



NAC-USA
DEVELOPMENT
INSTITUTE

Midweek Experience Curriculum

Baptism as profession | Peter's profession | Stephen's profession | Paul's profession

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*well pleased.” Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age. God chose baptism as the way to launch Jesus into His public ministry. Matthew’s account goes further in giving the impression that baptism was a requirement that answers God’s righteousness as Jesus insists that John baptize him: Matthew 3:13-15 - *Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, “I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?” But Jesus answered and said to him, “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”**

Fast forward to the completion of Jesus’ time on earth and we find baptism playing a prominent role in the Great Commission. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus said “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, baptism was used to introduce Him to the world, and at the end of His ministry, it was the task that Jesus left His disciples with. It’s safe to conclude that baptism is very important to our Heavenly Father.

Holy Baptism with water is the first and fundamental act of grace bestowed on a human being who believes in Jesus Christ (Catechism 8.1). The prerequisite is the believer’s profession of faith in Jesus Christ and His gospel (Catechism 8.1.5). In the book of Acts, when the people believed, they were baptized. Following a profession of faith, Baptism incorporates a believer into Christ’s activity of redemption.

In Baptism, a real and fundamental change occurs in a believer’s relationship with God, thus changing their life, which can now proceed in Christ. In Romans 3:21-24 it says that *“But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe...”* It goes on to say that all have fallen short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by His grace. The gift to mankind is grace. Jesus takes our sin and gives us His righteousness. The impact of this on believers should be spectacular. Without being slaves to sin, all are free to live intentionally for Him. This makes the Baptism a visible expression that can be an incredible witness for those that realize its occurrence.

Part of being a believer is sharing in the death of Christ and in the birth of His new life through Baptism. Just as Christ died on the cross for the sins of mankind, so the baptized are to be “dead indeed to sin” by renouncing it (Catechism 8.1.6) In Romans 6:1-3 (NIV), Paul writes the following: Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into

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3.4.8.2 Jesus Christ is without sin. Nonetheless, He allowed Himself to be baptized by John the Baptist and to be counted among the sinners (2 Corinthians 5: 21). This act of baptism—which was an expression of repentance—makes it clear that Jesus Christ abased Himself and subjected Himself to the same act that must be performed on every sinner. Already here it is clear that Jesus Christ, who is without sin, took the sins of others upon Himself and ultimately opened the way to righteousness before God.

8.1 Holy Baptism with water is the first and fundamental act of grace of the triune God bestowed on a human being who believes in Jesus Christ. Through it, original sin is washed away and the believer is led out of his position of remoteness from God. Nevertheless, his inclination to sin (concupiscence) remains.

8.1.6 Through Holy Baptism with water, a person who believes in Jesus Christ and professes Him is incorporated into the church of Christ and thereby has fellowship with Jesus Christ. Holy Baptism with water performed in the name of the Trinity is a binding element among Christians.

Bible Reference

Galatians 3:26-29

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Baptism is an act of God that signifies the end of an old life of remoteness from God and the beginning of a new life in Christ.

By believing in Jesus and being baptized, you take your place in the great love story of salvation. God loves mankind, and He has a great desire to be united with every person for all eternity, including you. Likewise, Jesus professed this love for mankind when He took our sins to the cross. Take a few minutes to reflect on your baptism or your confirmation. Recall how you've professed your faith since then.

Discussion Questions:

1. When was the last time you shared why you have chosen to believe in Jesus Christ? What would you share today if you were asked?

2. Describe the significance of renouncing the Devil and surrendering your life to God. The definition of "renounce" is to give up or put aside voluntarily. Do you see the influence of the Devil in your life? How can you fight against and give him up?

3. What can be learned from the story of Jesus' baptism? How does knowing that Jesus was baptized effect your relationship with Him?

4. Why is baptism important to our Heavenly Father? Jesus' baptism sent a message. What message does our baptism send to our God and to those who witness it?

Session 2: Peter's profession

Welcome back. You might remember that last week we discussed baptism as a way of professing our faith to others. Professing Jesus Christ in words and actions is profoundly apostolic. If you doubt that statement, ask yourself this question: What would the world know of Jesus Christ today without the testimony of the first apostles and those who came to believe in Christ because of their profession?

