ACTS 1:8 | 4-Week Session 4: "Howdy Neighbor"

Getting Started

Learning Goal: Students will understand that Jesus' Great Commission calls on Christians to witness to those in their own neighborhoods. Students will also commit to become more personally involved in the challenge set forth in Acts 1:8.

What You Need to Know: There are special challenges in witnessing to those in "Jerusalem," which includes those who live closest to us: family, friends, neighbors, classmates, teammates, coworkers, and others with whom we frequently come in contact.

Key/Memory Verse: John 20:21

Supporting Verse: Acts 16:11-40

Prepare Ahead

- No text in manuscript
- Review and determine how you will lead your group in "Far From Oliver" (p. 4).
- If you choose to do the options/video wrapup (p.5), be sure you have the necessary equipment and are prepared to show the video. Videos may be downloaded from *www.actsone8.com.*

Supply List

- Bibles (one per student)
- Memory verse (John 20:21) on board, cel, or slide presentation
- Paper/writing implements
- Chalkboard, dry-erase board, or large paper tablet
- Several colors of markers (or chalk) for board
- One 3-inch x 5-inch card per small group; divide the cards so that half of the groups receive the card labeled "Lydia" and the rest receive the card labeled "Philippian jailer"
- Your copy of Learner Worksheet 3-B (for review)
- Copies of Learner Worksheets 4-A and 4-B for all students
- For alternate challenge activity: A small notebook for each student to be used as a journal each session

INTERNET RESOURCES

Acts 1:8 Challenge – *www.ActsOne8.com*
International Mission Board – *www.imb.org*
North American Mission Board – *www.namb.net*
Southern Baptist Convention – *www.sbc.net*

Leader Background Study

What does a Christian witness look like? If you grew up watching photo slide shows (and later, slide presentations) when a church-sponsored missionary came "home" on furlough, you might envision a Caucasian worker in front of a one-story church, flanked by "nationals." Missionaries were people who were sent to the mission fields thousands of miles away. In fact, many have been sent, and many still go. This may be your idea of how a Christian witness looks.

But to see what a Christian witness looks like, you need look no farther than a mirror. You may not go to the ends of the earth, but if you're a Christian, you're a witness. You may be sent to a school or a job just down the road rather than to a medical clinic across the ocean, but you are still sent. In this session, we'll take a look at what it means to be a witness in your Jerusalem, which is the community in which you reside.

Your students need to view witnessing as something to which they are called right now; not something they might explore in adulthood. Witnesses don't need passports, driver's licenses, or credit cards. They do, however, need the Holy Spirit. Never leave home without Him.

Read the following Scripture passages: John 20:21 (memory verse); Acts 16:11-40. Create two columns on a sheet of paper and list the similarities and differences you notice between Lydia and the Philippian jailer. As you prepare the lesson, remember that opportunities to witness often come upon us suddenly, but that the Holy Spirit has been working in the hearts of those we encounter, preparing the way. As such, we never witness in isolation; we always have a friend and a "comforter" with whom we partner, and that partner is the Lord Himself.

It is important to remember that the Great Commission sends us to share the gospel in Jerusalem—our very own community. Sometimes it's easier to share the gospel with strangers than it is with those in our own neighborhoods and families. Can you imagine what Lydia's neighbors thought about her conversion? What about the jailer's? Both of these people would have been well known within their communities. That has advantages, such as rapport, personal connections, and shared knowledge; but it may also have challenges, such as when there may be longstanding grudges or misunderstandings to overcome.

As you study, make a list of individuals within your own circle of acquaintances (family, friends, neighbors, coworkers), and identify those with whom you could easily share a discussion regarding the gospel. Highlight the names of those with whom such conversations might prove more challenging. Pray in particular for these individuals, and seek ways to establish better lines of communication and better relationships so that when the opportunity to talk presents itself, you'll be able to share.

Connect: "X Marks the Spot" (10 minutes)

Review the last session's Scripture memorization (Luke 24:47) by **distributing** copies of Learner Worksheet 4-A and **instructing** students to fill in the missing words (they may work collaboratively). Say the verse several times. Let volunteers say it from memory.

Invite students to share their missionary masterpieces as created in response to Learner Worksheet 3-B. **Discuss**.

