

# SESSION 9.5 DECISION POINT

## WATCH VIDEO



Tip

Tell them something you learned from this session that you didn't know before.



2 MIN

## EXERCISE:

Know It. Think About It. Live It.

TIP

Ask someone to read aloud the Bible passage highlighted in the section **KNOW IT. THINK ABOUT IT. LIVE IT.** Ask another student to read the text from the workbook. [WB216]

Discuss with the class how they think they could share their talents with the Church to make it better for everyone.



5 MIN

FOR US MEN AND FOR OUR SALVATION HE CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN, AND BY THE HOLY SPIRIT WAS INCARNATE OF THE VIRGIN MARY, AND BECAME MAN. FOR OUR SAKE, HE WAS CRUCIFIED UNDER PONTIUS PILATE.

### WHEN YOU DON'T SHOW UP, SOMETHING IS MISSING.

Romans 12:5

KNOW IT: We are one body.

THINK ABOUT IT: We are all in this together. It is not every man and every woman for him- or herself.

LIVE IT: What gifts has God given you to contribute to the rest of the body? How do you need the rest of the Church to help you grow?

### 9. THE CHURCH

What is your image of the Church? When you think about the Church, what comes to mind? The building. The Pope. St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Your parish. A place to pray. A place of healing. A community.

I like to think of the Catholic Church as a big family—a family of faith, the biggest family in the world. There are more than 1.2 billion Catholics in the world, and more than eighty million Catholics in the United States alone. That's a big family!

This family—the Church—is made up of people like you and me. We are pilgrims on a journey together. When we are at our best, we form dynamic communities. People need community. We need people to do life with, others who can encourage and challenge us. We need others to live for so we don't get swallowed up by our own selfishness.

Paul tells us in Romans 12:5 that we are all one body. The right hand cannot leave the body. It needs the body and the body needs it. Without the body, it is useless. In the same way, we need each other.

We need the Church—and the Church needs us.

We are the Church. So when you don't show up, something is missing. When you don't show up, the Church can't fulfill its mission. So I hope you will continue to show up or start showing up. And more than just showing up, I hope you will get involved by sharing your talents, your energy, and your compassion with your spiritual family—the Church.

### 9.1 THE FIRST CHRISTIANS & THE EARLY CHURCH

On any Sunday you can just wander into your local church for Mass, but the first Christians didn't have it so easy. The early Christians were persecuted by both the Jews and the Roman Empire. From the very beginning, Christians have been discriminated against, tortured, and murdered for their faith. You may be tempted to think that this is all behind us now, but that would be a mistake. This is still happening in many parts of the world today. Google "persecution of Christians today" and what you discover will surprise and sadden you.

That's right. More than two thousand years later, Christians are still being beaten and murdered because of their faith. And in modern nations, like America, that are becoming increasingly secular, public policy is being used to discriminate against Christians more with every passing day.

Life for the first Christians was not easy, so why were so many people attracted to their way of life?

The ancient world was brutal, cold, and impersonal. By contrast, Christianity was warm, caring, and deeply personal. The first Christians modeled a more humane, compassionate, noble, and loving way of life—and it was phenomenally attractive. This is why people were joining them a thousand at a time, even though joining meant risking their lives.

In the first century the Church was organized around *agape* love. What is *agape* love?

*Agape* love is a choice we make to love another person regardless of whether he leans us back or not. It means that you choose to love someone even if he is your enemy. *Agape* love is not based on emotion in any way. In fact, it may at times be contrary to every emotion you have. It is a choice, an act of the will. *Agape* love is unconditional love. It is the love that sets aside self-interest. It is the love that Jesus modeled for us and calls us to.

This kind of love was profound, revolutionary, countercultural, and attractive two thousand years ago, and it is profound, revolutionary, countercultural, and attractive today. In some way the Church has lost this, and we need to get this *agape* love back at the center of our communities. The Church needs your help to do that.

Life for the early Christians was not easy, and life for a modern Christian is not easy. It's difficult to love people who ridicule or hurt you. It's difficult to be discriminated against because of your beliefs. It's difficult to stand up for objective truth in a society that thinks truth is whatever the majority decides.

It's difficult to be a good Christian. But that shouldn't be a surprise. Jesus didn't say, "Follow me and you will have a comfortable life." He didn't teach, "Follow me and I will make things easy for you so you never have to worry about anything." No, he didn't mind his words; he made it very clear from the very beginning: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Matthew 6:24) He said, however, offer this path as a way to fullness of life now and for eternity—and promise to send us the Holy Spirit to guide, encourage, and inspire us.