But when examining this statement, we often view it from our perspective 2,000 years later. We have the benefit of knowing how the story ends as we look at the various episodes that made up a totally new experience for the apostles.

Over the next 3 weeks, let's delve into the profession of Peter, Stephen and Paul, but let's try and see it through their eyes as they struggle to obey the Great Commission and proclaim the Gospel after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Let's remember His last words to them from Matthew 28: 16-20 – *Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.*

We have to pause and remember that while they had received this incredible commission from Jesus, they had no visible signs of authority. Today we know what apostles are and do, and why they do what they do. But at that moment, there were no witnesses of Christ's directive, nor of the authority that He left with them to lead His church. Therefore, their profession of Him had to also contain a certain self-profession of their role. To believe the apostles' report of Christ's life, death and resurrection, the credibility of the messenger had to be established.

Likewise, the apostles did not, at this moment, possess all the knowledge that they would need to lead the church. Remember these words that Jesus said to them at the Last Supper just prior to His death in John 16: 12-13 – *I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.*

Going Deeper

Holman Bible Commentary: Peter's Sermon (2:14–41)

Peter's Pentecost sermon is the first of the major Acts "speeches." It is built around a number of Old Testament texts, through which Peter interpreted the significance of the Pentecost miracle to the Jewish crowd. He probably spoke in western Aramaic, the language of Palestine in that day. Peter's sermon falls into three parts. 1. Scriptural Proof Concerning the Pentecost Experience (2:14–21). Peter began his sermon by quoting Joel 2:28–32, a prophecy which spoke of God's outpouring of the Spirit on all His people. Joel depicted this as a sign of the last days, when God would visit His people in a special way. Peter declared that Joel's prophecy was fulfilled in the Spirit's descent at Pentecost. The days of the Messiah had arrived. 2. Scriptural Proof Concerning Christ's Messiahship (2:22–36). Peter now needed to convince the Jewish crowd that Jesus was God's promised Messiah. This he sought to do by proving that the Messiah must die and rise again, that the resurrection was a sign of the Messiah. He began by introducing them to Jesus, with emphasis on His death and resurrection. Then he quoted Psalm 16:8–11 to prove that the Messiah, a descendant of David, would conquer death, just as Jesus had done in His resurrection. Finally, he quoted Psalm 110:1 as an Old Testament text that also points to the resurrection and exaltation of the Messiah. 3. Invitation and Response (2:37–41). Having set forth Jesus as their Messiah, Peter now called on his Jewish audience to repent and be baptized, and they would receive the same Spirit that they had just witnessed so powerfully. The response was also miraculous. Three thousand were added to the Christian community that day.

with minimal standing before the council, yet through the Holy Spirit he professes with authority the power of Jesus' name to heal.

Peter similarly professes to Cornelius' household, but in order to do so, he first must change his current understanding of God's will regarding the gentiles. God's spirit reveals a new understanding of the Gospel and then prompts him to profess it; firstly to Cornelius and his household and then to the congregation back in Jerusalem. This is another work of an apostle; to proclaim the will of God as revealed by the Holy Spirit as our understanding continues to evolve. Credibility and belief in the authority of the messenger are required here, too.

Let's conclude our session by understanding that many early Jewish converts to Christianity were driven out of Jerusalem by persecution. We will investigate this further in the next 2 sessions by examining the courage of Deacon Stephen and the conversion of Saul to the Apostle Paul. Both were exemplary in their own way in professing Christ.

Discussion Questions:

1. What would the world know of Jesus Christ today without the testimony of the first apostles and those who came to believe in Christ because of their profession?

2. What credibility do you have as a messenger/disciple of Christ? What can you do to gain credibility?

3. Do you think our church is apostolic in the same way as was the early church? Yes, we have living apostles whose primary task is to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus, but are we making disciples who confess His name? Are you and I professing the power of His Gospel at work, school, and in our neighborhoods?

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7.6.3 The self-conception of the Apostles

The Apostles have received their ministry and commission from Jesus Christ. They work in accordance with the will of their Sender and are completely dependent upon Him. In accordance with the example of Jesus, the Apostles are servants of all (John 13: 15). They do not have dominion over the faith of the congregations, but are fellow workers for their joy (2 Corinthians 1: 24). This means that, through the activity of the Apostles, believers are to develop a thankful and joyful fundamental attitude toward God. When necessary, admonitions and orders also serve this purpose (James 1: 21). The Apostles feel themselves obliged to serve as examples to the church and lead them in following Christ (1 Corinthians 11: 1).

