and a doctor of philosophy from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

David previously served at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary as the dean of chapel and an assistant professor of expository preaching and apologetics,

the staff evangelist at Edgewater Baptist Church in New Orleans, and the senior pastor of The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, Alabama. David has written several books, including *Radical*, *Radical Together*, *Follow Me*, and *Counter Culture*.

David founded *Radical (Radical.net)*, a ministry devoted to serving churches and disseminating disciple-making resources to make the gospel known in all nations.

David and his wife, Heather, have four children: Caleb, Joshua, Mara Ruth, and Isaiah.

INTRODUCTION

On popular issues like poverty and slavery, about which Christians are likely to be applauded for our social action, we're quick to stand up and speak out. Yet on controversial issues like homosexuality and abortion, about which Christians are likely to be criticized for our social action, we're content to sit down and stay quiet.

It's as if we've decided to pick and choose which social issues we'll contest in our culture and which we'll concede. And our picking and choosing normally revolves around what's most comfortable—and least costly—for us.

What if the main issue isn't poverty or sex trafficking, homosexuality or abortion? What if the main issue is God? What if the main issue is the glory of God revealed in the gospel? And what might happen if we made Him our focus instead of a particular social issue?

In a world marked by sex slavery and sexual immorality, the abandonment and murder of children, racism and persecution, the needs of the poor and the neglect of the widow, how would we act if we fixed our gaze on the holiness, love, goodness, truth, justice, authority, and mercy of God as revealed in the gospel? How would our approach to social issues change?

So my aim in this Bible study is to call us to a contrite, compassionate but courageous response on the battle lines in our culture with the gospel. This Bible study is aimed toward helping one another think through how to apply the gospel consistently in our culture in such a way that we're able to speak the gospel clearly to our culture.

HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THIS STUDY

ATTEND EACH GROUP EXPERIENCE.

WATCH the video teaching.

PARTICIPATE in the group discussions.

COMPLETE THE MATERIAL IN THIS BIBLE STUDY BOOK.

READ the daily lessons and **COMPLETE** the learning activities.

MEMORIZE each week's suggested memory verse.

BE HONEST with yourself and others about your thoughts, your questions, and your experiences as you study and apply the material.

ASK GOD to show you His truth about each topic so that you can boldly yet humbly counter culture with the gospel.

OBTAIN AND READ THE BOOK *COUNTER CULTURE* BY DAVID PLATT.

Tyndale, 2015, ISBN 978-1-4143-7329-4

TIPS FOR LEADING A SMALL GROUP

PRAYERFULLY PREPARE.

Prepare for each meeting by—

REVIEWING the weekly material and group questions ahead of time;

PRAYING for each person in the group.

Ask the Holy Spirit to work through you and the group discussion as you point to Jesus each week through God's Word.

MINIMIZE DISTRACTIONS.

Create a comfortable environment. If group members are uncomfortable, they'll be distracted and therefore not engaged in the group experience. Plan ahead by taking into consideration—

SEATING;

TEMPERATURE;

LIGHTING;

FOOD OR DRINK;

SURROUNDING NOISE;

GENERAL CLEANLINESS (put away pets if meeting in a home).

At best, thoughtfulness and hospitality show guests and group members they're welcome and valued in whatever environment you choose to gather. At worst, people may never notice your effort, but they're also not distracted. Do everything in your ability to help people focus on what's most important: connecting with God, with the Bible, and with others.

INCLUDE OTHERS.

Your goal is to foster a community in which people are welcome just as they are but encouraged to grow spiritually. Always be aware of opportunities to—

INVITE new people to join your group;

INCLUDE any people who visit the group.

An inexpensive way to make first-time guests feel welcome or to invite someone to get involved is to give them their own copies of this Bible study book.

ENCOURAGE DISCUSSION.

A good small group experience has the following characteristics.

EVERYONE PARTICIPATES. Encourage everyone to ask questions, share responses, or read aloud.

NO ONE DOMINATES—NOT EVEN THE LEADER. Be sure your time speaking as a leader takes up less than half of your time together as a group. Politely guide discussion if anyone dominates.

NOBODY IS RUSHED THROUGH QUESTIONS. Don't feel that a moment of silence is a bad thing. People often need time to think about their responses to questions they've just heard or to gain courage to share what God is stirring in their hearts.

INPUT IS AFFIRMED AND FOLLOWED UP. Make sure you point out something true or helpful in a response. Don't just move on. Build community with follow-up questions, asking how other people have experienced similar things or how a truth has shaped their understanding of God and the Scripture you're studying. People are less likely to speak up if they fear that you don't actually want to hear their answers or that you're looking for only a certain answer.

