

# Finding Freedom in Christ

*An 8-Week Study of Galatians*

PORTIA COLLINS

“Portia Collins’s first encounter with the gospel in the book of Galatians proved to be a watershed experience for her, as it has been for countless others. It led her into a life of freedom, hope, and joy she had never known was possible. Now she guides you on a journey through this small but mighty epistle, desiring that you, too, will discover the transforming, amazing grace of Christ in a fresh way.”

**Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth**, Founder and Bible Teacher, Revive Our Hearts

“When I think of Portia Collins, I think of one of the biggest cheerleaders I know for encouraging women to study and encounter the truths of the gospel for themselves. In this Bible study on Galatians, she does just that. Helping you with foundational Bible study skills as well as showing you how to discover truths that will transform your life, Portia is a trusted guide to take you deeper into Scripture and to help you fall in love with God’s word.”

**Laura Wifler**, coauthor, *Risen Motherhood* and *Gospel Mom*

“*Finding Freedom in Christ* is a helpful and enriching guide through Paul’s letter to the Galatians, revealing the life-changing truths of the gospel. With wisdom and clarity, Portia Collins encourages readers to apply these truths to their daily lives and embrace the freedom Christ offers. This Bible study is an excellent resource for any woman longing to grow in her faith and walk freely in the grace of God.”

**Melissa Kruger**, author; Vice President of Discipleship Programming, The Gospel Coalition

“This resource is a treasure. Whether for new believers, seasoned Christians, or Bible study groups, it provides both conviction and encouragement—just as Galatians itself does. Portia skillfully unpacks the setting and context of Paul’s letter while guiding readers to engage deeply with the text. Rather than spoon-feeding answers, she asks insightful questions that sharpen our exegetical skills and, ultimately, deepen our love for the Lord Jesus Christ.”

**Quina Aragon**, author, *Love Has a Story*

“I am excited to recommend *Finding Freedom in Christ* to women of all ages! Portia Collins helps us study Galatians through faithful observation, interpretation, and application. Whether you are new to the faith or a seasoned believer, this is a resource that will encourage you to live in the freedom Christ offers, rooted in the grace he provides.”

**Hunter Beless**, author; Founder, Journeywomen Ministries

“This is a rich, wide-reaching, exegetical look at Galatians wrapped in Portia’s inviting and relatable teaching style. Full of charts, definitions, cross-references, little-known facts, and opportunities for personal reflection, this book will help women walk away with a more thorough understanding of Scripture. *Finding Freedom in Christ* models Bible study best practices for women who are serious about learning how to dig into God’s word to come out changed.”

**Emily A. Jensen**, coauthor, *Risen Motherhood* and *Gospel Mom*



Finding  
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in Christ



# Finding Freedom in Christ

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PORTIA COLLINS

*Finding Freedom in Christ: An 8-Week Study of Galatians*

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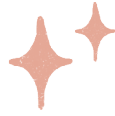
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# Introduction

## BECOMING A GOOD EXEGETE



VIDEO 1

**As a vibrant twentysomething-year-old,** I was on a difficult quest to find my true identity. Every aspect of my life seemed hard during that season. Yet these struggles had a wonderful side effect—they caused my desire for God’s word to greatly increase. One evening in particular, I planted myself on the floor of my small two-bedroom apartment and began reading the beautiful book of Galatians. As I sat there in the quiet, reading page after page, I began to weep. The message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ that is recorded in Galatians pierced through the noise of my life and spoke directly to my weary and anxious heart. My life had swung between the two poles of legalism and lawlessness. Sometimes I thought that my religious rule-keeping was enough to earn me righteousness before God. But then I would go in the completely opposite direction by indulging in sin under the guise of freedom. It was a vicious cycle that left me confused, lost, and constantly searching for hope in all the wrong places.

