

8-SESSION BIBLE STUDY FOR TEENS

BRENT CROWE



Moments 'til
MIDNIGHT

Lessons From Paul's Final Hours

LifeWay | Students

The background of the entire cover is a dark, textured, and somewhat abstract image. In the center, there is a circular clock face with Roman numerals for the hours. The clock hands are dark and simple. Below the main clock face, there is a smaller, semi-circular temperature gauge with markings from 0 to 100. The overall aesthetic is gritty and artistic.

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Table of Contents

ABOUT THE AUTHOR	4
HOW TO USE	5
SESSION 1 // NOON: COME, LET US WANDER TOGETHER	6
SESSION 2 // 3PM: LUKE ALONE IS WITH ME	16
SESSION 3 // 4PM: HEAD IN THE CLOUDS	26
SESSION 4 // 6PM: FROM TOLERANCE TO TOGETHERNESS	36
SESSION 5 // 7PM: THE SPIRIT OF ALICE ... AND PAUL	46
SESSION 6 // 9PM: GRACE DEMANDS MORE	56
SESSION 7 // 10PM: SANCTIFYING FAILURE AND HOLY REGRET	66
SESSION 8 // 11PM: LIFE IMITATES STORY	76
LEADER GUIDE	82



BRENT CROWE is a thought-provoking visionary and communicator who has a passion to present the life-changing message of the gospel. Brent uses humor and real-life situations to relate to people at the heart of their struggles. The roles of husband, father, minister, evangelist, author, and leader have allowed Brent to influence people from all walks of life throughout his twenty years in ministry.

Engaging issues such as leadership, culture, and change, Brent speaks to hundreds of thousands across the nation and abroad each year and is currently serving as Vice President for Student Leadership University, a program that has trained over one hundred fifty thousand students to commit themselves to excellence.

He is also the author of *Sacred Intent: Maximize the Moments of Your Life*, *Reimagine: What the World Would Look Like If God Got His Way*, and *Chasing Elephants: Wrestling with the Gray Areas of Life*, and is the Associate Editor of IMPACT, The Student Leadership Bible.

The desire of Brent's heart is to see people realize that they have been set apart to the gospel of God and thus, in turn, they must set their lives apart in an effort to capture every moment in worshipful service to Him.

Brent and his wife, Christina, live in Orlando, Florida, with their three children, Gabe, Charis and Mercy. He holds a Doctorate in Philosophy and two masters degrees, a Masters of Divinity in Evangelism and a Masters of Arts in Ethics, from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

HOW *to* USE

Thank you for allowing this study to serve your group. My hope is you and your students will discover, or rediscover, the glorious journey that makes up this life of following Jesus. To accomplish such an enormous and edifying task we are going to allow one of the greatest lives ever lived to echo down through the ages and speak into our own.

I have been fascinated with the apostle Paul for as long as I can remember. No single person, other than our Savior, has been used to accomplish more of God's purposes. Paul's pilgrimage was filled with every dramatic element necessary for a compelling story: heroic sacrifice, evil villains, uncompromising courage, human violence, battles with nature, friendship and comradeship, and finally a martyr's death.

So how can this epic life consumed with cause, purpose, and passion, help us go on a sacred pilgrimage of our own? I hope as you watch, listen, read, study, and converse over the following weeks, something will begin to stir within your heart. I am confident as you progress, you will become convinced to wander well through this broken world—to put one foot in front of the other day after day, until at last we cross over and step into the heaven country. The place where all pilgrims arrive after a lifetime of wandering.

HOW *it* WORKS

VIDEO GUIDE: Begin each session by watching the video of Brent's teaching. There is a Video Guide included for students to follow along while watching.

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE: Every session includes a Group Discussion Guide. Allow students time to work through this material and answer the discussion questions.

DAILY DEVOTIONS: Each session, except for Session 8, ends with 4 Daily Devotions. Encourage your group members to set aside time throughout the week leading up to your next group meeting to complete these devotions.