GOD AND HIS WORD ARE CENTRAL. Opinions and experiences can be helpful, but God has given us the truth. Trust Scripture to be the authority and God's Spirit to work in people's lives. You can't change anyone, but God can. Continually point people to the Word and to active steps of faith.

KEEP CONNECTING.

Think of ways to connect with group members during the week. Participation during the group session is always improved when members spend time connecting with one another outside the group sessions. The more people are comfortable with and involved in one another's lives, the more they'll look forward to being together. When people move beyond being friendly to truly being friends who form a community, they come to each session eager to engage instead of merely attending.

Encourage group members with thoughts, commitments, or questions from the session by connecting through—

EMAILS;

TEXTS;

SOCIAL MEDIA.

When possible, build deeper friendships by planning or spontaneously inviting group members to join you outside your regularly scheduled group time for—

MEALS;

FUN ACTIVITIES;

PROJECTS AROUND YOUR HOME, CHURCH, OR COMMUNITY.

WEEK 1
CULTURE

WELCOME EVERYONE TO YOUR FIRST GROUP DISCUSSION OF COUNTER CULTURE.

Culture is defined as the beliefs, customs, arts, etc., of a particular society, group, place, or time.¹

Where did you grow up? How would you describe the culture in which you grew up?

How would you describe the general culture of where we live today?

Describe a time when you felt that you clearly didn't fit in. (For example: You thought it was a costume party. You sat in the opposing team's section. You went to the wrong class. You couldn't speak the language. You didn't understand an international custom. You got lost.)

As followers of Christ, we won't always fit into the world in which we live. In fact, we'll find ourselves going against the flow of popular culture in certain areas of life. This Bible study will provide a solid biblical foundation to stand on in the midst of a rapidly shifting cultural landscape. The goal of this study is to understand how the eternal Word of God shapes our understanding of current issues and how we can share the gospel compassionately and courageously with the people around us.

To prepare to view the DVD segment, read aloud Romans 12:2.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:2

1. www.merriam-webster.com/culture

WATCH

COMPLETE THE VIEWER GUIDE BELOW AS YOU WATCH DVD SESSION 1.

These days in our culture require authentic _____, real passion for God.

TWO PRAYERS FROM ACTS 17

1. God, make us zealous for Your _____.

- _____ of the universe
- _____ of life
- _____ of the nations
- _____ of the needy
- _____ of each of us
- _____ over all of us
- _____ of the world

2. God, make us passionate for people's _____.

Let's _____ the gospel clearly.

FIVE TRUTHS OF THE GOSPEL

1. The _____ of God: God is the holy, just, and gracious Creator of all things.
2. The _____ of man: we're each created by God, but we're all corrupted by sin.
3. The _____ of Christ: Jesus alone is able to remove our sin and reconcile us to God.
4. The _____ of faith: the way to be reconciled to God is through faith in Jesus.
5. The _____ of eternity: our eternal destiny is dependent on our response to Jesus.

Let's _____ the gospel completely.

Video sessions available for purchase at www.lifeway.com/counterculture

DISCUSS THE DVD SEGMENT WITH YOUR GROUP, USING THE QUESTIONS BELOW.

What was most helpful, encouraging, or challenging in this session? Why?

On what social issues are you most likely to be courageous, outspoken, and active? Why?

On what social issues are you most likely to remain silent, uncertain, or inactive? Why?

Explain what David meant by “Our supposed social justice becomes a selective social injustice.”

What relationship exists between action on social issues and a desire for God’s glory? What do silence and inaction communicate?

In Acts 17:16-34 why is it significant to see Paul as a Christian explaining his beliefs rather than as a preacher?

When have you felt or been told that you were arrogant or had no right to tell other people what you believe to be true?

Explain what David shared about truth and love not being arrogant. How does this perspective give you courage and compassion?

Why are both courage and compassion important in addressing controversial social issues? Which comes easier to you—courage or compassion?

THIS WEEK

This week be prayerfully aware of points of commonality and points of conflict between the gospel and our culture. Memorize Romans 12:2 and practice summarizing the five truths of the gospel in a conversational presentation that could be shared in about one minute.

READ week 1 and complete the activities before the next group experience.

READ the introduction and chapter 1 in the book *Counter Culture* by David Platt (Tyndale, 2015).