Thankfully, God, in his infinite mercy and grace, gave me true hope through the truth of his word. As I studied Galatians, I was confronted with the reality of my own proclivity toward the two extremes of legalism and lawlessness. The Scriptures acted like a mirror that revealed the futility of trying to justify myself through my own means, and for the first time—even though I had grown up in the church—I clearly understood the gospel.

Opening my Bible to Galatians that night changed my life in the most magnificent ways. The teachings of Galatians gave me a comforting reminder that a life bound by legalistic practices could not bring me any closer to God, and a life marred by lawlessness could not keep me from truly receiving the grace and freedom that God offers to his beloved children. Through faith in

Jesus Christ, I found the true freedom that my soul longed for after so many years. Now, year after year, I experience the joy of repeatedly mining the words of Paul to gain a deeper understanding of this truth.

As I reflect on that evening when I first read the book of Galatians, I now see how this seemingly simple act of reading the Scriptures led me to a new life in Christ. God’s word was the catalyst that set me free. Needless to say, I am so grateful to the Lord for guiding me into a rich understanding of what it really means to be saved by grace through faith and to be free in Christ Jesus. This, my friend, is a precious gift that continues to shape my walk with God every day, and I hope that through studying Galatians with me, you will experience the same.

### **The Best Way to Study God’s Word**

“That’s a nice story,” you may say, “but how exactly am I supposed to study the Bible?” That is what I’m here to help with. In short, the best way to study Scripture is by using exegesis. “Exe-what?” you say. Don’t worry; that’s what I said too. When I first heard the word *exegesis*, I didn’t know how to pronounce it or what it meant. I was sifting through online resources about studying the Bible while sitting at my desk when the word caught my eye. Although I stumbled through its pronunciation more times than I’d like to admit (it’s “*ˌ*ek-sə-*ˈ*jē-səs”),<sup>1</sup> I was completely gripped by this fascinating concept. In short, exegeting the Bible means interpreting it by drawing meaning from the text. People who practice exegesis are called “exegetes.” Initially, I thought that title was reserved for pastors or reverends, not for ordinary people like me and you. But approaching the Bible in this methodical way is not only something that regular people *can* do; it’s actually something that we *must* do. Only by properly exegeting Scripture can we truly understand what it says and apply its life-giving power to our hearts. Through this study, I hope to train you to become a good exegete—someone who draws accurate and meaningful conclusions about the Bible by simply following the text and applying ordinary reading principles.

Think of it this way: When we read a letter, we never start in the middle of a sentence or the middle of the letter. We read beginning to end, starting with the first word of the first sentence and ending with the last. We read the letter page by page, seeking to understand the full context of what the writer is communicating. Reading the Bible is no different. While this is a special collection of books containing the very words of God, the Bible is still a literary

work and should be read as such. It is not a collection of disjointed, random stories, but one big story that reveals who God is and what his redemptive plan is for humanity. To understand the fullness of God's redemptive plan (as much as is humanly possible), we must be diligent students of Scripture. We must read line by line, making note of words, phrases, people, and places. Ideally, we engage the text inductively by asking thoughtful questions that lead us to God's intended meaning instead of forcing our own preconceived ideas on the text to make it say what we want it to say.

Overall, exegeting the Bible well as believers today is marked by three steps: reading, examining, and applying. Let's look at each now.

### *Reading*

First, and most obviously, we must read a passage in order to exegete it. And there's a lot that we can learn about God by reading the Bible over and over again and with intention! Our brains often start to make sense of the literary or historical context of a passage (the importance of which I explain below) by identifying key people, places, and other details when we read and reread. It is only by reading the Bible on a daily basis over many years that God's message for us starts to sink into our souls. But take heart—though it requires hard work to set aside time for reading God's word, it pays off in dividends to our souls, our relationships, our work, and every other area of life.

### *Examining*

Yet simply reading the Bible is not enough. Though God gives us all we need for life and godliness in the Bible (2 Pet. 1:3), and though anyone can understand its basic message without theological training, the fact is that the Bible was written years ago by people in a completely different context from ours. Thus, examining the historical and literary context of a passage is crucial for truly understanding it. These pieces of contextual information clarify the author's intent, which helps us get to what he was really saying to his audience in his own time and what God is really saying to us today.

In order to get at this contextual information, we need to ask questions about the author, audience, place, purpose, genre, and canonical location of the text. Who wrote it? To whom, where, and why? Is the text law, history, wisdom, poetry, narrative, a parable, or a letter? What verses, chapters, and books surround it? We must also examine the text itself—the structure of the sentences, the definition of terms, and the functions of the various

parts of speech. Further, we must pay attention to words and phrases that are repeated, because repetition in the Bible is much like the bold-faced and italicized words in our modern texts—it is meant to draw our attention to something important. Understanding these elements helps us discern God’s intended meaning of the text. Remember, Scripture always means what God intended it to mean.

To figure all of this out, it can help to use a study Bible. The *ESV Study Bible* is among my favorites. If you want to enhance your studies even more, consider investing in a concordance, lexicon, Bible dictionary, Bible encyclopedia, or commentary. These are all resources you can use to help you examine the Scriptures. You’ll also find QR codes for videos with additional instruction about Galatians at various places throughout this study guide to help you answer the questions.

### *Applying*

After we examine Scripture, we can properly apply it to our lives in practical ways. And by asking questions about personal and communal application, we bridge the gap between understanding the text and living it out. Application is where Scripture shifts from being theoretical to becoming a reality in our daily lives.

As imperfect beings, we’re capable of misinterpreting and misapplying the Scriptures. But if we dig deeper into God’s word through exegesis, we can listen and truly understand not only what God was saying to the original audience but also what he is saying to us today. The Scriptures are used by the Holy Spirit to teach, rebuke, correct, and train us in righteousness so that we might be fully equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16–17). The Spirit speaks through the Scripture to teach us what is true, and it is impossible to understand God without the Spirit’s work. Thus, God’s nature, ways, and plan are sufficiently revealed through the Scriptures and rightly applied to our lives through the work of the Holy Spirit. The two work hand in hand.

### **Studying God’s Word Together**

Though some aspects of studying the Bible are best done in quiet contemplation and prayer, it is also important to read, examine, and apply God’s word with God’s people. Thus, while this study of Galatians can certainly be completed on your own, I have designed it to be a combination of individual and group study so that after completing the individual study questions, you

can gather with sisters in Christ to discuss what you learned using the group discussion questions included at the end of each week. There is a sweet blessing that God gives when we meet together. In my years of studying God's word, my most special and cherished moments happened among dear sisters in Christ. Friend, please don't miss that blessing.

If you have never studied the Bible by reading, examining, and applying, then I'll admit that you might feel a bit intimidated right now. This might be the point where you are questioning whether you want to commit or if you're even capable of seeing this study through to the end. The good news is that I have designed this study to guide you through the steps of exegesis and equip you with the skills needed to become a great exegete. At the end, you'll walk away with not just a deeper understanding of Galatians but also the confidence to study other books of the Bible more effectively.

Right now, I want to encourage you to reject all notions of self-doubt and negativity as you prepare to work through this study. May the words of our brother Paul raise your spirit:

I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe. (Eph. 1:16–19)

In the same spirit and mind as Paul, I am also praying for you. I am fully confident in the Lord's extraordinary ability to lead and guide you through his word with much wisdom and clarity. I invite you to embark on this journey in faith, trusting that God is near as we seek to understand the truth of his word by the power of the Holy Spirit.





# Week 1

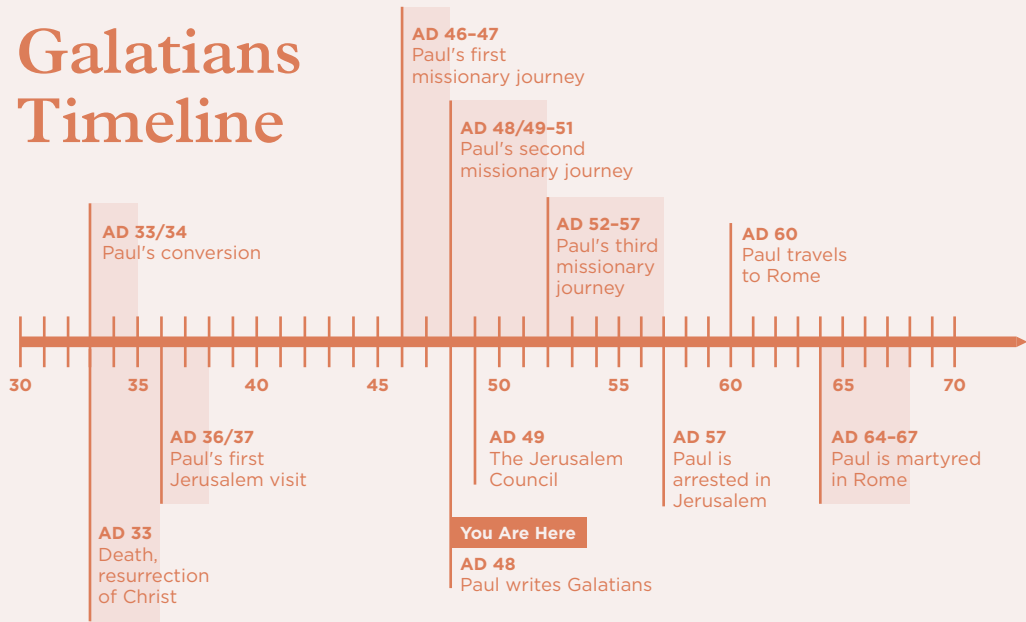
EMBRACING THE TRUE GOSPEL OF FREEDOM  
(GALATIANS 1:1-24)

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We go to Christ for forgiveness, and then too often  
look to the law for the power to fight our sins.

**C. H. SPURGEON**

# Galatians Timeline



VIDEO 2

**Welcome to our first week** of studying Galatians! Aren't you excited? Grab your pens, highlighters, and—most importantly—your Bible, because we are ready to explore the depths of God's grace and faithfulness as recounted by the apostle Paul in this letter.

Grace is the overarching theme of this book and the cornerstone of Christian doctrine—people are saved by God's grace. For many non-Christians, the concept of grace can be a bit baffling. I'm not an expert in other religions, but I've learned a thing or two about what non-Christians believe about attaining salvation. Consider these examples:

- ❑ Buddhists believe that salvation is reached by following the path of enlightenment, which is found only through dedicated preparation, meditation, and ascetic living (i.e., abstaining from worldly pleasures to achieve spiritual goals).

- Hindus believe that salvation is gained through spiritual liberation, which is brought about by a repeated cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.
- Muslims believe that salvation is achieved by doing good deeds and strictly adhering to certain prayer and fasting rituals.

You'd probably agree that these religions are pretty different from Christianity. However, some religious traditions that appear to have Christian origins also communicate a message very different from salvation by grace. Here are a few examples:

- Jehovah's Witnesses believe that salvation is achieved by performing works like door-to-door evangelism.
- Mormons, also known as members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, believe that salvation is granted not only by God's grace but also through the practice of Mormon temple rituals and unyielding faithfulness to Mormon church leaders.
- Black Hebrew Israelites believe that salvation is given to the true people of Israel—namely, people of African descent—when they strictly follow Old Testament laws and practices.

It's clear that all of these religions and religious cults share a common belief: that humans must attain to their own salvation. Whether through meditation, ethical living, strict adherence to laws or practices, or even being born with a specific ethnicity, the burden is always on a person to merit salvation rather than receiving the grace of God alone.

Thankfully, Christianity is different in that it proclaims that sinful human beings are saved by grace. That's it! Not our works, practices, or identity, but solely the grace of God. The fundamental belief of Christianity is that human effort, no matter how sincere or intense, is never enough to attain true freedom. Salvation is accomplished by Jesus Christ, and all who believe in him are recipients of God's good grace and freed from the chains of sin. Whew; talk about a hallelujah moment!

Galatians is a pointed letter that highlights how a “gospel” that simply tacks Jesus on at the end of a list of human requirements is essentially no gospel at all. The entire letter can be explained in this way: If faith in Jesus Christ must be supplemented with human deeds to ensure salvation, that's really bad news, but—praise God!—he gives us all we need for salvation in Christ.

Take some time to reflect on the implications of grace in your life. Have you ever been tempted to add something to the gospel (e.g., good works or an aspect of your

identity)? This week, I hope that God's goodness and grace shine bright through your studies. I hope that you'll be reminded of how salvation offered through Jesus Christ is the pathway to true freedom and how living under grace ultimately leads us to a deeper, more fulfilling relationship with God and people. Let's get started!



## WEEK 1 | DAY 1

*Galatians 1:1–5*

**Read Galatians 1.** After reading the entire chapter, focus on verses 1–5 and answer the following questions:

- Who is the author of this letter?

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## Key Terms

**Apostle:** a special messenger designated by Jesus Christ to proclaim his teachings to others

**Judaizers:** Jewish Christians who pressured non-Jewish believers to follow Jewish customs

**Grace:** unmerited favor from God (that cannot be earned)

- Who are the recipients of this letter (i.e., to whom was it written)?

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- How does the author describe himself in verse 1? Note the contrast that he makes. Specifically, how does this contrast undergird Paul’s authority?

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- Paul wrote thirteen of the books found in the New Testament, including Philippians. Take a moment to read Philippians 1:1–2. Compare how Paul describes himself in these verses with how he describes himself at the outset of Galatians. What is different about Paul’s description of himself? What differences do you notice in tone?

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- Why do you think Paul describes himself differently to these two audiences? (Reading both Galatians and Philippians in their entirety may help answer this question. Feel free to come back to this question later in the week.)

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- In the first few verses of Galatians, Paul establishes a firm foundation on which he will build the rest of his case concerning faith, redemption, justification, adoption, restoration, freedom, and ultimately, the love of God. We must not miss exactly why Paul begins his letter in this way. In verse 1, Paul has already told us who he is, who sent him, and the mighty work of the one who sent him. In verse 2, Paul mentions “all the brothers who are with me.” Paul’s words here highlight a sense of unity. Read Romans 6:3–4. How do these verses help us to understand better what Paul is saying in Galatians 1:2?

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- We see the first mention of the word “grace” in verse 3. Continue reading verses 3–5 and answer the following questions:

- According to Paul, who gives “grace and peace” to us?

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- What did Jesus Christ do to attain grace and peace for those who believe?

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## WEEK 1 | DAY 2

*Galatians 1:6–10*

**Reread Galatians 1.** After rereading the entire chapter, focus on verses 6–10 and answer the following questions:

- At this point, Paul quickly transitions from his greeting and jumps right into the heart of what he wants to discuss. What is Paul’s problem with the Galatian church?

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- In verse 6, Paul uses the word “gospel,” which means “good news” in Greek. Read Romans 5:1–11. How does this passage help you to understand that the gospel of Christ is good news?

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- ▣ In Galatians 1:7, Paul describes those who teach a different, or a false, gospel. According to Paul, what are the primary characteristics of a false teacher?

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- ▣ Why is a different or distorted gospel no gospel at all?

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- ▣ To underscore the seriousness of preaching another gospel, Paul offers some pretty stern words to the Galatians. What does Paul say of people and even angels who distort the one true gospel?

