




# ANNO DOMINI

THE FIRST 500 YEARS OF THE CHURCH



LEADER GUIDE



We love that many of you will be studying Anno Domini in a group setting. It really is the perfect way to study church history. This leader guide is simply meant to support you as you lead and provide additional questions for your group to discuss as you process the story of the church. If your group has a lively discussion going, there's no need to rush to get through all the questions. We simply want to make your role a bit easier and provide a starting point to get the conversation going.

## HOW TO FACILITATE:

There are many ways to host a study such as this. However you decide to go about hosting your event, we ask that you will create a simple and pure environment for everyone to come, pray, and learn the story of the church.

### ***Simple & Pure***

We believe that things are best done when they are simple and pure, as opposed to complicated and cluttered. We want women to feel comfortable and safe, and when we put too many unnecessary elements in place, we can often muddle the true intention, which is to experience God.

### ***Fight to Keep Unity a Central Value***

Your attendees likely all have different experiences and backgrounds. They may know some parts of church history from their particular tradition. As a leader, you have the responsibility to keep a spirit of unity within your group. We ask for sensitivity, openness and a safe environment for everyone to learn the story of the church together. We encourage you to pray for the Spirit to guide you as you demonstrate love to everyone as you learn and process this story together.

### ***Build a Safe & Deep Environment***

***Pray:*** In preparation, spend time in prayer. Pray for those participating in the study, that they would gain a deeper love for the church and understanding of our history. This is the crux of what we are doing — we're ultimately seeking the Lord and learning His story.

***Be transparent:*** You have the opportunity to set the tone for those around you. If you choose not to be vulnerable, other women may not feel the freedom to be honest. We encourage you to be honest and transparent, creating an environment for women to open up.

***Listen, but also lead:*** When women are vulnerable, it is a tremendous risk that needs to be honored. Protect them by not interrupting and instead empathizing. You do not need to speak or pray after each person shares. Avoid lecturing, but do point women back to truth.

***Model trust:*** Be open with your group about how you are processing this study. There are periods in church history that we will love and times when we won't understand how the church could act in certain ways. Throughout the study, we must continue to seek God and ask for His help in understanding the story of His church. These women look to you for an example. We encourage you to be intentional in your relationship with God as we walk through the next eight weeks.

1. What were your expectations coming into this study?
2. When you think of the early church, what images come to mind?
3. In Luke 22:54-62, we see Peter deny he knows Jesus three times. A few months later, on the day of Pentecost, we see him boldly preach the gospel to crowds of people (Acts 2:14-36). What happened between these two events to create such a dramatic change in Peter? Have you or do you know someone who also experienced a dramatic turnaround in their life?
4. This week we read about one of the first church conflicts in Acts 6:1-6. How did the church handle the conflict and maintain unity? What can we learn from them when we face conflict within our churches?
5. Early on in the story of the church, we read about the first martyr, Stephen. How do you think his death would have affected the new church? Witnesses to his murder heard him pray for those stoning him. Put yourself in their shoes. What would that have been like?
6. One of the people watching Stephen's death was a Pharisee named Saul. Stephen's prayers didn't soften him. Instead, he watched over the brutal scene with approval. Later on, this memory would remind Saul (after he became Paul) of just how much grace God had shown him. When we think of our past sins, how can we keep our focus on the grace God has shown us?
7. Many of the very first Christians had grown up as Jews. Very quickly, the church understood that God intended the gospel to go to the Gentiles too. Why was this so significant at the time? How can we continue to share the gospel with all people?
8. Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit and even said that it would be to our advantage for Him to leave so the Spirit would come. How does the Holy Spirit guide the church? What examples do we see of this in Acts?