CULTURE

THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:2

"If I profess, with the loudest voice and the clearest exposition, every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christianity. Where the battle rages the loyalty of the soldier is proved; and to be steady on all the battle-field besides is mere flight and disgrace to him if he flinches at that point."¹

Elizabeth Rundle Charles

"A zealous man in religion is pre-eminently a man of one thing. It is not enough to say that this person is earnest, hearty, uncompromising, thorough-going, whole-hearted, fervent in spirit. He only sees one thing, he cares for one thing, he lives for one thing, he is swallowed up in one thing; and that one thing is to please God. Whether he lives, or whether he dies—whether he has health, or whether he has sickness—whether he is rich, or whether he is poor—whether he pleases man, or whether he gives offence—whether he is thought wise, or whether he is thought foolish—whether he gets blame, or whether he gets praise—whether he gets honour, or whether he gets shame—for all this the zealous man cares nothing at all. He burns for one thing; and that one thing is to please God, and to advance God's glory. If he is consumed in the very burning, he cares not for it—he is content. He feels that, like a lamp, he is made to burn; and if consumed in burning, he has but done the work for which God appointed him."²

J. C. Ryle

This week we'll lay foundations of the gospel and culture. Ultimately, we'll find answers to this important question: Why must Christians engage culture and, specifically, controversial issues?

1. Elizabeth Rundle Charles, *Chronicles of the Schönberg-Cotta Family*, vol. 1 (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1864), 276.

2. John Charles Ryle, *Practical Religion* (Library of Alexandria, 2002), 130–31.

DAY 1

IN THE BEGINNING

The initial affront of the gospel is that there's a God by, through, and for whom all things begin. Because all things begin with God and ultimately exist for God, nothing in all creation or in our lives is irrelevant to Him. What we believe and what we do (or don't do) matter.

Read Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1-4.

What do the opening words of the Book of Genesis and the Gospel of John reveal about God?

In what ways is the existence of God increasingly controversial? In what ways is the reality of God as Creator even more controversial in today's culture?

How does rejecting the existence of God or simply rejecting Him as Creator radically alter a person's perspective on life, morality, and culture?

What other than God as Creator does your culture look to as a standard for authority, morality, and truth? At what point does that standard break down in its logic?

Keep reading the opening pages of human history, and you'll see the ultimate problem of the human heart. The story began with God in His goodness creating mankind and giving great freedom. But that freedom was quickly abused:

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Genesis 2:15-17

In these verses God's holiness, goodness, justice, and grace are on display. God had the authority to define what's right and wrong, good and evil, based on His pure and holy character. God made clear to man that he'd be judged based on his obedience (or disobedience) to the command God had given. God's grace is evident in the fact that He didn't hide His law from His creation. In love God told man the way to life and exhorted him to walk in it.

Read Genesis 2:25.

What does this simple description reveal about life according to God's design?

Read Genesis 3:1-7.

Describe what happened before the first man and woman disobeyed God.

How does this scene establish a pattern at the root of all brokenness in the world?

Describe the change between Genesis 2:25 and Genesis 3:7.

Write a definition of *sin* and an explanation of its consequences, based on this scene.

Do you see the role reversal here? It all began when a command from God was reduced to questions about God: Is God really holy? Does He really know what's right? Is God really good? Does He really want what's best for me? Amid such questions man and woman subtly asserted themselves not as the ones to be judged by God but as the ones who sat in judgment of God.

The serpent's question revolved around the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We may read the tree's name and think, *What's so wrong with knowing the difference between good and evil?* But the meaning of Scripture here goes beyond simple information about good and evil to the determination of good and evil. In other words, for man and woman to eat from this tree was to reject God as the One who determines good and evil and to assume this responsibility themselves. The temptation in the garden was to rebel against God's authority and in the process to make man the arbiter of morality.

When we understand the anatomy of this first sin, we realize that the moral relativism of the 21st century is nothing new. Once we take God out of the picture, we lose objectivity for determining what's good and evil, right and wrong, moral and immoral. Any argument for morality or goodness apart from our Creator eventually breaks down. *Who's to say what's good or evil, right or wrong, for another individual or culture without the standard of God's design?* So let's take a closer look at authority, an ongoing point of conflict in our culture.

SHARING WHAT WE (DON'T) BELIEVE

Our culture is increasingly secular and humanistic, denying the very existence of God. One way to counter culture, as surprising as it may seem at first, is to build on common ground and points of agreement. Paul did this in Acts 17:23 when he used the cultural belief in an unknown god to share what he knew about a relationship with the one true God.

