

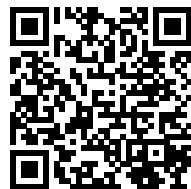
# When the Church Was Young

STUDY GUIDE

**TRUTH  
FORLIFE**

# THIS STUDY GUIDE

contains ten sessions intended to deepen your understanding of the early church. You will get the most out of this study by intently reading or listening to the sermons from Alistair Begg's series *When the Church Was Young* as you progress. By surveying key events in the life of the early church, you will see the striking similarities between its time and ours. The content for each session accompanies a particular sermon Alistair preached on either Luke's Gospel or the Acts of the Apostles.



FIND ALL 10 MESSAGES AT  
[TFL.ORG/SG-YOUNG.](https://www.truthforlife.org/sg-young)

*When the Church Was Young: Study Guide*  
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The following description of the *When the Church Was Young* sermon series provides a good summary of this study's purpose:

*Contemporary churchgoers may find themselves considering the early days of the Christian church with fond nostalgia. However, in reading through Luke's account in Acts, we find that the early church was not a group of elite Christians. Instead, they wrestled with the very same challenges that face the twenty-first-century church today.*

*In this series, Alistair Begg traces a line from the first-century church to the twenty-first-century church by examining issues such as our alienation from God, our tendency to present a cheapened Gospel, the juxtaposition of divine predestination and human free will, our culture's obsession with idolatry, and God's ultimate power to save. We learn that the early Christians devoted themselves to the teaching of God's Word and the spreading of the Gospel by depending on the Holy Spirit, and we are encouraged to hold firmly to the truth of Christ's saving work as we engage our communities.*

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## Each session includes four parts:

- 1) Getting Started:** a brief summary statement or commentary on the sermon, followed by an introductory question
- 2) Key Scriptures:** important Bible verses that were referenced in the sermon and are flagged for further meditation and memorization
- 3) Going Deeper:** questions to help you process the main ideas of the sermon
- 4) Giving Praise:** a hymn that can be committed to memory, incorporated in worship, and used as the basis for prayer about what you have learned and considered



# SESSION ONE

“Two Sad Faces” | Luke 24:1–53

## Getting Started

Easter is an occasion for great rejoicing. But on the first Sunday after Christ’s crucifixion, the women who journeyed to Jesus’ tomb were sorrowful—until, to their disbelief, they discovered an empty tomb and a living Christ. The fact of Jesus’ death and the discovery of His resurrection formed the basis of the early church’s message and mission.

How has the news of Jesus’ death and resurrection shaped the course of your life?

### KEY SCRIPTURES

“As they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, ‘Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.’”

LUKE 24:5–7

“In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.”

2 CORINTHIANS 5:19

## Going Deeper

1. What details in Luke 24:1-12 reveal how the disciples responded to Jesus' death and then reacted to His resurrection?

2. Why is it significant that Jesus predicted His own death and resurrection (Luke 24:6-7, 25-26)? What does this reveal about Him?

3. In what sense are people today like the two sad men on the road to Emmaus? How does Christ offer hope, both then and now?

4. On the cross, Jesus dealt with our alienation from God because of sin (Isa. 53:6; 2 Cor. 5:17-19). How does His resurrection provide life, hope, and peace?

5. The testimony of the early church was straightforward: Jesus of Nazareth was raised bodily to a new life three days after His crucifixion (Acts 2:22, 34; 1 Cor. 15:3-5). How does the historicity of the resurrection lend credibility to Christianity?

6. Imagine being in the early disciples' position after Jesus' death and before His resurrection. What might they have felt and experienced, and why?

### **GIVING PRAISE**

There was no other good enough  
To pay the price of sin;  
He only could unlock the gate  
Of heav'n and let us in.

**"THERE IS A GREEN HILL FAR AWAY"**

**BY CECIL FRANCES ALEXANDER**

# SESSION TWO

“Kingdom Thinking” | Acts 2:1–21

## Getting Started

Even after encountering the risen Christ, the disciples lacked understanding of what He came to do. Jesus’ mission was centered neither on politics nor on pietism but on the gradual expansion of God’s kingdom through the church.

What comes to mind when you hear the phrase *the kingdom of God*?

### KEY SCRIPTURES

“This is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.’”

ACTS 2:16–17

“This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

MATTHEW 24:14

## Going Deeper

1. Using Acts 1:6 and 1:10-11 for reference, answer the following questions: What two faulty views of the kingdom did the apostles have? How do these two ideologies still surface in the church today?

2. The kingdom of God is gradual in its expansion. Why do you suppose God chooses to expand His kingdom gradually in the course of history rather than rapidly or instantaneously?

3. What role did the Holy Spirit play in the events recorded in Acts 2:1-21?

4. Peter responded to the crowd's amazement and scoffing by preaching a sermon (Acts 2:14-21), trusting God's Word to do its work. What does Peter's response imply about the Bible's power?