Draw a horizontal line the full length of the whiteboard (or chalkboard). At the far left, write "Disagree;" at the far right, **write** "Agree." **Explain** to students that after you read a statement, each person will come to the board and place an X at the point on the line that best represents his or her opinion (you may want several students to come up at a time). If possible, use a different color marker for the responses to each statement:

- I have been nervous or afraid when witnessing.
- It's easier to witness to strangers than it is to friends.

After students have made their marks, **allow time** for discussion. **Ask** for volunteers who placed their Xs at extreme ends of the line to explain why they did so. **Acknowledge** that often it is easier to witness to people who don't know us well because we won't be hindered by past disagreements, misunderstandings, or even hard feelings. For example, if you got into a squabble at school with another kid last week, you may think it was no big deal, but it might be a barrier in a conversation about spiritual matters. In addition, it can be difficult to witness to someone who has seen us at our worst. Perhaps someone has seen you lose your temper inappropriately, cheat on a test or in a game, or pick on someone else. Perhaps you repented of that behavior and have not repeated it; nevertheless, the person who saw it in the first place might remember all too well. Witnessing in our own communities—our "Jerusalems"—is no easy task, but with the Holy Spirit's help, it can be effective and rewarding. Besides, we are called to do it.

Coach: "Character Counts" (35 minutes)

Divide students into two groups and distribute the "Lydia" and "Philippian jailer" 3-inch x 5-inch cards (if you have a large group, you may want to form additional small groups; aim for four to five students per group). **Explain** that each group is to read Acts 16:11-40 and engage in a study of the character to which they have been assigned: Lydia or the Philippian jailer. **Provide** paper and writing instruments, and **ask** groups to list at least five characteristics of their persons (example: determined, curious, fearful). **Allow** 10 minutes for the study. **Have** groups write their descriptive terms on the board and **discuss**. Are there any characteristics that Lydia and the jailer have in common? **Circle** and **connect** those with lines.

Review details from the stories by asking questions such as:

Lydia:

- Where was Lydia when Paul and his companions met her?
  She was with other women of the city, gathered in a location thought to be a place of prayer.
- What was her occupation?
  She was a businesswoman.
- What was her attitude toward God?
  She worshiped Him.
- What did God do to her heart?
  He opened it so that she would pay attention to what Paul said.
- What happened next?
  She must have trusted Christ, then gone home and persuaded her entire family to do the same, because "she and her household were baptized."
- What offer did she extend to Paul and his companions?
  To stay at her house.
- After they were released from jail, where did Paul and Silas go?
  They went to Lydia's house.

The jailer:

- The jailer was told to guard Paul and Silas securely; what was his response?
  He locked their feet in the stocks.
- Why was the jailer so upset when he saw the prison doors open?
  He knew he would be severely punished for allowing prisoners to escape, as he assumed they had.
- What had happened that the jailer knew to ask Paul and Silas how to be saved?
  (Answers will vary; it's likely he had heard or overheard their testimony; it was Paul who kept him from harming himself and assured him the prisoners were still there; also, he had just been through an earthquake—he may have had safety in mind!)
- How did the jailer respond to the message of the Lord?
  He and his household trusted Jesus and were baptized.

Neither Lydia nor the jailer was trained in evangelism techniques (much less trained at a seminary), but they were witnesses in their own communities. What did they do? *They told what had happened to them when they met Jesus.* When you testify in court, you tell what happened; when you testify about your relationship with God, you tell what happened. Whether you travel to the ends of the earth … to Samaria … to Judea … or stay close to home in Jerusalem, it's all about telling what happened. Trust the Holy Spirit to take care of the rest.

Challenge: "Afraid But Still a Witness" (10 minutes)

Remind students that at the beginning of class they responded to the statement, "I have been nervous or afraid when witnessing." If they agreed, they're in good company. John writes that after Jesus' crucifixion, the disciples were gathered one evening with the doors locked because they were so afraid of the Jews. That's when the risen Jesus appeared, showing His hands and His side. Point out this session's memory verse. "Jesus said to them again, 'Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you' " (John 20:21).

Ask students to share details regarding some of those instances when they were uncomfortable while witnessing. **Invite** students to role play one or two situations and offer each other suggestions on things to say or do when similar situations arise in the future. **Offer** feedback. Feel free to **share** instances from your own experience when you feel you said the right thing, and when you didn't. Don't forget to **assure** students that God can use even our "failures" for His purposes, and that while He is pleased when we witness, we are not ultimately responsible for the results. The Holy Spirit will take care of that!