People who don't believe in God generally have a distorted perspective or misunderstanding of who God is. For example, they might say they don't believe in an angry old man in the sky waiting to smite everyone who does something wrong. You can agree that this idea isn't true about God as revealed in the Bible. Allowing them to express what they don't believe will often reveal a point of agreement between you. After they've shared what they believe or don't believe about God, they're often more likely to return the favor, allowing you to share what you believe about Him.

You may be surprised to find that people are open to hear what you believe if you start by allowing them to share what they don't believe and by affirming the views you share in common. Many people expect Christians to be combative and defensive. To be fair, many of us have earned that reputation. My prayer is that this study will help you engage people in a way that creates openness to the truth of God.

Identify common objections to belief in God or Christianity.

Write a simple response to those objections, starting with ways you agree that something isn't true and moving to what you believe to be true about God.

DAY 2

IDOLATRY

"I could not endure existence if Jesus was not glorified; it would be hell to me, if he were to be always ... dishonored."¹ —Henry Martyn

As a missionary in India, Henry Martyn was literally surrounded by idolatry in a culture filled with thousands of gods. And while our culture may not be as blatant in its worship of man-made gods as the one Henry was immersed in to share the gospel, our culture is no less idolatrous. In some ways idolatry can be even more dangerous and deceptive in our culture because we often don't realize we're worshiping other things. We bow before them, so to speak, when we look to them for our hope, meaning, satisfaction, comfort, pleasure, or prosperity and when we think they'll make our lives better. This is nothing less than idolatry.

From the beginning of human history until now, our natural human tendency has been to glorify things other than God. This pattern of sin has been repeated throughout every generation and every day since the garden of Eden.

Just as Henry Martyn had an overwhelming desire to see Jesus honored, Paul wasn't content to believe in God while the culture around Him glorified other things. Let's look back at part of the story from our group session that describes Paul's visit to the city of Athens.

Read Acts 17:16-21.

Besides the blatant idolatry evident in this passage, we see a more subtle idolatry in the Athenians' mindset. In verse 21 below, circle the words *all, spend their time, nothing except, and something new.*

Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

Acts 17:21

What examples of this form of idolatry—obsessing over new things—do you see in our culture?

You are surrounded by a culture similar to the one of Athens. You also have a marketplace—places you go and people with whom you interact in your daily routines. This marketplace is your mission field. These are God-given opportunities to share your life and share the gospel.

What's your marketplace? Identify routines and people in your circles of influence.

Places I regularly go:

People with whom I regularly interact:

Paul was stirred to holy anger by the idolatry surrounding him (see v. 16). Identifying what makes you angry can help you pinpoint what you're truly passionate about. It can reveal to you a source of zeal—even an object of worship. The reason you get angry is that what matters most to you is being threatened or neglected in some way. If it's anything other than God, you're identifying a god or an idol in your heart.

The heart of every Christian should burn with desire for God's glory. We can't sit back and remain silent while God isn't glorified and people are on a path that ultimately leads to self-destruction. A life given over to misguided desires; selfish ambition; and a relentless pursuit of new experiences, ideas, or possessions is simply unacceptable. We want more. Because people need it. And because God deserves it. He alone is worthy of our worship.

That's what Jesus taught His followers to pray, right?

***Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.***

Matthew 6:9

We ask God to cause His name to be known as holy in my life, in my family, in the church, and in the culture around us. That desire should drive not only our personal prayers but also our public lives on a daily basis.

What makes you angry?

What does your answer reveal about your passion and your object of worship?

Biblically, putting anything other than God in a position of ultimate authority and highest affection is idolatry. Idols are more than physical objects of worship.

This is true not only of our culture or of people throughout the world but also of our individual lives. We worship all sorts of things, making them ultimate in authority and affection.

Read Romans 1:21-25.

Summarize the three great exchanges described in these verses. Then identify examples of the same exchanges that take place in our culture today.

	EXCHANGES	EXAMPLES TODAY
Thought:		
Worship:		
Desire:		

What's idolized in our culture? Make this list as extensive and specific as possible.

What are you tempted to idolize? Make this list as extensive and specific as possible.

How would you explain worship to someone who doesn't consider himself religious or spiritual? Provide examples of secular worship and ways it's misdirected.

Ironically, another subtle form of idolatry is to deny God's existence altogether. It happens when we worship ourselves, our own limited intellect, or an ideal and so-called greater good. We live in a culture that increasingly distances itself from religious labels and from religion in general. People are more and more likely to identify themselves as "other" or even as "none" when responding to questions about religious belief. Some wouldn't even bother to describe themselves as atheist or agnostic.