7.6.5 The Apostles in the church of Jesus Christ

The objective of the Apostles' work is to edify the Lord's work of redemption and lead it to its completion. The fellowship of the Apostles with the believers is characterized by warm care and loving understanding. The apostolate has been given for the entire church of Christ. Its task is to offer salvation in Jesus Christ to human beings (Acts 13: 47). Salvation is only possible through the Son of God (Acts 4: 12). Until the return of Christ, salvation is imparted through the Apostles in word and sacrament, that is to say through the preaching of the gospel, the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins, baptism with water and Holy Spirit, and through Holy Communion.

4. Have you considered that it is your responsibility to make disciples, as a Christian? Have you ever done this before? What first steps could you take in making disciples?

5. Can you relate to Peter when he was afraid to profess Christ during His crucifixion? Share a time when you were afraid to profess your faith.

6. How can you respond to people who don't want to hear about Jesus?

CHALLENGE: Tell someone in church on Sunday about Jesus and what He means to you.

Session 3: Stephen's profession

Hello again. Last week we discussed courage as an aspect of profession in regards to the Apostle Peter. This week we're going to look at another courageous figure in Acts: Stephen.

Stephen was named among the managers of food distribution in the early church. Social ostracism existed long before violent persecution broke out against Christians. Jews who accepted Jesus as the Messiah were usually cut off from their families. As a result, the believers depended on each other for support. The sharing of resources was both a practical and a necessary mark of the early church. Eventually, the number of believers made it necessary to organize the sharing. But people were being overlooked, and there were complaints. The congregation wanted the apostles to take care of administrative and soul care tasks. However, the apostles' calling was to preach the Word of God, so others had to take on the responsibility. Those chosen to help manage were chosen for their integrity, wisdom, and sensitivity to God. These issues that arose have interesting parallels to today. Whether it's an apostle, the rector, or another minister, sometimes our expectations as members are too high. Each ministry has a certain purpose to fulfill, and each person has been given gifts by God to fulfill their calling. How can we avoid overwhelming expectations in our congregations? What is God asking you to contribute to the church?

Once you've realized your calling, it might seem too much to bear. Deacon Stephen was given great responsibility in the church, but he never shied away from it because he had courage. As it says in Acts 6:3-5, Stephen was "a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit." His faith in Christ and his courage to stand up for God contributed to his solid character.

Even when adversity came from the Synagogue of the Freedmen, who disagreed with Stephen, they weren't able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. (Acts 6:8-10 NKJV). People listened to Stephen because he allowed the Holy Spirit to transform his character.

If we want to be courageous in our lives we need to start on the inside, with our character. There are many things in our lives that we can't choose or change, but we can change our character. How do you react to difficult situations? Your character is formed by the choices you make. How can you choose to let the Holy Spirit lead your actions?

Let's take for example Stephen's actions when false witnesses bring him to trial. Instead of defending himself, Stephen tells his accusers the history of the Israelites; of God's promises and faithfulness to them,

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3.4.6.3 Son of Man

In Daniel 7: 13–14, the term “Son of Man” is used to denote a heavenly being who is not part of the human race. At the time of Jesus, devout Jews awaited the coming of the “Son of Man”, to whom God was to commit dominion over the world. According to John 3:13, the Lord revealed Himself as the Son of Man: “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man.” As such, He has the authority to forgive sins (Matthew 9: 6), is Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12: 8), and has come “to seek and save that which was lost” (Luke 19: 10)

Finally, the Lord announced the suffering (Matthew 17: 12), sacrificial death (Matthew 12: 40; 20: 28), and resurrection of the Son of Man (Matthew 17: 9). Whenever Jesus spoke about the Son of Man, He was referring to Himself.

Stephen also attested to the divinity of the Son of Man: “I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” (Acts 7: 56). Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, is now back in the place from which He came (John 16: 28).

Bible References

Acts 6:3 - 8:2

Acts 11:19

Acts 22:20

Matthew 5:11

Psalms 31:5 (a reference to what he said when he was being stoned)

2. Have you ever felt overwhelmed by what God calls you to do? Where can you find courage to persist?

3. There are many things in our lives that we can't choose or change, but we can change our character. How do you react to difficult situations? Your character is formed by the choices you make. How can you choose to let the Holy Spirit lead your actions?

