

is an afterthought? Are we living in the presence of God or are we living as practical atheists? I mean, we're religious people, right? We're here this morning. Why do we want to live as though God is not there? But this way of life, this materialistic naturalism, this practical atheism creeps in and even we find ourselves forgetting that God is right there, and from time to time, God does stuff! "I will pour out my Spirit in those days," says the Lord, "I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke." (Acts 4:19) God is there.

I tried this week to go through my days recognizing God's imprint on the world around me. It's a little like going to Target or something, and the brand is everywhere—on the front, on the walls, on the baskets on the products. God's brand is everywhere. That's the way of life found in Jesus—constant awareness of the presence of God. Abraham Kuyper said, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'" God's brand is on everything. The belt I'm wearing, God knew the cow! The wood in my house, God knew the trees. The iron in my car, God formed the rocks. Constant awareness of the presence of God. But I also found places in my life where I wasn't confident God can move. Aren't there places in your life where you are acting as though it is all up to you, and you are alone in the universe with this problem? "God can't change that situation; it's up to me. God won't change her heart; I just have to deal with it." Or, how about this? "God can't bring me peace; it's up to me to find ways to relieve my stress, soothe my soul—I have to comfort myself by whatever means I find at my disposal." That's life without God. That's living as though God does not exist. Let's root out practical atheism this week. That is no way of life. No. God is there, and He is our God, and we are the sheep of His pasture, and He cares for us. And if God is there, there is no more important discipline than living in constant awareness of His presence, and there is no more important question to answer than "How can I be right with God?" The passage closes, and so do I, with this promise: "And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (Acts 4:21) Let's call on Him and find the true way of life.

STUDY GUIDE "Way of Life: God Is There" • Acts 2:14-21

Start It

What is a "way of life"? Name some ways of life.

What is your way of life? Can you write out some ideas? If not a full sentence or two, are there a few key words you would use to describe your way of life?

Study It

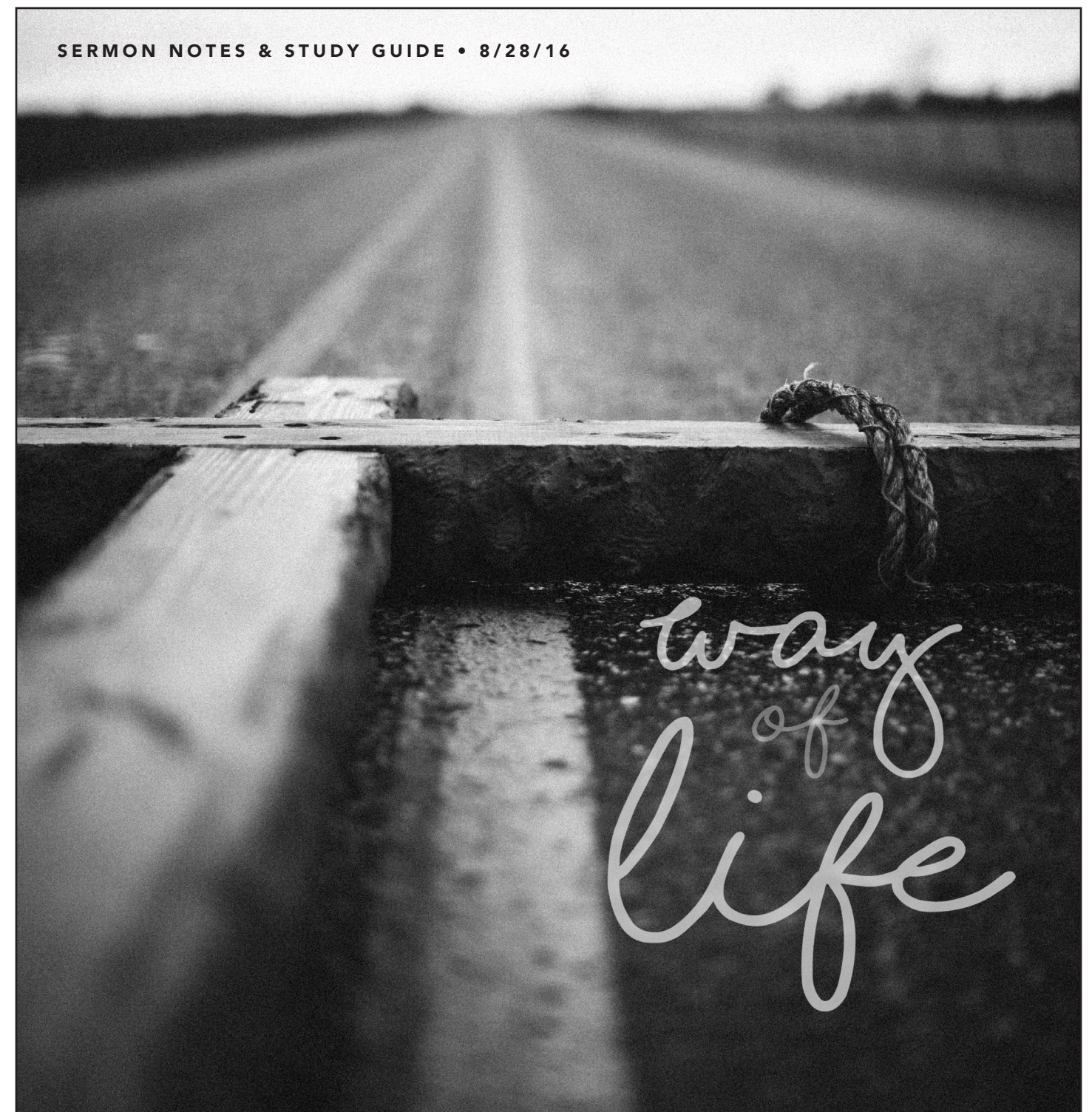
- What is happening here? What has just occurred before this passage?
- Some say this is the moment when Peter shifted from being a **disciple** to being an **apostle**. A **disciple** is one who follows the master, and is so devoted in love to the master that he or she wants to imitate and grow to become more and more like the master. An **apostle** is one who is sent out to convey a message. Is Peter's role changing here? Which one are we supposed to be, disciples or apostles?
- Are you surprised to see Peter stand before the crowd to speak? Why do you think he did it? Peter had many reasons to be afraid and nervous to speak. He was an uneducated man (Acts 4:13). He was not a rabbi or a philosopher. His confidence may have been low (why?). Read 1 Peter 3:15. When do you think the idea of always being ready first occurred to Peter?
- What is the content of Peter's sermon? What does that teach us about the importance of the Old Testament? Does Peter's choice give you any guidance on what to say or what you should be ready to share when you are put in a position to speak of Jesus?
- I have heard a pastor say, and I agree, that even those of us who believe often live our lives as "de facto atheists." We live our lives as though God doesn't exist, isn't there, doesn't hear our prayers, and is powerless to act. How much of that is true? How can we make a change?

Pray It

Lord, our God, we know that you are there and that you reward those who seek you. Help us to seek you, and to find what we seek. We no longer want to live as if you are not there, when in fact you are. You are present, you are all-powerful, and you love when our hearts turn to you. Help us to resist the atheistic way of life and live our lives aware of your presence and devoted to your glory. In Jesus' name, amen.

Live It

Take stock this week of every time you 'remember' God—every time you find yourself living as though God does not exist and you are alone in the universe.



Peter and Paul absorbed the reality of God that comes from our salvation in Jesus Christ. They worked to translate that reality to the word in a number of powerful sermons in the book of Acts. Through our series, **Way of Life**, we'll be looking at these powerful sermons and how they call us to action. Early Christians were known as "People of the Way," as though they were fighting for a new way of life. They were advocating for a way of life, but that way of life is Jesus Himself. Presenting Jesus as Savior and Lord competes with the alternative ways of life presented in culture. By digging into these sermons in Acts, we will see how the way of Jesus is better than any alternative offered by the world.