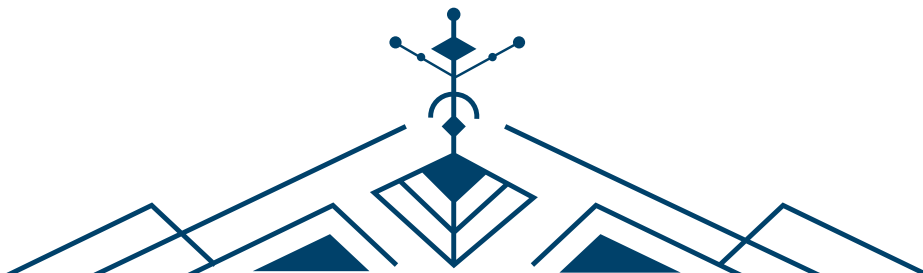




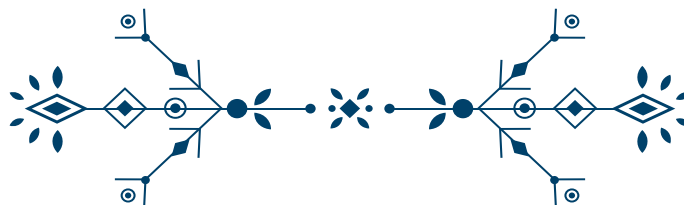
1. This week we looked at Paul's three missionary journeys. It wasn't long before this that we saw Paul approving of Stephen's death. God took the passion Paul had for enforcing the rules of the Pharisees and turned it into a passion for sharing the gospel with all people. Has God ever changed or repurposed what you're passionate about?
2. When Gentiles became Christians, the church faced one of their first conflicts. The church leadership didn't agree on whether Gentiles needed obey the laws of the Old Testament (specifically circumcision). How did the church handle this conflict? What guided their decision?
3. During his travels, Paul met Timothy and began to disciple him. They traveled together and ministered together. They shared meals and prayed together. What can we learn from Paul and Timothy's relationship when it comes to discipleship?
4. When arriving in a new city, Paul had a strategy in mind for how he would share the gospel. He modified his approach depending on the city and the context. Sometimes he went to the synagogue and shared the gospel with the Jewish leaders. Other times, he met with philosophers or people in the marketplace. What can we learn from Paul's approach in sharing the gospel?
5. As we read through Acts, we see the church grow at an extraordinary pace. Why do you think the church grew so quickly during this time?
6. Paul was deeply concerned for those he had shared the gospel with and the young churches in the cities he had visited. How did he encourage and advise them? How can we apply his advice today?
7. Throughout his travels, we see Paul suffer often for the gospel. God had warned Paul that he would suffer for the sake of His name (Acts 9:16). In spite of this, Paul obeyed the Lord with joy. Thousands of years later, we continue to benefit from his obedience as we study the words he wrote in the New Testament. What can we learn from Paul's willingness to suffer to obey God's will?



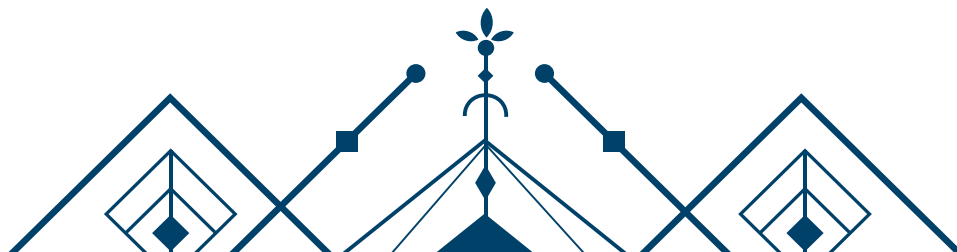
1. This week, we saw the young church faced persecution and the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. Imagine what the Christians of that generation must have felt during these events. What do you think they struggled with and prayed for?
2. The Great Fire of Rome lasted for six days. Afterwards, Nero accused Christians of starting the fire, prompting more persecution. How were Christians and Christianity misunderstood at this time? Have you ever been misunderstood for your beliefs?
3. Throughout the Gospels, we see the tension between the Jews and the Romans. In AD 70, we see the tension boil over with the Jewish revolt that ended with the destruction of the temple and the city being sacked. How did this affect the early church? What would be a comparable event today?
4. As Christianity spread, the gospel reached new cultures and people from different backgrounds. How do you think this affected the early church? What can we learn from them when people join our church who are different than us?
5. This week, we learned about the rise of the heresies. What is a heresy? Why is it important to think correctly about God?
6. Gnosticism believed that the “spiritual world” was better than the “material world.” The Bible teaches that God created everything and called His creation “good.” Where have you encountered thinking similar to Gnosticism today – that the physical things aren’t as good or important as spiritual things? Or vice-versa?
7. As we finished the week, we saw the first generation of Christians (including the apostles) pass the baton to the next generation. They had personally disciplined many of these new leaders. What does this teach us about discipleship? How can we be preparing the next generation?