The world needs more *agape* love. This is the love Jesus calls us to. Just as the ancient world of the first Christians was brutal, cold, distant, impersonal, and ruled by self-interest, so too is the modern world. As modern society abandons Christianity, the world becomes more and more like it was before the birth of Christianity. All around us there

Matthew 6:24

KNOW IT: Deny yourself. Take up your cross. Follow Jesus.

THINK ABOUT IT: Believe it or not, this is the path to the happiness you have been seeking your whole life.

LIVE IT: Find three small ways to deny yourself today.

WHAT IS AN ANNOYING CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION?

The act of harassing, annoying, bullying, torturing, excluding, or killing someone because he or she is Christian.



What would it have been like to be at Mary's side during those first days of the Church?

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THE CHURCH

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THE CHURCH

## STEP 4 JOURNAL



7 MIN

**INSTRUCTIONS:** It's time to journal. This time is sacred; remind them of that. Invite your class to open up to page 239 and take a few minutes in silence to journal their answers to those questions.

### TIP

Lead by example. The questions being posed throughout these sessions are life's biggest questions. Take some time to grapple with them. Let the candidates know that you are still grappling with them . . . but the grappling is worth it.

## STEP 5 ANNOUNCEMENTS



3 MIN

### Tip

Thank them for coming.

Remind them you are praying for them. Ask them if there is anything in particular they want you to pray for this week.

Encourage them to watch the short films again during the week online or on the app.



# STEP 6

# CLOSING PRAYER

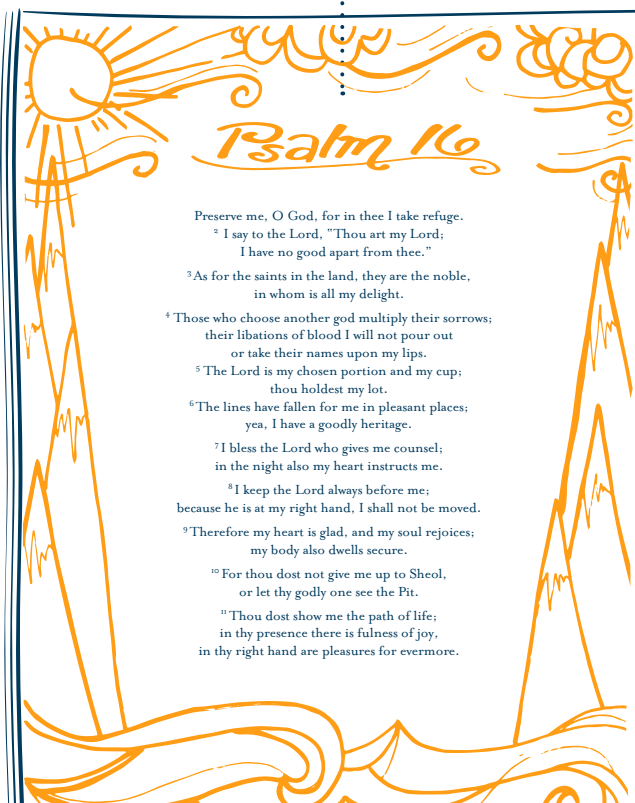


Before you read the Psalm today, encourage your class to sit still and quiet for a couple of minutes and just listen to whatever God is saying to them.

Close with a spontaneous prayer inviting God, thanking him for giving us the Church, and asking him to help us appreciate it more with every passing day.



4 MIN



Preserve me, O God, for in thee I take refuge.

<sup>2</sup> I say to the Lord, "Thou art my Lord;  
I have no good apart from thee."

<sup>3</sup> As for the saints in the land, they are the noble,  
in whom is all my delight.

<sup>4</sup> Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows;  
their libations of blood I will not pour out  
or take their names upon my lips.

<sup>5</sup> The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup;  
thou holdest my lot.

<sup>6</sup> The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;  
yea, I have a goodly heritage.

<sup>7</sup> I bless the Lord who gives me counsel;  
in the night also my heart instructs me.

<sup>8</sup> I keep the Lord always before me;  
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

<sup>9</sup> Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;  
my body also dwells secure.

<sup>10</sup> For thou dost not give me up to Sheol,  
or let thy godly one see the Pit.

<sup>11</sup> Thou dost show me the path of life;  
in thy presence there is fulness of joy,  
in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore.

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THE CHURCH



THE CHURCH