What is your way of life? That's a big question isn't it? Some say happiness is a way of life, service is a way of life, or adventure is a way of life. I've heard that success is a way of life, and so is failure. We talk about defending our way of life, the American way of life. What are we talking about? Do you think about your way of life? If someone asked you to define your way of life, would you have any words to offer? It's big. But it's also frighteningly unexamined sometimes. Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth living," and he was not the dumbest guy to walk the stage of history. The Bible tells us to examine our lives. In 2 Corinthians 13:5 we read: "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?" Are you living an unexamined life?

When I talk about a way of life, I'm talking about the whole shebang—how you see yourself, how you understand God, how you look at the world and grasp your role in it. Your way of life is a paradigm, a worldview that measures experiences and often makes decisions for you before you are even conscious that all this is going on. It's just who you are. Now, a new way of life (imagine this), a new way of life is total transformation. A new way of life changes everything even though nothing changes. Make sense? With a new way of life, your job is just the same, your house is the same, the walls are the same color they were before; your car still makes that annoying little noise; your kids are the same kids—still fighting and breaking stuff; your husband is the same, snoring just as loud as ever; and your wife...well, I can't think of anything a wife does wrong! Can you? When a new way of life breaks in, everything stays the same but everything is different because you look at it all in a new way. When you accept Christ, when the light of Christ breaks in on you, everything changes—even when nothing in your world is different. C. S. Lewis famously said, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else." The truth of Christ is a light, not just to light us up, but to light up the whole world all around us. It's a way of life.

For the next eight weeks, we will be looking at the sermons of Peter and Paul in the book of Acts. Acts, the next book in the New Testament after the four Gospels, was written by Luke and continues the story into the next chapter. Acts is roughly broken into Peter's half and Paul's half, and we will look at sermons

from both of these men. There's a lot that happens in the book, but I want us to focus in on these sermons because it's there, in these critical moments when they opened their mouths to talk and the Spirit of God gave them something to say with great power, it's in these moments that the way of life we find in Jesus, the way of life they preach about, comes into contact with the way of life of the people they are addressing. So for us, we can see just how different the way of life found in Jesus is from competing ways of life. And, you know what, as we go along I bet you will find that you have allowed some competing ways of life into your own patterns and habits and thinking, personally or in your home and family. So we stand to learn a lot.

Today we begin with Peter's sermon on Pentecost. Peter, the fisherman. Peter, the simple, uneducated man from Bethsaida of Galilee. Peter opens his mouth and begins to speak. Some say this is the moment Peter moves from disciple to apostle. Now, do you know? Peter was not a 'way of life' kind of a guy. Peter was not a philosopher, not a theologian, not a guy used to making grand speeches to academic arguments—or frankly, having anyone listen to him at all! But Peter was called to speak. What a surprise. A surprise to the eleven to be sure, but an even greater surprise to Peter, I suspect. "Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: 'Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say.'" (Acts 2:14)

He raised his voice, it says. I wonder if it started out loud, or maybe he stuttered his way into it: "eh...hey, everybody..." "A little louder, Peter. What was that?" But then, in the confidence only of a humble sinner in the hands of a living God, in the power only of the Spirit of God speaking through a simple man, Peter raised his voice. "Hey! Let me explain. Listen carefully to what I say." I can't imagine the dread in his heart. He had no prepared remarks. He had no title or authority by which to speak. And all of a sudden all eyes were on him. "These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning!" (Acts 2:15). Good argument, Peter. Solid. But then the God-thing happens. A Scripture occurs to Peter. He quotes it, and finds that he can present it word for word. If you're taking notes: whenever you have to speak for Jesus and have no idea what to say, the Bible is a good place to go! Peter is no genius, but he is obedient. He will speak, he will bear faithful witness—and that willingness is all God needs.

Peter's sermon was perfect timing. It was at the feast of Pentecost, a great festival held in Jerusalem every year celebrating the gift of the Torah, the Word of God. It's a gift, and the people used to celebrate it with a huge party, and that party was underway. Jews had come in from all the surrounding nations where they lived in dispersion; they had come in to Jerusalem to join the festival. It was then, as the Word was celebrated, the Spirit came upon the disciples in power, like a blowing wind, like fingers of flame, like something supernatural. The disciples started speaking to those gathered in their native language, miraculously. Beautiful! The good news about Jesus is suddenly being shared in a dozen languages to people gathered from every corner of the known world who can carry it home! For Peter this is a beautiful moment, but for others it was ugly, foolish, and probably the product of alcohol. Peter could not let that go by—all of a sudden his mouth was open. Perfect timing, Peter! But the timing wasn't Peter's was it?

What to say? One important thing about opening your mouth is having something to say! Can I review for you some of my anxiety dreams as a pastor? Peter, your mouth is open. What are you going to say? He quotes the perfect Scripture for the moment: Joel 2. Joel 2 is richly Trinitarian (God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). This passage has three terms for God: "God," "Spirit," and "Lord." All doing divine God things, but each in a slightly different way. It's the perfect Scripture. Peter must have known the church would need to understand God as three persons in one God, so he picked the perfect Scripture. It's perfect because it is thickly Christological—it presents a high view of who Jesus is as Lord. So thickly Christological that scholars like professor Kevin Rowe of Duke still study and write about it. Stuff like: "...in the context of Acts 2, *kurios* refers *both* to the God of Israel *and* to Jesus...Luke's hermeneutical appropriation of the OT reflects a rather more complex theological move, one in which the prophecy of the text of Joel is expanded—not negated—to say that the *Lord God's* coming is actually fulfilled in the appearance of the *Lord Jesus*." (*World Upside Down*, p.112) Wow! Perfect Scripture, Peter! How did Peter know that quoting that Scripture at that time would give scholars cause two thousand years later to argue that Jesus is God? Incredible! My guess is that when we get to heaven and ask, Peter will say, "I had no idea. That was in my quiet time that morning." I can't tell you how many times I have been in situations where a Bible verse is called for, and the perfect verse is the verse I happened to read in my devotions that morning, or just saw on Facebook, or something else. The

Spirit prompts, and you speak. Perfect timing. Perfect Scripture. All because Peter was willing, that's all. God uses our imperfection to do perfect things.

Okay, so far that was all set up. Are you ready for the main point? I'm just about to reach the main point, and that's good—because we're almost out of time. The main point is this: Peter argues that God is there. In humble obedience he speaks, and in his testimony to the Lord he makes a profound argument—more profound probably than he realized—that God is there. Peter makes an argument for the way of life in Jesus that recognizes the presence of God. Remember who he's speaking to. First of all, he would have been quaking in his boots (I would have been quaking in my boots) because he's speaking to the "fellow Jews" (that's probably the Jews that have traveled from far) AND "all you who live in Jerusalem." Now those are the leaders who just ended the Jesus movement. Those are the leaders who just convinced Rome to kill Jesus. Those are the leaders who are looking at Peter and thinking about how to take his head off. But Peter speaks anyway. He has to speak. He is compelled to speak. There is no other option for him. He has to speak because of what has just happened—the Spirit has moved. Something supernatural has just occurred and everybody saw it, so now Peter has to explain it. That's what compels him. God did something, and it was beautiful, and the world calls it ugly, and that won't stand—so Peter speaks. He speaks to testify to the religious people all around him and say, "You know, sometimes God does things." For all of their religious practice, the people around Peter had succumbed to what we could call a "practical atheism." Although they claimed to believe in God, they lived as though God did not exist. Although they prayed regularly, they lived without expectation that God would move. Although, in theory, they were the most devoted to God—they lived as though the natural material world is all there is. So Peter had to argue, "You know, God is there after all."

According to polls, 89% of Americans say they believe in God, but only 20% are in church on a given Sunday. Do we live as though God is there, or are we practical atheists? How quick are we to pray? Have you ever heard someone say, "Well, I guess there's nothing left to do but to pray?" As if that's the last thing to try on the list. "Might as well pray." Meanwhile, God, the All-powerful, Almighty Creator of the Universe—God, the Ruler and Author of all things, God who spun the universe into existence and in Whom and by Whom all things hold together...God