1. We started this week at the beginning of the fourth century, when the Roman Empire had been through a long period of instability and the majority of the population was hostile towards Christianity. What do you think encouraged the faith of Christians during this time?
2. Emperor Diocletian enacted the last and bloodiest official persecution of Christians by the Roman Empire. Churches were destroyed and Christians lost their civil rights. What passages of Scripture do you think these Christians turned to in their darkest hours?
3. In many places around the world, believers continue to face violent persecution. More than at any other other time in history, we have the ability to encourage our brothers and sisters in Christ. What are some ways we can support the persecuted Church today?
4. Constantine's conversion marked a turning point for the church. While he still participated in other faiths, he enacted legislation that favored Christians. His story is an example of why we should pray for our civic leaders. What does the Bible say about praying for our leaders?
5. The Edict of Milan legalized Christianity in the Roman Empire. Christians had differing responses. Why do you think they responded so differently? How do you think you would have responded if you had lived during this time?
6. Over the course of this week, we've seen the church's circumstances change dramatically. Through it all, many Christians remained faithful and the church continued to grow, no matter the circumstances. What does this tell us about God's faithfulness? What can we learn from this generation?



1. Over the first three days of this week, we discussed the teachings of Arius, also known as Arianism. What did Arius believe? Have you ever heard someone say something similar today—that Jesus wasn't God or fully God? How would you respond?
2. Church leaders from congregations all over the empire came together for the council at Nicaea. What does this indicate about the importance of the debate over Arianism?
3. Athanasius saw the threat that Arianism was to the church and passionately fought for the truth. In return, his opponents spread lies and false charges against him. Have you ever had to fight for something against strong opposition? How can we respond when people attack us unfairly?
4. Have you ever spent time thinking about how the canon of Scripture was put together? What surprised you?
5. Why is it important to understand the history of the Bible? Have you ever had to defend the Bible to someone who was skeptical of it? What would you say to someone questioning how the canon was compiled?
6. Much of this week focused on how we think about God and the Scriptures. Why is it important to think correctly about God?



1. Looking back over our study the last few weeks, we see just how far the church has come in roughly 100 years. Many of those who lived during this time had grown up with the stories of the persecution their grandparents endured. What do you imagine that experience would have been like?
2. With the Edict of Thessalonica, Christianity became the only legal religion in the Roman Empire. What are the challenges and benefits to being the culturally dominant religion? What are the challenges and benefits to being in the minority? How does God work through each circumstance?
3. Sometimes it can be hard to connect with historical events when we're separated by so many centuries and vastly different cultures. Is it challenging for you to picture everyday Christians engaged in these debates? What helps you understand what was at stake and why the Council of Constantinople was necessary?
4. The Cappadocian Fathers had a profound influence on the church. To this day, they are honored by the Eastern Orthodox Church, Roman Catholicism, and Protestants around the world. What surprised you most about these three men?
5. Basil and Gregory's sister Macrina was also a respected spiritual leader. She confronted Basil when he came home with an arrogant attitude after completing his studies. While he didn't listen at first, he eventually came around and asked for his sister's help. Sometimes our most challenging relationships are found in our families. What does this show us about loving those we're closest to, even through conflict?
6. For all his flaws, Jerome gave the church a huge gift in translating the Scriptures into the language of the people. This tedious task took years to complete. Do you think he had any idea that his translation would become the principal text for the church for the next 1,000 years? How does this encourage us in the tasks God has called us to?

