

CONTENTS

| | | |
|----------|---|----|
| 1 | What Happens to People Pleasers? <i>Galatians 1:1-24</i> | 5 |
| 2 | Is There One, and Only One, Gospel (Good Message)? <i>Galatians 2:1-21</i> | 13 |
| 3 | So . . . What about God's Rules Now? <i>Galatians 3:6-29; 5:18</i> | 21 |
| 4 | How Do We Live by the Spirit? <i>Galatians 3:1-5; 5:1-26; 6:8-10</i> | 29 |

Galatians 1:1-24

Learner
Session
Guide

Focus Statement

The radical good news of the gospel offers an exciting alternative to the trap of people pleasing.

Key Verse

Am I now seeking human approval, or God's approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ. **Galatians 1:10**

What Happens to People Pleasers?

Focus Image



Dog Rose thorns. Buckinghamshire, UK © age fotostock / SuperStock

GATHER

Check-in

Welcome to this study of Galatians. Thanks for taking your valuable time to be here. Take this time to connect or reconnect with others in your group.

Pray

Living Spirit of Jesus, “people pleasing” has caused a great deal of complexity in our lives—some of it good, some of it not so good. For some, or even many of us, the last 24 hours has been a frantic rush to meet all expectations. Give us quiet and grace so that we can be still and know that you are God of our lives. Amen.

Focus Activity

Take a look at the Focus Image. Have you ever scraped your hand when reaching for a rose or fruit such as raspberries or blackberries? Imagine what it would be like to be surrounded by such thorny bushes and not be able to get out. Does your life ever feel like that? Make a list of things (good or bad) that can make us feel surrounded, or even trapped, in life.

SESSION ONE

Notes

Cities of Galatia:

Galatia was a province in what is modern-day Turkey. The location of the cities mentioned in 1:2 are not certain. Some suggest the cities were in northern Galatia, settled by ethnic Galatians of Celtic origin. Others believe Paul is addressing the cities in the Roman province of Galatia, such as Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Paul visited these cities during his missionary journey. There were two main churches at the time Galatians was written: one in Jerusalem, and one in Antioch, near the northeast corner of the Mediterranean Sea. Paul's evangelistic work was based out of Antioch.

Open Scripture

Read Galatians 1:1-24.

- What words or phrases stood out as you listened to the reading?

- What questions were raised for you?

- What did the reading tell you about Paul's temperament and personality?

Join the Conversation

Historical Context

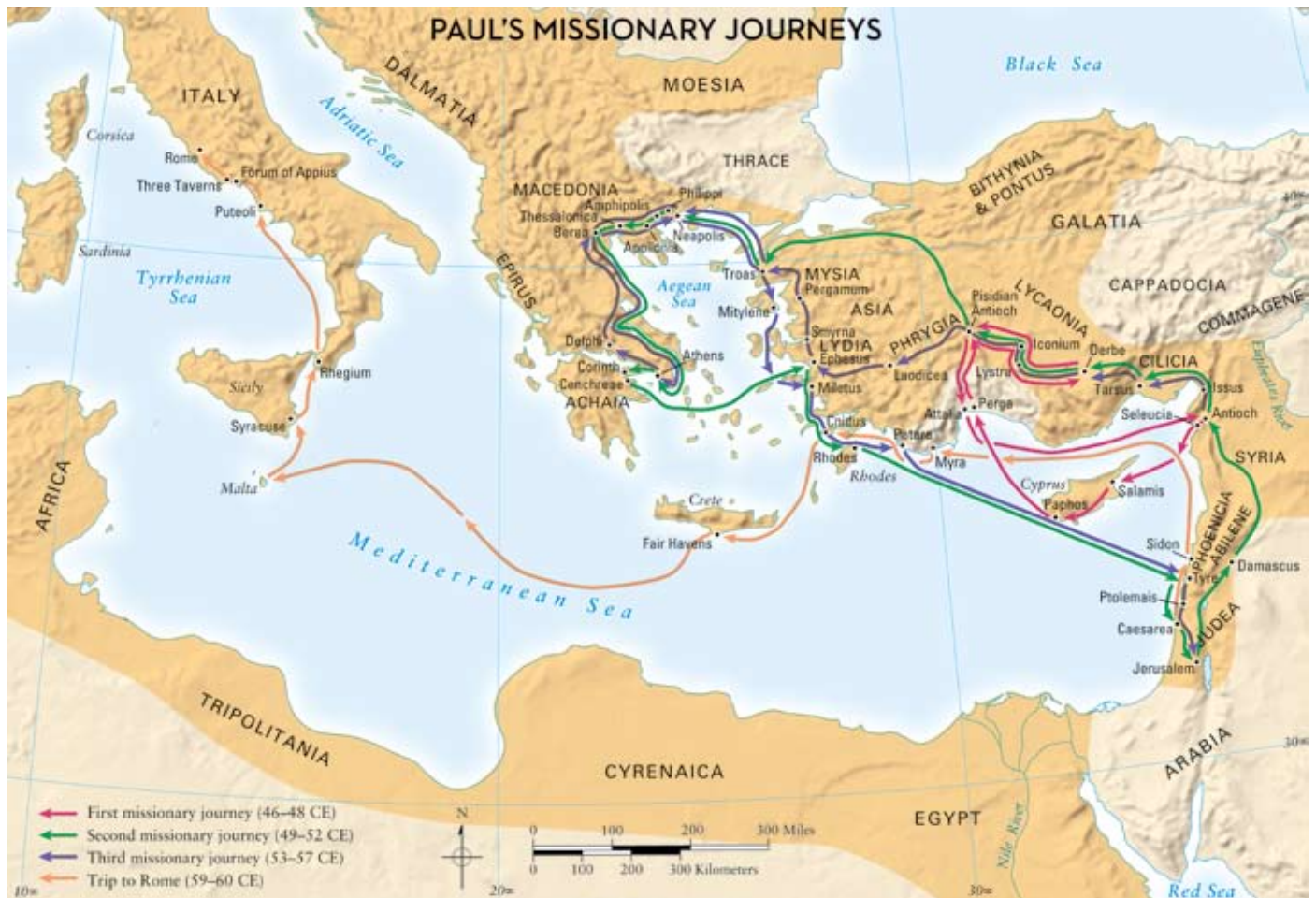
1. Take a moment to look at the map on p. 7 and locate the following places mentioned in Galatians 1:

| | |
|---------|-----------|
| Galatia | Jerusalem |
| Arabia | Damascus |
| Syria | Cilicia |
| Judea | |

2. Paul was Jewish by birth and trained as a teacher of Jewish faith. How does he describe his life in Judaism (1:13-14)? Even so, what did God call him to do (1:15-16)?

3. At the time Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians, the Christian movement was less than one generation old. Think back 15 to 20 years ago from today. What year would it be? Not so long ago, is it? That's roughly the time span from Jesus' ascension to the penning of Galatians.

Look at the following statements that summarize the situation in the culture and the early church when Paul wrote to the Galatians. Then reflect on the questions that follow the statements.



© Augsburg Fortress

- The Romans controlled all of the territory mentioned in the letter to the Galatians.
- Paul was a Roman citizen. He was from privileged stock.
- In the eastern part of the Roman Empire, the setting for Galatians, Greek rather than Latin (the language of the West and Rome) was the common tongue for commerce and learning.
- Within this Greek-speaking part of the Roman Empire, there was a sizeable Jewish minority. Paul was a Greek-speaking Jew.
- This Judaism was unlike contemporary Judaism, as the temple and its business were still in full swing. The temple was very much the beating heart of the Jewish faith system.
- These Jews preserved their identity by the ritual of circumcising males, eating kosher food, and attending national holiday celebrations.

Notes

SESSION ONE



Notes

- Most of the earliest Christians were observant Jews.
- At the time of the writing of Galatians, little or perhaps none of the New Testament had been written! Paul's scriptures were the Jewish Scriptures (what we call the Old Testament). There were both Hebrew and Greek versions. Paul, from his quotes, obviously preferred the Greek version.
- At the time of the writing of Galatians, it was unclear as to how Gentiles (non-Jews) could become followers of Jesus.
- Christians had not developed much theological clarity, and lots of issues that feel "settled" to us (the Trinity, the creeds, leadership roles) were totally open questions at the time.

Based on the statements above, match the following items:

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| _____ Political and military authority | a. GREEKS |
| _____ Ethnic identity of most early Christians | b. JEWS |
| _____ Culture that controlled commerce, language, and learning | c. GALATIANS |
| _____ Non-Jews living in what is now modern Turkey | d. ROMANS |

Scan Galatians 1:1-24 again. How does the list above shed light on the chapter?

4. Imagine that there are no Christians on earth. People had heard about Jesus from history class, but the movement never took off. Imagine that one prominent woman, this year, and in your community, had a profound, out-of-nowhere, personal experience of the risen Christ. Let's say she lays hands on folks and prays over people, and they have similar transformative experiences. A community forms to promote the grace and peace they feel.

Members of this community have no access to creeds, hymns, clergy or other leaders, doctrines, liturgy, or sacraments.

- What do you think these communities would look like?
- What would their "life together" be like?
- How would they pass their "faith experience" to the next generation?

Literary Context

1. Paul used letters to communicate to various churches and individuals. What part of chapter 1 sounds like a letter?
2. Paul quickly gets to the point of his message. What seems to be the issue?
3. What do you make of Paul's questions in 1:10?
4. Letters like Galatians are called "polemic" ("warlike") letters. It is arguably the most radical, and in some ways, most anti-religious book in the Bible. People only write polemic letters if they have enemies.
 - Are you able to tell whom Paul might be battling or arguing against?
 - From where has Paul "received" his gospel message?
5. How do dramatic situations often give rise to writing? Name a time when you've had a challenging situation that required a written response on your part.