LEADER GUIDE: In the back of this study, there is a Leader Guide to help leaders prepare for each session with Scripture references, optional ice-breakers, key points, and prayer prompts.



Session 1

**NOON: COME, LET US
WANDER TOGETHER**

Start by watching the video for Session 1. As you watch the videos, fill in the following blanks and answer the questions.

- The more we interact with Paul, the clearer the picture becomes of a _____ consumed with his _____.
- We are part of the greatest _____ of all time—we follow _____.
- Paul's was a story that had _____ as its theme and the _____ as the central character.

When grace motivates the pilgrim's journey, four things happen:

1. Grace gives us peace and makes us _____.
2. Grace makes us quick to _____.
3. Grace teaches us how to _____ well.
4. Grace teaches us to _____ completely.

Do you tend to think of yourself as a pilgrim wandering your way home to the heaven country? Why or why not?

Brent said if we deprive ourselves of any sense of pilgrimage, we will miss out on so much of life's purpose. What did he mean by that? What might we miss out on if we fail to see ourselves as pilgrims?

What would you do if you knew you only had 12 hours left to live? Are you satisfied with how you have used the time you have been given so far? Explain.

To journey well, we must embrace the grace of Jesus and let that grace give flavor and direction to every area of our lives. In our first Session we will discover how grace is the foundation of every true pilgrim's journey toward the heaven country.

The Hero's Journey is one of the oldest storytelling devices. The structure of the Hero's Journey has been used for thousands of years to tell all kinds of stories: from Odysseus battling two-headed birds to Luke Skywalker bringing balance to The Force. Something about it resonates within us, because we use story to express things that are built into us by our Creator.

The Hero's journey has three basic stages: The Call to Adventure, the Trials, and the Return.

Think about Frodo's adventure in *The Lord of the Rings*. It begins with Frodo hearing that an overwhelming task has been given to him: to return a dangerous and powerful ring to the fires of Mt. Doom. After his adventure begins, he makes friends who help him overcome the trials set before him by the enemies he discovers along the way. When he finally accomplishes his task, he returns home to the Shire to live happily ever after.

What are your favorite adventure movies?

How do they use the Hero's Journey as the backbone to the story?

Paul was no stranger to the Hero's Journey, because he lived his own. He received a call to adventure on the Road to Damascus in Acts 9. In 2 Corinthians 11:24-27, he outlines a few of the trials he endured on his journey to make the gospel known to the world. And in 2 Timothy, the last letter we have from him, Paul explains that his race has been run, and he is finally headed home.

There is a word used for someone on a journey—a Pilgrim. When a pilgrim is traveling, the land he is traveling through is not his home, but everything he does is for the sake of home. In Paul's case, he was a pilgrim in a foreign land on a mission to take the good news of Jesus to whoever would listen. When his journey ended, he got to go back home.

What's the longest trip you've ever been on?

How did it feel when you got to go back home?

In what ways is the Christian journey like a voyage?

One of the most famous passages in the Bible about faithful pilgrims is Hebrews 11, sometimes called the Hall of Faith. The author of Hebrews listed several faithful pilgrims and then wrote, “These all died in faith, although they had not received the things that were promised. But they saw them from a distance, greeted them, and confessed that they were foreigners and temporary residents on the earth” (Heb. 11:13). In another translation, these people were called “strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Heb. 11:13, KJV). Consider these four statements about pilgrims:

1. A PILGRIM IS CONSUMED WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT HIS/HER LIFE IS ALL ABOUT A JOURNEY OR A PILGRIMAGE.

We are simply temporary residents on earth. Nothing in our lives can or should be separated from our view of Jesus, who has given us this identity.

How does knowing Jesus mean that we are citizens of heaven rather than just citizens of Earth? What’s the difference?

What do you think it would look like to live as a citizen of heaven?

2. A PILGRIM IS WILLING TO EXHAUST HIS/HER RESOURCES TO JOURNEY WELL.

If we have established that our identity is that of a pilgrim and all of life happens within the context of a pilgrimage, then it makes sense to use our resources with the journey and the destination in mind. Jesus told us to “store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don’t break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:20-21).

What sorts of things does the world tell us we should treasure?

What things should a citizen of heaven treasure?

How can you treasure those things in your daily life?

3. A PILGRIM BELIEVES ONE JOURNEY CAN CHANGE THE WORLD.

Take a moment to read Hebrews 11:1-12 out loud.

Each of these people was identified as a pilgrim and each of them changed the world. It's not because they were giants or spiritual superheroes, but because they recognized their journey was not about them; it was about filling their role in the story God was crafting to bring the nations back to Him.

List a few things you are involved with on an ongoing basis—sports teams, clubs, friend groups, etc.

How would seeing yourself as a pilgrim on a journey affect the way you interact with each group of people? How would it affect the way you live your everyday life?

4. A PILGRIM LIVES WITH THE TENSION BETWEEN THE PRESENT JOURNEY AND THE DESTINATION.

It's no secret that life is sometimes difficult. Pilgrims live on the rugged road of the redeemed with the knowledge and anticipation of the glorified state that is restoration. In other words, we know there is a real day on God's calendar in which He will make all things new again. And in the meantime, we live and journey through a world where pain, tears, and death are a reality.

How does it change the way you view difficult times to know you are merely a pilgrim passing through?

Living as a pilgrim means seeing yourself humbly. Recognizing that the story is not about you, it's about the journey you are taking at Jesus' request. As we take this eight-week journey together, let's try to do it as pilgrims passing through, learning about the greatest gift that has ever been given to us, and learning how to live the kind of life Jesus envisioned for us when He said, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19).

As we close this session, take some time to reflect on who you are and what you've been called to do.

What story is your life telling right now?

What story would you like your life to tell?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE A HEAVENLY PERSPECTIVE?

The perspective a story is told from tells you a lot about the story itself. Consider the opening line to the famous book *The Great Gatsby*:

In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since.¹

We know a few things just by reading this sentence. We know the narrator is someone we can relate to, and we know he's about to give us a piece of advice. We can reasonably guess he is going to play a part in the story being told: he's using words like "me" and "I," which will continue throughout the story. And since he's a relatable person that is going to play a part in the story, we can assume he is telling us the story after it has already happened.

No matter what comes next, whenever the narrator seems like he is in a tough situation, we know that he makes it through. He lives to tell about it. He already knows the ending, even if we don't. But we do not have his perspective. We have to discover the events of the story one sentence, one paragraph, one page at a time.

You are kind of like the reader of *The Great Gatsby*. You are in the middle of a story you don't know the ending to. But God does. That means no matter what turns your pilgrim's journey takes, you can rest in the understanding that God already knows the ending.

Hebrews 12:2 calls Jesus the "author and finisher of our faith." That means he is like the author of any book you've read—He's in total control of the situation, even when it doesn't look promising for the characters involved. He will always make things work according to His plan.

Living as pilgrims with a heavenly perspective means understanding you are a vessel for God's unfolding story. It is not about you, but you've been given the chance to play a part in getting His story out there for the world to see.

- **When have you faced uncertainty? What was going on, and how did you handle it?**
- **How does it change the way you see uncertain times to know that God is in control?**
- **What role do you play in taking God's story to the world?**

WHAT IS FORGIVENESS? (DON'T BE HELD HOSTAGE BY YOUR PAST)

Forgiveness is a word we hear a lot in church, but it can be a little bit tricky to define. Sometimes it's easiest to understand a word when we put it in a story. As it turns out, Jesus told an excellent story that perfectly illustrates forgiveness for us.

"A creditor had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Since they could not pay it back, he graciously forgave them both. So, which of them will love him more?" (Luke 7:41-42)

Try to put yourself in the shoes of these people (especially the first person). In those days, the average worker probably made about 300 denarii a year to provide for everything he needed—and this first man owed *five hundred*. He would be in debt for years!