4. In adverse circumstances, do we turn to the Scripture to remember God's faithfulness and promises to us?

5. How can you increase your knowledge of Scripture? Why is it so hard to commit to studying scripture? How can you overcome these barriers?

6. Think about your reaction the last time things got tough or you faced a challenge. Were you a reflection of Christ? Did your actions profess His teachings?

Going Deeper

NKJV Life Application Study Bible

Stephen was a powerful speaker. When confronted in the temple by various antagonistic groups, Stephen's logic in responding was convincing. This is clear from the defense he made before the council. He presented a summary of the Jews' own history and made powerful applications that stung his listeners. During his defense Stephen must have known he was speaking his own death sentence. Members of the council could not stand to have their evil motives exposed. They stoned him to death while he prayed for their forgiveness. His final words show how much like Jesus he had become in a short time. His death had a lasting impact on young Saul (Paul) of Tarsus, who would move from being a violent persecutor of Christians to being one of the greatest champions of the Gospel the church has known. Lessons from life: Striving for excellence in small assignments prepares one for greater responsibilities; real understanding of God always leads to practical and compassionate actions towards people

7. How do we pick our moments of greatest impact? How do we know when to rise to the occasion? What could your profession lead to?

8. How have you been courageous in your profession of Jesus?

Session 4: Paul's profession

Continuing our discussion of the first apostolic professors of the Gospel, let's talk about Paul. He was considered to be the greatest missionary of the first church, but his profession was largely directed to the gentiles.

A few facts about Paul: he planted numerous congregations in Asia Minor; his writings provide us with some of the clearest substantiation and understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in scripture; and he had a gift to make it understandable to people of all backgrounds and

Going Deeper

From the Holman Bible Dictionary:

More importantly, Paul was born a Roman citizen. Many speculate that Paul's father or grandfather was honored with citizenship because of some special service rendered to a military proconsul. However, early Christian tradition preserved by Jerome and Photius stated that Paul's parents had been carried as prisoners of war from Gischala to Tarsus, enslaved to a Roman citizen, then freed and granted citizenship. Regardless of how Paul's parents received their citizenship, the book of Acts states three times (Acts 16, Acts 22, Acts 23) that he possessed it, and his citizenship was accompanied by important rights that would benefit him in his missionary labors. The Roman citizen had the right of appeal after a trial, exemption from imperial service, right to choose between a local or Roman trial, and protection from degrading forms of punishment like scourging. Paul might have carried a wax tablet that functioned as a birth certificate of citizenship in order to prove his Roman citizenship. However, most people who claimed citizenship were trusted since the penalty for impersonating a Roman citizen was death.

and conviction as seen in the examples of Peter, Stephen, and Paul. Regardless of our past, it's never too late to make a change in our life and become a living testimony of Jesus Christ.

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you think it's possible to be close to Jesus and not have that relationship change your life? Why?

2. What can we learn from Paul and Stephen in regards to professing during our struggles? How can you apply this to your next difficult situation? Find a Bible verse to carry with you in these struggles.

3. Only with time can they see the larger scope of God's plan and results of their testimony and faith in the Gospel. What lessons can we learn from this? Does God have a bigger plan in the works when we see only short term disappointments?

4. Is your faith story interconnected with others' faith stories? How does this point to God's bigger plan for His children?

5. PROFESS, prŏ-fes', PROFESSION, prŏ-fesh'un:

- a. to own before
- b. to put before
- c. to speak or say together in common
- d. to confess publicly

Look at these four definitions. How did Peter, Stephen and Paul profess in these ways? What does your life profess based on these definitions?

6. Read James 2:20-24. James is teaching that an empty profession without the spiritual life to back it up is absolutely worthless in God's eyes (2:20). He goes on to illustrate that point by citing Abraham and his offering up of Isaac as an illustration of genuine faith (2:21–24). A man may profess piety, but have no faith or submission in his heart, even as Judas demonstrated (Matt. 10:4; 26:14; Mark 3:19; 14:10)

Consider your profession being more than your words. Look back on today – did your actions profess Christ, as well as your words?

CHALLENGE: Tell someone that doesn't go to your church about Jesus and what He means to you.