Distribute Learner Worksheet 4-B. **Review** directions and allow five minutes for students to complete. **Assist** students with answers if necessary:

1. To whom was Jesus speaking when He said, "Peace to you!"?
   He was speaking to the disciples who were in hiding following His death and resurrection.
2. Why were they afraid?
   They were afraid of the Jews, who had already successfully demanded Jesus' death.
3. What did Jesus show them?
   He showed them His hands and His side; this was proof that He was the Jesus who had been killed and had been raised from the dead; this must have filled the disciples with renewed hope and confidence.
4. How did they react to seeing Jesus' proof?
   They rejoiced.

Don't let it end here.

With an outreach coordinator, prayer, and a class that is passionate to follow the Lord, you have the tools needed to continue on your mission journey. But first you should map out a plan for future projects. Fill in the blanks with ideas for possible projects for the year. Here is a framework of ideas you can start with:

Spring: Pick a place in your state/province—a camp or summer ministry—that needs help preparing for the summer.

Summer: Line up a weekend or week-long trip in your state/province. Maybe another church or community needs your help with a particular project.

Fall: Get into the community. Autumn is a perfect time to reach out to those in need. Perhaps there is a shelter that could use your class's help for Thanksgiving or another holiday event.

Winter: Time to plan for something big. If you're waiting for better weather, you've got at least a couple months to start planning for a spring or summer mission project. Maybe your class isn't ready to make that step, but the point is to present the opportunity and have them start thinking about it. Perhaps your class could box up a care package for a missionary family or maybe some Bibles for a people group that doesn't have access to the gospel. There are hundreds of possibilities.

Journaling Option

Ask students to write down details regarding some of those instances when they were uncomfortable while witnessing. Don't forget to **assure** students that God can use even our "failures" for His purposes, and that while He is pleased when we witness, we are not ultimately responsible for the results. The Holy Spirit will take care of that!

Show Optional Video to Wrap Up Acts 1:8 (Choose one)

Video: *Blessed to Be a Blessing* (4:44). In this music video, Scott Wesley Brown challenges us to remember our duty to share God's love and blessing with the world.

Video: *Seize Your Divine Moment* (3:10). This is a gripping testimony of a young man who was on the verge of committing suicide until God answered his plea for help and sent Isaiah to share Jesus with him.

Invite your class to visit *www.ActsOne8.com* to learn more about the Acts 1:8 Challenge. **Encourage** your class to listen to the Acts 1:8 podcasts.

Conclude with group prayer, in which you invite students to offer short prayers regarding missions and the sharing of the gospel throughout the world. Recite Acts 1:8 together at the conclusion of the prayer.

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible® Copyright © 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Holman Christian Standard Bible®, Holman CSB®, and HCSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.

Train Your Brain!

Memorize: Luke 24:47

Directions: It's important to memorize as much Scripture as you can. That comes easily for some, but others struggle. There are things you can do to improve your memorization skills. Use this sheet to practice memorizing last session's verse, Luke 24:47. Work through the exercise in each box, then repeat as necessary until you can repeat the verse without looking.

#1

Read the verse at the bottom of the page. Then, without looking, complete the missing letters:

"And r_____ for forgiveness of s_____ would be p_____ in His name to all the n_____, beginning at J_____."

#2

Cover the section above with a sheet of paper. Now, fill in the missing words:

"And _____ for forgiveness of _____ would be _____ in His name to all the _____, beginning at _____."

#3

Without sneaking a peek, write out the verse:

Memory Verse:
"And repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proaclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47).

Sent to the Mission Field … Next Door

Review this session's memory verse:

"Jesus said to them again, 'Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you' " (John 20:21).

Now that you have taken a look at the memory verse, look up John 20 and answer the following questions.

1. To whom was Jesus speaking when He said, "Peace to you!"?

2. Why were they afraid?

3. What did Jesus show to them?

4. How did they react to seeing Jesus' proof?

We are all sent to share the gospel (remember Acts 1:8?), and nearly all of us feel afraid or anxious at times when we feel that someone will not respond positively. In the following space, write out your thoughts to God regarding your feelings about sharing the gospel with those in your family or circle of friends. Know that He not only will read what you write, He will read what is in your heart. He listens, He understands, He cares, He empowers.

Dear God: