



## **Rebuild the Children of God: Shepherd the Flock** **Acts 15:15-18**

### **Background for Leader**

Find a quiet space to read the scripture. Be sure to have pen and paper in hand. After getting still and comfortable, slowly read the text out loud. If it is familiar to you, try to imagine that it is not. After reading the text, ask God to speak to you through this scripture revealing all that God would have you to hear in it. Take your paper and make a list of words that stand out in your memory from your reading. Read the scripture again and end by thanking God for speaking to you through the Living Word.

Take a moment to pray for the women for whom you will facilitate discussion. Name their names if you know them.

**Notes from Writer** (*Please be sure you have done the above personal study and prayer before reading the following*):

The following personal thoughts of the writer are provided to aid you in leading this Bible study. Please be sure to follow your own personal study to know where the Holy Spirit is guiding you and the group. Use these thoughts, if needed, as further discussion material.

This passage can be a little confusing because it is a quote of another scripture from the Old Testament. Here, James is quoting Amos 9:11-12. (If you have not already read this, please do.) He pulls in the words of the prophet to make clear the point that God has always planned for the Gentiles to be included. It isn't a new plan that was just thought up, God has "been making these things known from long ago" (v. 17-18).

Because it is prophetic writing, at first glimpse it may present difficulty in getting to the point of the writer. However, if we delve a little deeper (and read a few notes from the *HarperCollins Study Bible*), we quickly realize that what we are reading about is our very salvation. We are a fallen people. Sin entered into our world and it brought the house down with it. We need salvation, we need a Savior. Only God can provide that and in this scripture we see that God promises to come in and rebuild our fallen lives for us.

When thinking about Mission/Service/Outreach, it is especially important to pay close attention to the first portion of verse 17, "so that all other peoples may seek the Lord – even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called." ALL OTHER PEOPLES, no one is left out, not even the Gentiles. That is to say, in our day and age, even those with whom we are very uncomfortable, even those of whom we are very afraid, even those by whom we are disgusted, we are to reach out as dwellings of God on this earth to ALL of them and help them to rebuild their lives as well.

All of the people of earth are children of God. If we fail to see a child of God when we look into any face, then we have failed as Shepherds of God's Flock. When we allow our broken lives to be rebuilt and stand tall before the world - going from having been rebuilt to working with God to rebuild others, we are Glorifying the Lamb in all that we do.

## A Note to the Leader

Choose from the following activities as time and your desired focus permits. You may have had insights come to you through your personal study (above) which will help in choosing activities or which may even lead you to create new ones. Use your personal study and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in making these decisions and aiding you in facilitating discussion among the group.

As the facilitator, be sure to practice good listening skills, especially during *Searching the Word*. Through your personal study and then listening to the group's discussion, be prepared to connect the activities back to scripture and focus on the highlights which seem to be coming up again and again.

Materials Needed: The game Jenga, pens, paper, Bibles, newsprint or a dry erase board with markers, copies of "They'll Know We are Christians by Our Love" for each participant. *(Note: Please be aware of copyright issues for all songs and hymns. Before you photocopy any song, make sure that your church has a license to copy. For more information contact Christian Copyright Licensing International, 17201 NE Sacramento St., Portland, OR 97230; 503/257-2230; 1-800-234-2446.)*

### Leading the Bible Study

#### Activity One: Jenga!

As participants arrive provide a stacking game such as Jenga for participants to play as they gather for the Bible study. Allow the participants time to play the game, adding other players as they arrive. It is not important to follow the rules of the game, but to allow each person a chance to remove a block without collapsing the tower. Play until everyone has arrived and had a turn. Rebuild the tower each time it falls and begin again.

#### Activity Two: Finding Meaning

Ask each participant to take one of the blocks and hold it in her hand as she finds a partner. **Say:** *As we played that game, holes were often left in the tower which was once strong. In what ways can those holes and the tower be like our life with Christ? In what ways does sin leave holes in our lives? In what ways does the world work to tear down the tower which is the strength of God?*

#### Activity Three: Searching the Word

Divide into small groups of three or four. Instruct each group to choose one person to lead them in prayer, one person to read the scripture aloud, and one person to act as scribe, taking notes on what the group says. Once these positions are filled, the prayer leader should lead her group in a prayer asking God to speak through the scripture to each of them. Then have the reader slowly read Acts 15:15-18 aloud.

Have the following questions written on newsprint or a dry erase board so that all the groups can see them. Ask the groups to discuss the questions and think of any other questions that come to them in their discussion. The scribe should take notes so that they can share their discussion experience with the larger group. *(See Notes from Writer for additional discussion material and ideas for answers if needed.)*

- What do you think that God means (speaking through the prophet) by saying that David's dwelling has fallen?
- What are ways in which we use the word "fallen" in our Christian life?
- God says that God will "set it up" again. What does this mean to you?
- What does it mean to us Gentiles to know that God "has been making these things known from long ago"?