Lutheran Context

1. Martin Luther was a Roman Catholic monk who lived in the early 1500s in Germany. His work helped start the Protestant Reformation. Lutheran churches trace their heritage to the movement he started. Like Paul, Luther wrote a number of polemic letters to address opponents and what he believed to be false teachings. Like Paul, he also faced opposition from many directions. Have a look at the key verse, Galatians 1:10.
 - What do you, as an individual, and the whole group, know about Martin Luther?
 - In what way does Galatians 1:10 remind you of Luther's temperament?
 - From what you know about Paul, how are he and Luther similar in temperament?
2. If someone asked you what Lutheranism or being Lutheran is about, what would you say? Is it about following rules and traditions, or is it about something else? Why? Try to give some concrete examples.
3. A key Lutheran principle for interpreting Scripture is an understanding of law and gospel. Based on Galatians 1, what is Paul saying about the gospel? Does he say anything about the law, especially the religious laws and practices that had been part of his Jewish heritage?



Notes

 A large, empty, rounded rectangular box with a thin orange border, intended for taking notes.



Notes

A large, empty, rounded rectangular box with a thin orange border, intended for taking notes during the session.

Devotional Context

1. Stay with the key verse, Galatians 1:10. What are the pros and cons of people pleasing? Do you think in today's efficient and complex society that meeting the expectations of others has gotten easier or harder over the last 100 years? Why?

2. Look back at the Focus Image. Roses are beautiful, but their stems are filled with thorns. Think of the encroachment of (good and bad) expectations upon you as a thorny thicket of rose bushes surrounding you.

- What is enticing about living according to a set of expectations?
- How do expectations become thorny?

3. Of the following list of motivations, which is most responsible for "growing the rose bush" and feeding our desire to please everyone?

- Fear
- Habit
- Not really knowing God or what God wants
- Lack of love for ourselves
- Hopes of being more popular
- Not having a true purpose or vision for our lives
- Other

4. Draw a series of simple diagrams.

- a. What life looks like when it is surrounded by expectations (label the expectations if you wish)
 - b. What life looks like when it is based on religious duty or obedience to law
 - c. What life looks like when it is based on a living, grace-filled relationship with God
- Which diagram best describes your situation? Why?
 - Which diagram provides the best means for loving our neighbor? Why?

Wrap-up

1. What surprised you about your time together? What happened that you were not expecting?

2. How might you live differently tomorrow with the insights you gained today?

Pray

Spirit of Jesus, you stand knocking at the door of our lives, and you want to lead us out of the thorny bushes of law and expectations. You have abundant love and grace for us right now, if we would but abide with you long enough to enjoy it. Help us to live free of destructive people pleasing, that we might fully be in the moment with others, with our work, and with you. Give us, right now, the grace and peace that Paul found. Amen.

Extending the Conversation**Homework**

1. Read the next session's Bible passage: Galatians 2:1-21.
2. In a journal, reflect on Galatians 1:10. What does it mean for you to be a servant of Christ?
3. In a journal, jot down some thoughts about how you feel about different religions. Is there only one truth, or are there many?

Enrichment

1. Watch the movie *Forrest Gump* (Paramount, 1994). Is Forrest a people pleaser? Why or why not? Forrest doesn't seem to be hemmed in by any thorny bushes. How does this allow him to have three exceptionally close relationships? How can he be very effective at everything he does, despite low intelligence?
2. Describe the concept of the "rose bush" of compound expectations to someone you know who doesn't go to church. See if that person can relate to it. What kind of language could you use to describe the alternative to the rose bush, the presence of the living God? How could you use language that would not "put off" the person you are talking to?

For Further Reading

Available at augsburgfortress.org:

The Irony of Galatians: Paul's Letter in First-Century Context by Mark Nanos. The author challenges the previously dominant views of Paul as rejecting his Jewish heritage and the law. Nanos instead demonstrates the implications of an intra-Jewish reading. He explores the issues of purity; insiders/outside; the character of the gospel; the relationship between groups of Christ-followers in Jerusalem, Antioch, and Galatia; and evil-eye accusations.



Notes

 A large, empty, rounded rectangular box with a thin orange border, intended for taking notes.

SESSION ONE



Notes

A large, empty, rounded rectangular box with a thin orange border, intended for taking notes.

Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians by N. T. Wright. A clear exploration of the text by a world-renowned New Testament scholar.

Galatians, Philipians, Augsburg New Testament Commentary, by Donald Juel, John Koenig, and Edgar Krentz. Leading Lutheran scholars discuss two of Paul's letters.

Lutheran Study Bible, Augsburg Fortress, 2009. David Tiede is the author of notes and introduction to Galatians.