5. Commenting on the power of the Bible, Alistair states, “The fact that our friends don’t believe in the Bible doesn’t blunt our sword. It doesn’t prevent its ability to cut.” How does this truth strengthen your trust in God’s Word?

6. Two events dealing with languages in the Bible are found in Genesis 11 and Revelation 7. The former records God’s confusing of the languages of man; the latter envisions the future, diverse community of worshipping believers. How do the events of Acts 2:1-13 fit within this framework?

### **GIVING PRAISE**

Teach me to love Thee as Thine angels love,  
One holy passion filling all my frame,  
The baptism of the heav’ n-descended Dove,  
My heart an altar, and Thy love the flame.

“SPIRIT OF GOD, DESCEND UPON MY HEART”

BY GEORGE CROLY

# SESSION THREE

“The First Christian Sermon – Part One” | Acts 2:14–23

## Getting Started

At the heart of Peter’s sermon on Pentecost is the promise that everyone who calls upon the Lord’s name will be saved (Acts 2:21). Between the pouring out of the Holy Spirit and the second coming of Christ is a corridor of opportunity for the salvation of all people without distinction.

What does the promise of Acts 2:21 reveal about God’s nature and character?

### KEY SCRIPTURES

“It shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

ACTS 2:21

“The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

1 CORINTHIANS 1:18

## Going Deeper

1. Who was Joel, and why did Peter reference his prophecy in Acts 2:16–21? (See Joel 2:28–32.)

2. How should we interpret the language of “the last days” and God’s Spirit being given to “all flesh” in Acts 2:17?

3. What is the difference between sharing the benefits or warnings of the Gospel and sharing the Gospel message itself?

4. What bearing does the promise of Acts 2:21 have on our evangelism and discipleship?

5. Peter emphasized Jesus' life and death in his Gospel presentation (Acts 2:22-23). Why is it imperative that we have a firm grasp on both aspects of Jesus' ministry?

6. A real knowledge of the Gospel begins with looking away from oneself and toward Christ's achievements. How can you practice this in your daily Christian walk?

### **GIVING PRAISE**

Before the throne of God above  
I have a strong and perfect plea,  
A great High Priest whose name is Love,  
Who ever lives and pleads for me.

**“BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD ABOVE”**

**BY CHARITIE LEES BANCROFT**

# SESSION FOUR

“The First Christian Sermon – Part Two” | Acts 2:24-41

## Getting Started

Peter preached the life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ in his sermon at Pentecost. The elements of his sermon serve as a kind of framework for sharing the Gospel with others. Like Peter, we must be ready to present the good news of Jesus compellingly to those who ask.

What aspects of the Gospel could you gain more clarity on to help you present it more winsomely?

### KEY SCRIPTURES

“Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”

ACTS 2:37-38

“In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.”

1 PETER 3:15

## Going Deeper

1. Peter kept the cross central in his Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:23, 36). What are some of the blessings and benefits of Christ's work on the cross that we might do well to emphasize when sharing the Gospel?

2. What are some of the implications of the resurrection for us? (See 1 Cor. 15:1-58.)

3. In Acts 2:25-35, Peter cites several psalms to support his case. Why do you think he does this, and what do these verses tell us about Jesus' resurrection and exaltation?

4. Alistair points out that after Peter's sermon, the appeal for salvation is made from the people to the preacher: "Brothers, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). Why is this meaningful?

5. Compare Acts 2:21 with 2:39. How are we to understand these two texts together in terms of God's work in calling us to Himself?

6. In a short summary, write out the basics of the Gospel according to Peter's Pentecost sermon. What aspects of his message are especially good news for you?

### **GIVING PRAISE**

Jesus, the Savior, reigns,  
The God of truth and love;  
When He has purged our stains,  
He took His seat above;  
Lift up your heart,  
Lift up your voice!  
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

**"REJOICE, THE LORD IS KING!"**

**BY CHARLES WESLEY**

# SESSION FIVE

“Evangelism Explosion – Part One” | Acts 8:1–25

## Getting Started

Tertullian, who lived in the second and third centuries, once defiantly said to the Roman authorities, “Kill us, torture us, condemn us, grind us to dust. ... The more you mow us down, the more we grow; *the seed is the blood of Christians.*”<sup>1</sup>

Do believers today face persecution in your community? If so, how? How does that compare to other parts of the world and/or other eras of church history?

### KEY SCRIPTURE

“Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.”

ACTS 8:4

“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.”

GENESIS 50:20

<sup>1</sup> Tertullian, *Apology* 50, quoted in John Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church and the World*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1990), 119.



## Going Deeper

1. Read Acts 7:51-60. What was the reason for Stephen's martyrdom? What does the event tell us about the social status of early Christians?