But to say there's no God is really an unsustainable negation. There's no way to prove God doesn't exist. Think about it. If you say something isn't there—for example, to say a certain object isn't in the room where you're reading this right now—then that means you've searched

everywhere in the entire room to find whether it's possible that the thing is there. If you search the whole room and learn that it's not there, you can definitively say, "OK, it's not here."

It's impossible to apply this same argument to the existence of God. To say there's no God, you'd have to search all existence to see whether He's there. To do this, you'd have to be omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient; in other words, you yourself would have to be God. There's no way to definitively conclude that something doesn't exist that's beyond our human limitations. Therefore, to deny a transcendent Creator just isn't possible. Any reasonable person would have to admit that it's at least possible God exists.

Read Romans 1:18-20.

What did Paul write about people's knowledge of and accountability to God?

What emotions do you experience when you read the sobering reality of Romans 1:18-25? Why?

All people must decide whether they'll acknowledge and believe in God. The Bible is clear about this. You probably have opportunities to share the good news of Jesus during your daily routine. Pray that God will give you passion for His glory as you go throughout your day.

1. Henry Martyn, as quoted in Constance E. Padwick, *Henry Martyn: Confessor of the Faith* (IVF, 1953), 146.

DAY 3

ENGAGING CULTURE

For the sake of simplicity, let's say we can have one of four possible responses in engaging our culture.

- 1. WE CONFORM.** We start compromising what we believe and the way we act in order to appeal to and appease the surrounding culture. We may even genuinely believe that doing so is both loving and strategic, hoping somehow people will be attracted to Jesus through a less offensive form of Christianity and will ultimately be saved. However, we have to realize that our goal isn't to make following Jesus easier. We'll look more closely tomorrow at the message of the gospel, but we've already seen that at its core, it's necessarily countercultural and offensive to the human heart.
- 2. WE CHECK OUT.** The opposite extreme is to secede from culture, distancing ourselves so completely that we never have any interaction with the world around us. Again, the intent may seem honorable and sincere because we want to remove even an appearance of evil and the temptation of sin. But Jesus specifically prayed that His Father wouldn't take His followers out of the world but protect them while they were sent into it (see John 17:15-16). The world around us desperately needs the life-changing power of the gospel. Forming an isolated, insulated subculture may feel countercultural, but it isn't an appropriate response. Countering culture doesn't mean withdrawing and isolating ourselves from culture.
- 3. WE COMBAT.** This approach is antagonistic and defensive. While the intent begins moving in the right direction, refusing to give in to or give up on the world around us, it misses the heart of Jesus. This response sees culture as an enemy to be defeated instead of people to be saved. Our desire mustn't be to prove ourselves right or to force our way on the world around us. Instead, our goal is to show Christ to be true and worthy. Just as wrong as running away from our culture is driving people away from the church. Countering culture doesn't mean attacking it.
- 4. WE COUNTER.** Countering culture means engaging culture with conviction and compassion. We stand firmly on the truth of God, empowered by the Spirit, to extend the love of Christ to a lost and dying world. Our desire isn't to conquer but to redeem. It matters what we do, how we do it, and why we do it.

A wrong response to culture is more than unhealthy or unhelpful. It's potentially damning. Engaging our culture is literally a matter of life or death—eternal life or death.

This dynamic is precisely what we see in Paul's interaction with the people of Athens in the synagogue, the marketplace, and the Areopagus. Yesterday we focused on what exactly provoked a response from Paul. Tomorrow we'll focus on the content of his response. Today let's look at the spirit of his response—how he engaged culture.

Read Acts 17:22-34.

What were the various responses to what Paul shared?

As noted in the video, we can hardly consider the response to be a great revival. However, Paul was effective in engaging people, and consequently, at least some believed—both men and women.

What's your greatest fear about engaging people with the countercultural message of Jesus?

What would you consider success in sharing your beliefs?

Notice that Paul showed respect and identified points of agreement but also spoke clearly about points of disagreement and wasn't shy to call out error. His speech is an invaluable example of how to counter culture with conviction and compassion.

What specific examples do you see of Paul's showing respect and building agreement?

What specific examples do you see of Paul's challenging people's beliefs?

Paul was familiar enough with the culture in Athens to quote a pagan poet. He identified points of common interest and shared values or ideals as ways to introduce the truth of the gospel.

How can you use popular expressions of art, such as music, movies, books, and shows, to understand culture and to share the gospel?

Try it now. Identify a popular song, show, or movie.

Based on what you identified, what desires, needs, questions, or values do you see or hear expressed in popular culture?

How can those desires, needs, questions, or values be fulfilled or answered in Jesus?

Also note what Paul didn't do. He didn't boycott idol makers or petition for legislation to be passed against them. He didn't scold or shame them.

Identify examples of Christians combating culture in ways that sought to force a position without heart change.

What was the result of the combative activity?

What could have been done differently?

To be clear, we should absolutely utilize the freedoms we have in social and political systems. However, believers don't rely on a political party, a government program, or another form of activism to change our world. We put our hope entirely in our Savior and Redeemer. Jesus' kingdom isn't of this world (see John 18:36). The rights we exercise and the actions we take should be done in a spirit of conviction and compassion. We act in humility and love. Not judgment. Not with a mean spirit. Not to force anyone to conform to our values or beliefs. In love.

IT IS GOOD

You have a choice to make. Will you go with the flow of popular opinion and cultural trends? Or will you cling to the holy standard of God's Word? Will you seek what's most comfortable and take the path of least resistance? Or will you trust the loving authority of your Creator and His good design for all creation?

If you're truly going to be passionate about the glory of God, you have to believe in the depths of your heart that God's design is good. It's not enough to begrudgingly forfeit what you truly want from a sense of duty to submit to God's will. That's just a step away from where Adam and Eve were back in the garden. They listened to the lie of our Enemy, the whisper that caused them to question God's goodness. Do you believe God is holding back something good from you? Do you believe a sinful desire is truly good and satisfying in a way God isn't? Until you trust that God is good and His design is good, you'll be on the brink of giving in to outside pressure or inner desire, exchanging the truth for a lie, the Creator for creation. Don't settle for less than the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

Record the following verses.

John 10:10

Romans 12:2

James 1:16-17

How will these verses encourage and equip you to counter culture?

DAY 4

THE GOSPEL

The gospel doesn't simply compel us to confront culture; it causes conflict with culture. It stands in direct opposition to culture.

Consider the message of the gospel: the good news that the God of the universe has looked on relentlessly rebellious and hopelessly sinful men and women and has sent Jesus, God in the flesh, to bear His wrath against sin on the cross and to show His power over sin in the resurrection so that all who turn from themselves and trust in Him can be reconciled to God for all eternity. When you truly grasp the gravity of this message, you begin to realize that the gospel doesn't just compel Christians to confront social issues in the culture around us. The gospel itself creates confrontation with the culture around and within us.

Now we see the offense of the gospel coming to the forefront. Tell any modern person that there's a God who sustains, owns, defines, rules, and will one day judge him or her, and that person will balk in offense. Any man or woman would—and every man and woman has. This is our natural reaction to God.

The past couple of days you've read about Paul's response to idolatry and the way he engaged culture. Today let's back up a couple of verses to see exactly what he said about the gospel in the context of a culture filled with idolatry and sensuality.

Read Romans 1:16-17.

In what ways are you ashamed of the gospel?

Summarize Paul's rationale for not being ashamed of the gospel.

The very fact that Paul felt it necessary to write about not being ashamed of the gospel suggests either that he faced pressure to feel ashamed and keep quiet or that the gospel was considered shameful by some. Paul had been a Pharisee, so his former peers and other Jewish adherents would have considered his radical change in life and message shameful.

What encouragement does Paul's statement provide for you today?

It's vital to understand what the gospel is—both for your sake and for the sake of others around you. Unfortunately, the word *gospel* has become a religious buzzword lately, meaning it tends to get thrown around a lot or added to all kinds of concepts and phrases. To be clear, our lives and churches should absolutely be centered on the gospel. We should preach, teach, and live out the gospel in our homes, in our communities, in our workplaces, and around the world. But adding the word *gospel* to something, doesn't mean what we're actually doing has anything to do with the message of Jesus, nor does it mean people understand what the gospel is or how something relates to the gospel. So for the rest of our study today, let's walk through the five truths we saw in Acts 17 that make up the whole gospel message. The goal is not only to reiterate them biblically but also to grow comfortable explaining each truth in your own words so that you'll be ready when opportunities arise to share the gospel naturally with family members, friends, coworkers, neighbors, and other acquaintances.

FIVE GOSPEL TRUTHS

1. *The character of God.* God is the holy, just, and gracious Creator of all things.

Read Acts 17:24-31.

What attributes did Paul mention to describe God's character?

What other attributes would you use to describe God's character? Include Scripture references.

2. *The sinfulness of man.* We're each created by God, but we're all corrupted by sin.

Read Romans 1:18-25; 3:23.

How would you explain man's sinfulness?

What examples would you provide of your own sinfulness?

3. *The sufficiency of Christ.* Jesus alone is able to remove our sin and reconcile us to God.

Read Romans 3:24-25; 5:19-21; 6:23.

How would you explain the sufficiency of Christ?

Before you knew Christ, how did you try to improve your life or make yourself good enough for the approval of God or others? Where did you put your hope?

4. *The necessity of faith.* We're reconciled to God only through faith in Jesus.

Read Romans 5:1-2; Ephesians 2:1-10; and Hebrews 11:6.

How would you explain the necessity of faith?

Describe the moment when you realized your need to trust Jesus for salvation.

5. *The urgency of eternity.* Our eternal destiny depends on our response to Jesus.

Read Matthew 7:21-23; 25:46; and John 3:16.

How would you explain the relationship between the urgency of eternity and the need to respond to the gospel?

How does a view of eternity shape your daily priorities?

How does it provide courage to share the gospel?

THE GOSPEL ISN'T A RELIGIOUS SALES PITCH.

IT'S A DEEPLY PERSONAL STORY OF LOVE AND SALVATION.

DAY 5

SPEAKING UP

If you really believe the gospel, you'll share the gospel. You have to speak up.

We can't sit idly by while literally billions of people in the world are heading toward eternal judgment. Like Paul (see Acts 17:16), we should be provoked. We should be stirred to action, knowing that people all around us aren't giving God the glory He deserves and aren't receiving the grace He offers. These aren't faceless numbers—impersonal statistics. Right now, as you read this, people you know, human beings created in the image of God, are headed for an eternal crisis. Considering that people you know and love need to be saved, can you afford to remain silent?

Read Romans 10:9-13.

Who can be saved?

What's required for salvation?

Is there anyone in your life about whom you've honestly felt, "They'll never believe. They're too far gone to be saved"? Record the names of people in your life who don't currently believe in Jesus as their Savior and Lord. Pause now to pray for God to work miraculously in their lives and to use you to share the good news of salvation.

Read Romans 10:14-15.

What emotions do you experience as you read Paul's series of rhetorical questions?

What's your role in salvation?

Read Romans 10:16-17.

Notice that *obey* and *believe* are used interchangeably in these verses. Explain the relationship between action and belief in being saved by faith.

Using the logic presented in these verses, what responsibility do you have to speak the gospel? Why isn't it enough to merely be nice, moral citizens and neighbors in hopes that people will be attracted to Jesus without your having to speak the gospel?

ONE WAY

Paul was clear that salvation comes only through faith in Christ as presented in the gospel. This means that Christians believe in absolute truth and that all religions and philosophies aren't equally good and acceptable. I probably don't have to tell you that talking about Jesus as the only way to be saved is considered narrow-minded and even hateful in our culture.

Jesus spoke one of the most radical statements in all human history on the night before His crucifixion. The words He lovingly shared with His disciples are just as true and as countercultural today as they were two thousand years ago:

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

John 14:6

Why does our culture find it hateful and narrow-minded to believe that Jesus is the only true God and the one way to experience eternal life? What idol does this reveal?

When have you felt or been told that you were arrogant or self-righteous for sharing your faith in Jesus as the only way to a right relationship with God?

Why would the epitome of hate be refusing to share the gospel?

To believe we're somehow superior to someone else or more deserving of God's love than another culture or people group would be arrogant. But that's not what we believe. To believe billions of people need to believe what we believe or they'll spend eternity in hell would be hateful—unless it's true. If the gospel is true—and it is—then we must share it with everyone. It isn't hateful or narrow-minded to warn someone of impending danger or death. It's hateful and selfish *not* to warn and plead with others, seeking to convince them of the only way to have life.

If a building caught on fire and you knew the only way out, the most loving and selfless thing you could do would be to tell others how they can be saved. On an eternal scale this is exactly what's happening. No matter how hard they work, how noble their efforts, or how far they actually get through that burning building, if only one way to salvation exists, everything they've done and everyone who's followed them will perish. You can't simply be nice and hope people ask whether you know the way out. You have to tell people there's only one way, one truth, and one life. Otherwise, nobody will be saved. In this scenario it's easy to see that worrying about whether the message will be appreciated or socially acceptable is crazy.

It's a lie from the Enemy to believe you should be quiet and let other people believe whatever works for them. Ultimately, anything other than faith in the gospel won't work for anyone.

APPLYING THE GOSPEL

The hope and prayer is that this study will equip you to tie pressing social issues to the gospel and will empower you to use these issues to speak about the gospel to those who need to hear it. As a result, you won't sit back in paralyzed silence the next time someone in your workplace brings up a controversial issue, but instead, you'll seize this opportunity to bring the gospel to bear on that issue and address the most significant need in every person's heart.

Helping the poor gives us an opportunity to communicate how Christ, though He was rich, became poor so that others could become rich (see 2 Cor. 8:9). Caring for orphans provides us an opportunity to tell people that God pursues us as His children and adopts us into His family through Christ (see Rom. 8:15-17; Gal. 4:1-7). Defending marriage in our culture provides us an opportunity to show that God designed the relationship of a husband and a wife to illustrate Christ's love for His people on the cross (see Eph. 5:22-33). Working against racism in our culture provides us an opportunity to share how Christ came to redeem people from every tribe, tongue, and nation to belong to Him (see Rev. 5:9-10; 7:9-10). All these issues open the door for the gospel to come in and change lives forever.

As we begin to look at specific social issues, it's vital that you get ready to clearly articulate the gospel. Before you can apply the gospel in life and conversation, make sure you know what it is.

Record a simple presentation of the gospel that includes the five gospel truths you studied yesterday: the character of God, the sinfulness of man, the sufficiency of Christ, the necessity of faith, and the urgency of eternity.

**IF YOU REALLY BELIEVE THE GOSPEL,
YOU'LL SPEAK UP AND SHARE IT.**

WEEK 2

WEALTH

WELCOME EVERYONE TO THIS SECOND GROUP DISCUSSION OF COUNTER CULTURE.

What was most helpful, encouraging, or challenging in your study of week 1?

What issues of wealth or poverty have you seen in the news or on social media lately?
Share a recent news story related to wealth, poverty, orphans, or widows.

To prepare to view the DVD segment, read aloud Mark 12:28-31.

One of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

Mark 12:28-31

WATCH

COMPLETE THE VIEWER GUIDE BELOW AS YOU WATCH DVD SESSION 2.

Over _____ people live and die in desperate poverty in the world, living on less than one dollar a day.

MATERIAL RICHES IN THE CHURCH

1. The path to great _____

- Be content with having _____.
- Be cautious with acquiring _____.

You will take _____ of it with you.

Excess will take _____ from you.

You will miss God's _____ for you.

2. The path to total _____

- Love of _____
- Desire for _____

The love of money and the desire for riches lead to a life of self-_____ and self-_____.

3. The plan for _____ people

- Flee self-_____.
- Flee self-_____.
- Focus on _____.

God gives good things for _____ enjoyment.

We give good things for _____ enjoyment.

We invest good things in our and others' _____.

WHAT THE GOSPEL COMPELS

1. Simplify your _____.

2. Increase your _____.

- What is God leading you to _____?
- What is God leading you to _____?
- What is God leading you to _____?

3. Consider your _____.

Video sessions available for purchase at www.lifeway.com/counterculture

DISCUSS THE DVD SEGMENT WITH YOUR GROUP, USING THE QUESTIONS BELOW.

What was most helpful, encouraging, or challenging in this session? Why?

What emotions did you feel when hearing statistics and quotations related to poverty?

How does our culture view gain?

What countercultural perspective on wealth is presented in 1 Timothy 6?

How have you experienced the unquenchable thirst for more—comparable to drinking seawater? When did you get what you wanted, only to discover it didn't satisfy you or even made you worse off than before you got it?

Explain what David meant when he said that how we handle money can literally make or break us forever.

What insecurities arise when you consider not having your things? What does this reaction reveal?

Give examples of how godly contentment is great gain.

How does the gospel compel action related to wealth and poverty?

How do issues of poverty open a door to conversations about the gospel? Give examples of statements that relate the gospel to poverty, wealth, orphans, or widows.

THIS WEEK

Identify something you can share, sell, and sacrifice in order to love your neighbor as yourself. Memorize Luke 10:27 and continue praying for an awareness of the needs around you and discernment on how to respond.

READ week 2 and complete the activities before the next group experience.

READ chapters 2 and 4 in the book *Counter Culture* by David Platt (Tyndale, 2015).