Bring the groups together again and allow time for sharing. Be sure to allow exploration of new questions that were raised in the small groups.

#### **Activity Four:** Connecting to the Theme

*Ask: What does God hope to accomplish through setting up the dwelling of David again? (v. 17) (Say: We each have holes in our lives put there by sin. We are in need of a Savior because we cannot save ourselves. God rebuilds our lives through the love of Jesus Christ. But, God does expect something in return. In rebuilding our lives, God uses us to show others the path to salvation. Our "rebuilt dwelling places" should be a sign to all people, even those who are outcasts, that salvation is available to them just as much as it is to us.)*

Allow time for discussion of the question as well as a discussion of ways in which each of us can be "dwelling places" used by God to show others the way to salvation. Be sure to write these ideas on a dry erase board or newsprint so that everyone can see them.

An additional idea could be your group committing to participate in a project such as Habitat for Humanity where you actually help build a home for a family in need. Another project idea would be joining Builder's Fellowship, either as a group or individually, for the building of new churches in our denomination. (Contact the Board of Missions or go to their website at [www.cumberland.org](http://www.cumberland.org) and follow the links to Board of Missions to find out more about Builder's Fellowship.)

#### **Activity Five:** Worship

Have participants form a circle around a table where you have two levels of the Jenga tower completed. Ask them to be sure to have their own block in hand for the worship experience. Hand out copies of "They Will Know We are Christians by Our Love." *(Say: Only God can rebuild our fallen houses. Glory be to God, though, that God actually uses us to do that. It is too easy to participate in ripping people's houses, their lives, apart instead of participating in the work of God to rebuild lives here on this earth. If we are going to be Shepherds of God's Flock, if we are going to Glorify the Lamb, then we must allow our salvation to shine and stand tall as a tower as a witness to the world. We also must get to work doing all that God has asked us to do. So, now let's rebuild our tower as a symbol to God that we will open ourselves to God to be used to rebuild lives today, tomorrow, and always.)*

Lead the group in singing "They Will Know We are Christians by Our Love" as each participant adds her block to the tower. If there are extra blocks, ask them to continue adding while singing until the tower is complete.

#### **Activity Six:** Closing Prayer

Either lead the group in prayer or ask someone else to lead the group using the following prayer or another.

*God, rebuilder of lives, we do want all the world to know we are Christians by our love. It isn't easy, though, God, because we live in a fallen world of fallen houses of fallen lives. Use us, O Shepherd of our hearts, to shepherd your flock and stand tall as a once fallen person now rebuilt by your love. Amen.*

**About the Writer**

Tiffany Hall McClung is an ordained Cumberland Presbyterian minister. She is currently focussing on being a full-time mom to son, Ian. She also volunteers with the youth group at First CP of Savannah, TN where her husband, Andy, is pastor. She preaches once a month for a PCUSA congregation in the area and refers to herself as the “roving preacher” available to fill pulpits when needed. Tiffany is a member of the General Assembly Council and a Vision Enabler for Touch the Future. When she isn't changing diapers or preparing sermons, she enjoys creative writing, reading, and travelling just about anywhere.

## **People of God** **Acts 15:15-18**

There has always been confusion about how an individual comes into a personal relationship with God by having his/her sins forgiven. Then, as now, many were asking, "Can I receive salvation by placing my faith in Jesus Christ and in His work on the cross in dying for my sins, or is there something else I need to do, some religious work or ritual in addition to what Jesus has done?" That question was one Apostle Paul had to answer over and over again. As He says in vs. 11 that you must not add anything to being saved through the grace of God: "No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

For the sake of unity in Christ we are urged to seek middle ground where we can remain harmonious. Paul and James, two of the most divergent thinkers in the Bible, learned how to lead through the Holy Spirit. In this passage, we see that the Spirit of God showed the council how time tends to change hearts of individuals. Let God be the judge of all people in every situation with every decision.

Every day, in all seasons good and bad, that is the business of God. God is able to open and close doors, both to nations and individuals. God is using all of our personal histories, everyone around us, all the crime and violence, terrorism, wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines, everything, so as to accomplish God's purpose of making a people for himself. God is very much at work among God's children. That is how God is pursuing the plan of redemption. Trust the Lord for the grace to change the things we can and the serenity to accept the differences that cannot be changed. We need to think like Jesus, "Your kingdom come, your will be done. On earth as it is in heaven". (Matt 6:10)

What about you? Are your intentions to seek out and know the God of the ages who knows your heart? He knows you better than you will ever know yourself, and He still loves you. Are you helping others to know Him through who you are? Since it is God's purpose that no one should perish but have the salvation Jesus has freely given, our purpose should be no less than to serve others so they will know this wonderful, redeeming love.

### **PRAYER:**

*Heavenly Father, we come to you when we are still powerless because Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God, you demonstrate your love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. We glorify you, Lamb of God, for your sweet sacrifice. Help us this hour to direct ourselves to become aware of your intended mission for our lives. Amen.*

Pat Freeland  
Seekers of Joy Region