2. Why do you think God used persecution to expand the early church? How does this fact highlight His sovereignty over all things?

3. What do we know about Samaritans, and why is it significant that Philip brought the good news of Jesus to them? (See Acts 8:5; Luke 9:51-54; John 4:9.)

4. Consider the events of Philip and Peter's interaction with Simon the Magician (Acts 8:9-24). How does Simon's false profession of faith serve as a warning to us?

5. What is the difference between professing to believe the Gospel and truly believing it? What evidence should accompany genuine conversion?

6. In what sense is Acts 1:8 fulfilled in Acts 8:1?

7. Alistair points out that the word “preaching” in Acts 8:4 has in view sharing the good news of Jesus through conversation rather than strictly declaring a message publicly. What implications does this have for us?

### **GIVING PRAISE**

The church shall never perish!  
Her dear Lord to defend,  
To guide, sustain, and cherish,  
Is with her to the end.  
Though there be those that hate her  
And strive to see her fail,  
Against both foe and traitor  
She ever shall prevail.

**“THE CHURCH’S ONE FOUNDATION”**

**BY SAMUEL JOHN STONE**

# SESSION SIX

“Evangelism Explosion – Part Two” | Acts 8:1–25

## Getting Started

Acts 8:14–17 records the unique and perplexing event of the Samaritans receiving the Holy Spirit. The delayed giving of the Holy Spirit to the Samaritans was ultimately to demonstrate that they received the same Spirit as the Jews in Acts 2. It was an anomalous situation and a historical exception. As students of Scripture, we must approach difficult texts like these with humility and care.

What are some pitfalls to be mindful of when interpreting difficult passages in the Bible?

### KEY SCRIPTURES

“Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.”

ACTS 8:14–15

“Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.”

JUDE 3

## Going Deeper

1. How did sharing the good news of Jesus with non-Jewish Samaritans (Acts 8:5) add complexity to the early church? How did the apostles in Jerusalem handle the situation (8:14)?

2. Read Acts 10:44-48 and 19:1-7. How are these two accounts similar to the one in Acts 8 with the Samaritan believers?

3. Look up and review James 1:3, Hebrews 12:8-9, and Deuteronomy 13:3. What do these verses tell us about how God uses trials in the believer's life?

4. Using Ephesians 2:20 and Jude 3 for reference, explain what the church today has in common with the early church. How do these commonalities encourage you?

5. What does Ephesians 1:14 teach concerning God's giving of His Spirit in salvation to believers? How is this different from the anomalies we read of in Acts?

6. What does it mean that the church is both *catholic* and *apostolic*?

### **GIVING PRAISE**

Come, O come, life-giving Spirit,  
God from all eternity!  
May Your power never fail us;  
Dwell with us constantly.  
Then shall truth and life and light  
Banish all the gloom of night.

**“COME, O COME, THOU QUICKENING SPIRIT”**

**BY HEINRICH HELD, TRANS. CHARLES WILLIAM SCHAEFFER**

# SESSION SEVEN

“Personal Evangelism” | Acts 8:26–40

## Getting Started

Against what seemed rational, God called Philip away from revival in Samaria to the remote desert of Gaza. God ordered these events in such a way that there would be a life-changing encounter in that place. Philip’s willingness to share the Gospel indiscriminately continues to be an example for believers today.

Think of a time when you obeyed the Lord even when it didn’t fully make sense to you. What did it teach you about who God is and how He works?

### KEY SCRIPTURES

“Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ And he said, ‘How can I, unless someone guides me?’ And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.”

ACTS 8:30–31

“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.”

ISAIAH 53:7

## Going Deeper

1. What details in Acts 8:26–29 show that God’s instructions to Philip were unusual?

2. What are the four questions that drive the narrative in Acts 8:30–37? What do they reveal about both Philip and the Ethiopian?

3. How is the Ethiopian’s line of questioning evidence of God at work in him?

4. Philip is an example for us in that he was prepared, available, and thoughtful in his evangelism. In which of these areas do you feel you have the most room to grow?

5. What is the difference between knowing God's Word and submitting to it? What are some traits of the person whose life is submitted to the Bible?

6. Why is it important that we present the *facts* about Christ to those with whom we share the Gospel?

### **GIVING PRAISE**

Onward, Christian soldiers,  
    Marching as to war,  
With the cross of Jesus  
    Going on before!  
Christ, the royal Master,  
    Leads against the foe;  
Forward into battle,  
    See His banner go!

**“ONWARD, CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS”  
BY SABINE BARING-GOULD**



# SESSION EIGHT

“One Changed Life” | Acts 9:1-18

## Getting Started

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus is one of the most striking New Testament events with which any serious seeker needs to reckon. While Saul was persecuting the church, God was at work in his heart. God’s grace continues to go before those whom He will call to Himself.