But look what the moneylender did. He forgave the debt. These two people were no longer responsible for paying it back. They wouldn't have to scrounge and save; the debt didn't apply to them anymore.

This is what forgiveness is. If somebody forgives you, it doesn't mean your wrongs are forgotten, it simply means they're not counted against you anymore.

Some of us live with incredible guilt about things we've done. People we've hurt. Mistakes we've made. Sins we've committed.

But as pilgrims on a Christian journey, something amazing has happened to us: Jesus paid the debt we owed because of our sin, and all we have to do is ask for forgiveness. John wrote in 1 John 1:9 that "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive." Does that mean you forget where you've come from? Absolutely not. What it does mean is that you are walking with fresh legs. You don't have to keep going back to those past sins that have held you hostage for so long because, through the blood of Jesus, God does not count it against you.

- **What is something you need to ask forgiveness from God for?**
- **What has been done to you that you need to forgive someone else for?**
- **How does it affect you knowing that you are forgiven?**

WHAT IS GRACE?

Let's use our imaginations for a second. Pretend that last night you were up all night binge-watching the newest season of your favorite TV show. Because of how excited you were that the new episodes were finally available, you lost track of two things: time (you went to bed way too late) and the fact that you had an important test the next day. So you drag yourself to class and sit with fear and maybe a tinge of regret for staying up so late and completely forgetting to study. You know for a fact you are not prepared, and your grade on this test is going to bring your average too far down to be able to recover easily.

As your teacher is passing out the tests, he stops at your desk and notices your sunken eyes, your exhausted expression, and the worry stretched across your face. "What happened?" he asks.

"I stayed up too late, and I am completely unprepared for this test," you reply with a little bit of shame.

Then your teacher does something incredible. He tells you to come up to his desk after all of the class has their tests and begins taking it. He tells you he's giving you an extension. You can leave early to study, get some sleep, and come back to his office the next day to take the test you should have taken today.

He's just given you grace: a free gift you do not deserve.

God is the master of giving grace, and the finest example is when He gave us Jesus to pay for our sins on our behalf. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift—not from works, so that no one can boast."

There is nothing you can do to earn grace, and nothing you can do to pay it back. But God's grace is something that should permeate the life of every pilgrim walking their journey back to the heaven country. We have experienced the miraculous grace shown by God, and it is our job to model that for those around us. So they can see a piece of it, too.

- **How has God shown you grace?**
- **How does God's grace motivate you to behave toward others?**
- **How can you best model grace for others this week?**

WHAT DO WE DO WHEN WE DON'T GET WHAT WE ASK FOR?

Try to think of someone in Scripture more sold-out for the cause of Christ than Paul. Go ahead. Try.

Paul met his fair share of difficulties, but his faith persisted throughout all of them. Still, he wrote something interesting in 2 Corinthians 12:7-9:

Therefore, so that I would not exalt myself, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to torment me so I would not exalt myself. Concerning this, I pleaded with the Lord three times that it would leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness."

To be honest, nobody knows exactly what Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' was. Some think it might have been his eyesight, epilepsy, or some other physical condition. Some believe the thorn was a person who was causing chaos and conflict in the church or being especially bothersome to Paul personally.

Whatever the case, we see Paul asking specifically for this thorn to be taken away, and God definitively telling him, "no." Surely if anyone was going to get a free request of God, it would be Paul, right?

Wrong. And Paul knew it—God told him. He said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." If Paul had it his way, one of those three times he asked God for relief, God would have given it to him. But there was something bigger at work.

As a pilgrim like Paul, you are going to encounter all kinds of things—things you need, things you want removed, things you just plain want. But remember, our journey requires a heavenly perspective. Sometimes, the things we want are not the things God has in store for us. And for a pilgrim, what God wants comes first.

Read Matthew 26:39.

- What request did Jesus make? Did He get His request?
- Why is it a good thing God didn't "let this cup" pass from Jesus?
- What is something you've asked for, but not gotten?
- Are you more concerned with getting what you want or aligning with God's will?
- How do your actions reflect your answer to the previous question?