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- ▣ The Greek word for “curse” is *anathema*, which is where the English word comes from. Look up this word in an English dictionary. How does its definition help you understand Paul’s warning?

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- In verse 10, Paul unpacks his motivations for writing such a stern rebuke, highlighting that his goal is not to win the approval of people. Ultimately, who does Paul aim to please?
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## The History of Galatia

Galatia was a unique city that now is part of modern Turkey (see fig. 1). Originally part of a Celtic region, Galatia became a Roman province (that is, a territory located outside of Rome but still under Roman control) in 25 BC. Galatia's Celtic roots and Roman governance created an interesting dynamic that transformed the city into a melting pot of diverse cultures, ethnicities, and religions. As shown in figure 2, Paul's first missionary journey brought him to many cities in southern Galatia. (You can read about this particular journey in Acts 13–14.) Though Galatia was an ideal location for sharing the gospel, establishing a church there came with serious challenges. For example, the Galatians faced conflicts regarding cultural differences between Jews and Gentiles. Specifically, the Judaizers—a group of Christian Jews who falsely taught that everyone of non-Jewish descent must be circumcised—threatened the gospel-centered ministry of Paul. This made confusion and conflict run rampant in the Galatian church. Fortunately, Paul did not consider the Galatian believers to be a lost cause. Thus, his letter to them is a passionate plea to reject the legalism and any cultural conformity that leads to abandoning the truth of the gospel. Most importantly, he wants them to keep their eyes fixed on Jesus. Paul's ultimate goal in writing to the Galatians was to provide a stern yet loving appeal to remember the true gospel that he first shared with them.<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 1.** Modern Galatia



**Figure 2.** Ancient Galatia



**WEEK 1 | DAY 3***Galatians 1:11–16a*

**Reread Galatians 1.** After rereading the entire chapter, focus on verses 11–16a and answer the following questions:

- ▣ Paul begins this section by making a distinctive claim about the gospel that he preaches and elaborates on in the following verses. According to Paul, how is the gospel that he shares different from false gospels (vv. 11–12)?

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- ▣ In verse 13, Paul mentions his former way of life. Take a moment to read Acts 8:1–9:2 and 26:4; Philippians 3:5–6; and Mark 7:3. How do these passages shed light on Paul’s former way of life?

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- Paul also describes himself formerly as “advancing in Judaism” and “extremely zealous” for the traditions of his ancestors (v. 14). What does this say about Paul’s preconversion motivations?

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- In verse 15, Paul recounts a pivotal point in his life. What caused such an abrupt and radical change?

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- Read Isaiah 49:1, Jeremiah 1:5, and Romans 8:28–29. What do these passages teach us about being “set apart” and “called” by God (Gal. 1:15)?

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- In your own words, explain the four ways that Paul emphasizes God’s work in his life (vv. 15–16).

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- Take a look at verse 15 and the beginning of verse 16. How does Paul describe the gift of grace that he received? Specifically pay attention to who is revealed to Paul and who makes the revelation to Paul (see Acts 9:3–19).

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## Personal Reflection

By highlighting his radical conversion, Paul supports the claim that the gospel he preaches is from God and is not his own or any other man's. Take a moment to reflect on God's grace in your own life. How did God open your eyes to the gospel? In what ways has Jesus Christ made himself known to you? What is God's call on your life?

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## WEEK 1 | DAY 4

*Galatians 1:16b–20*

**Reread Galatians 1.** After rereading the entire chapter, focus on verses 16b–20 and answer the following questions:

- Paul notes that immediately after his conversion, he did not “consult” with anyone regarding the gospel he received (v. 16b). Why did Paul not need to consult anyone?

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- To further support this point, Paul notes that he also did not immediately go up to Jerusalem to confirm his apostolic calling. According to the text, where did Paul go?

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- Read Acts 9:19–22. What was Paul doing in Damascus?

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- According to Galatians 1:18, how many years passed before Paul actually arrived in Jerusalem after his conversion?