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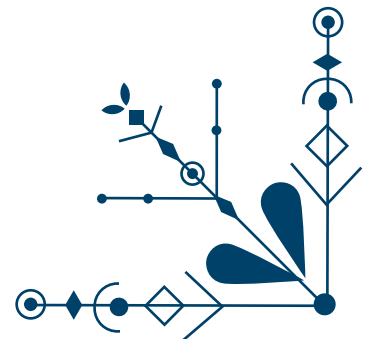
# 06

WEEK: 06 of 08    STUDY: ANNO DOMINI

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7. The Vulgate brought the Scriptures into the common language of Latin. Why is it important to have the Bible in the language you know best? How can we support Bible translators today, who are working to bring the Scriptures to people who don't have a translation in their own language?
8. On the final day of this week, we discussed the changing relationship between the church and the state. What has been your understanding of this relationship? How has this study shed new light on the history of this question?
9. Aside from the writers of the New Testament, no other early church leader had a greater influence on the church than Augustine. What surprised you the most about his story?



1. Aside from the writers of the New Testament, no other early church leader had a greater influence on the church than Augustine. What surprised you the most about his story?
2. Monica, Augustine's mother, spent years faithfully praying for her son to come to Christ. She waited decades for her prayers to be answered. How does this encourage us to continue praying for others who don't know Christ?
3. Before coming to faith, Augustine struggled with intellectual questions about Christianity and Scripture. For him, faith involved the head as well as the heart. Ambrose was able to address these questions. Perhaps you or someone you know has struggled with intellectual questions about Christianity. How does Ambrose encourage us to meet them where they are?
4. Pelagianism was another heresy that rocked the church, teaching that it was theoretically possible to live a sinless life and achieve salvation on their own. Why was this teaching so dangerous? How was Augustine uniquely prepared to address this false belief?
5. Augustine didn't place his faith in Christ until he was 32. But God had always been preparing him for the role he'd eventually have in the church. In what ways did God prepare him? Looking at your own story, how has God prepared you through past experiences?
6. Before this study, had you ever heard the story of the real St. Patrick? What surprised you the most?
7. As a young man, Patrick rejected his parents' faith. It wasn't until he was kidnapped, sold into slavery, and given the lowly, difficult task of caring for sheep that Patrick came to faith. Have you ever had to come to the end of yourself before turning to God?
8. Human trafficking flourished in the fourth century. The pirates who kidnapped Patrick had no idea the story that would unfold in this boy's life. How does Patrick's life demonstrate that God can bring good from evil?
9. We sometimes struggle with dividing the world into the sacred (going to church, Bible study) and the secular (going to work, spending time with non-Christian friends). How do Augustine and Patrick's stories encourage us to see that all of life is important to God?

1. This week we looked at the Council of Chalcedon. Every council we've studied has focused on Christ. What was at stake in correctly understanding who Jesus was?
2. Each of the heresies addressed at Chalcedon looked at the relationship between Christ's divinity and humanity. Why was it so important to understand Jesus as fully God and fully man? Have you tended to think of Jesus as more human or more divine? How does this study clarify who Jesus is?
3. When trying to understand who exactly Christ was, the church struggled to find the right words to describe how God became man. In the end, it was easier to say what wasn't true about Jesus. The church leaders meeting at Chalcedon left some questions unanswered. How do you feel about unanswered questions? Are you comfortable with the thought that God left some things as mysteries?
4. The monastic movement began in reaction to changes within the church. What surprised you the most about the monks? Does anything about their simple way of life appeal to you?
5. Early monks took vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. As monastic communities developed, they were marked by strict discipline and sometimes went to extremes. Benedict's Rule brought stability and order to the movement. While we may not live in a monastery, what can we learn from Benedict's balance of work, worship, and rest?
6. As monasteries grew and spread, they served a critical role within their communities, caring for travelers, the sick, and the poor. How do we carry on these tasks within our traditions?
7. In looking back over the last few weeks, what surprised you the most about the first 500 years of church history? What did you struggle with? Has your view of the church changed? If so, how?