Reflect on your conversion. Are there any similarities to Saul’s? Is there a sense in which everyone’s conversion is like Saul’s?

### KEY SCRIPTURE

“Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’”

ACTS 9:3-4

“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

2 CORINTHIANS 4:6

## Going Deeper

1. What do we know about Saul's background, and how did it make him an unlikely candidate for conversion? (See Acts 8:1-3; 26:9-11; Gal. 1:13-16.)

2. How does Saul's conversion to Christ speak to the credibility of the Christian faith?

3. How was God's grace at work in Saul prior to his conversion? How does God's grace work in a similar manner today?

4. Saul asked the Lord on the Damascus Road, "Who are you?" (9:5). Jesus also seemingly anticipated the question "What am I to do?" (9:6). Why are these two questions imperative for every believer to ask?

5. Read Philippians 3:12, 2 Corinthians 4:6, and 1 Timothy 1:14. According to Paul's words, how does God work in the unconverted?

6. How can Saul's conversion give hope to those far from God?

### **GIVING PRAISE**

O the deep, deep love of Jesus!  
Vast, unmeasured, boundless, free,  
Rolling as a mighty ocean  
In its fullness over me.  
Underneath me, all around me  
Is the current of Thy love,  
Leading onward, leading homeward  
To Thy glorious rest above.

**“O THE DEEP, DEEP LOVE OF JESUS!”**

**BY SAMUEL TREVOR FRANCIS**

# SESSION NINE

“City of Idols – Part One” | Acts 17:16–23; Isaiah 44:16–20

## Getting Started

Paul’s missionary travels took him to Athens, a city of idols. There he discovered a city in which God’s glory was dragged down amongst the mechanisms and philosophies of pagan worldviews. Undeterred, Paul carefully reasoned with them and boldly proclaimed the Gospel, trusting in its power and efficacy.

What aspects of your own town or city’s brokenness are particularly burdensome to you?

### KEY SCRIPTURES

“Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.”

ACTS 17:16–17

“Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?”

1 CORINTHIANS 1:20

## Going Deeper

1. What do you know—from Scripture or other sources—about first-century Athens?

2. How did Paul feel when he arrived in Athens, and why (Acts 17:16)? How would his Jewish upbringing have made the situation more tense?

3. The idolatry of ancient Athens is not much different from that of our day. What are some cultural idols of our own time?

4. What principles can we learn from Paul in Acts 17:16–21 that can be applied to our personal evangelism?

5. What was the reason for the pushback Paul received in Acts 17:18? How does 1 Corinthians 1:18 help make sense of the hostility he endured?

### **GIVING PRAISE**

Let all who name Christ's holy name  
Give God all praise and glory;  
Let all who own His power proclaim  
Aloud the wondrous story!  
Cast each false idol from its throne,  
For Christ is Lord, and Christ alone:  
To God all praise and glory.

**“SING PRAISE TO GOD WHO REIGNS ABOVE”**

**BY JOHANN JAKOB SCHÜTZ, TRANS. FRANCES ELIZABETH COX**

# SESSION TEN

“City of Idols – Part Two” | Acts 17:22–34

## Getting Started

Addressing the leading Epicurean and Stoic philosophers of his day, Paul presented a masterful, compelling Gospel address. His concern for the culture and careful handling of the Word gives us a framework for any age. Like Paul, we should strive for cultural relevance without compromising biblical truth.

Why is it important to strike a balance between having one foot in the culture and one in the Bible? What are the pitfalls of erring too much on one side or the other?

### KEY SCRIPTURES

“The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

ACTS 17:30–31

“But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.”

1 CHRONICLES 29:14

## Going Deeper

1. What are some of the ways Paul engaged with the culture in his address? How about with Scripture?

2. The key issue for Athens was idolatry (Acts 17:16). How is the God of the Bible different from idols, and why is idolatry incompatible with true worship?

3. Paul taught that God's judgment is fixed, fair, and final (Acts 17:30-31). What part should explaining God's judgment play in our evangelism?

4. What can we learn from the different responses to Paul's message in Acts 17:32? What do these responses reveal about human nature and our need for God's intervention?



5. Paul shows his adept hand in understanding the culture with his introductory remarks (Acts 17:22-23). What aspects of our culture might you need to better understand to aid your evangelism?

6. How does God's sovereignty over history and geography bring you comfort and give you courage (Acts 17:26)?

7. How could the pattern of Paul's address be applied as a framework for your own evangelism conversations? Write a few prompts below.

### **GIVING PRAISE**

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,  
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,  
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,  
Almighty, victorious, Thy great name we praise.  
Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,  
Nor wanting, nor wasting, Thou rulest in might;  
Thy justice like mountains high soaring above  
Thy clouds, which are fountains of goodness and love.

**“IMMORTAL, INVISIBLE, GOD ONLY WISE”**

**BY WALTER C. SMITH**

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