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## Did You Know?



Growing up, I really wanted to become an attorney. I fiercely pursued this career path until my junior year of college. I took courses to prime myself for law school, and I also joined high school and collegiate mock trial teams. As a result, I became relatively well-versed in what is commonly understood as the “rules of evidence.” When an item of evidence is presented in a court of law, it must be authenticated in order to be admitted. However, some items

of evidence are self-authenticating, which means they require no extrinsic evidence of authenticity. Examples of self-authenticating items of evidence are domestic or foreign documents that are signed and sealed by verified governmental personnel. The gospel of Jesus Christ is much like a self-authenticating piece of evidence. It does not require any extrinsic evidence to be received. This is why Paul did not need to confirm the gospel that he received with anyone else.

- Who did Paul meet in Jerusalem?

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- According to verse 18, the purpose of Paul’s travel to Jerusalem was to “visit” Cephas (some translations, like the New Living Translation [NLT] and the Christian Standard Bible [CSB], phrase this as “get to know” or “become acquainted”). How does Paul’s wording highlight the main reason for this visit? What does Paul’s language suggest about what he was *not* coming to Jerusalem to do?

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- In verse 20, Paul makes a solemn declaration before God, similar to how witnesses affirm the truth when taking the stand in a courtroom. What is Paul affirming, and why is it important for his message?

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- Why do you think Paul chooses his words with such care and meticulously chronicles his travels after his conversion? What is he ultimately making a case for? (Hint: See Gal. 1:11–12.)

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## WEEK 1 | DAY 5

### *Galatians 1:21–24*

**Reread Galatians 1.** After rereading the entire chapter, focus on verses 21–24 and answer the following questions:

▣ Paul now draws our attention to another one of his postconversion travels. Let’s take a moment to read and connect several passages in order to clearly understand this:

- Read Acts 22:3. Here we see that Paul is from Tarsus, the capital of Cilicia. According to Galatians 1:21, Paul’s first missionary journey took him back to his home region. Let’s put on our imaginative thinking caps: What might have been some reasons for Paul returning to his home region? What potential challenges or downsides could he have faced?

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- Read Acts 22:17–21. What happened here? Who sent Paul to Cilicia and Syria? What does this reveal about who is ultimately behind all true ministry endeavors?

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- Peter and several other apostles were ministering to Jews in Jerusalem. With whom was Paul called to share the gospel?

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- ▣ Paul notes that while he was away on his travels, he remained “unknown” to the churches of Judea (v. 22). According to verse 23, what did those in Judea hear about Paul while he was away?

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- ▣ What did the churches in Judea do in response to hearing about Paul (v. 24)?

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## Week 1 Group Discussion

1. What foundational truth lies at the heart of the gospel, and why is it considered good news for all who believe? Discuss with your group how the message of the gospel is transformational, and specifically how it has changed your life.
2. How is legalism different from the gospel? What might we be tempted to add to the gospel in our cultural context today? How does adding to the gospel in any way distort it, and how can we guard against doing that?
3. In Galatians 1:8–9, Paul issues a stern warning against altering the gospel, saying that those who distort the gospel are cursed. Why is Paul’s language so severe? What happens when the gospel is altered?
4. Consider what it means to contend or fight for the gospel. Is this something that you do regularly? In what ways? Why is it critical that we are always ready to make a defense for the hope that is in us (1 Pet. 3:15)?
5. How does your understanding of the gospel shape your actions and interactions with others? Practically speaking, how does knowing the gospel help you better engage with both believers and nonbelievers?
6. Think of those in your life who have rejected the gospel or perhaps believe a false gospel. How do Paul’s encounter with Christ and his subsequent conversion provide hope for witnessing to the lost people in your life? How can you find encouragement as you continue to hope for their salvation?
7. What did you learn about the nature of grace from studying Paul’s conversion this week? How have your own tendencies toward works-righteousness been challenged through this week’s studies?