

DISCUSS

Brandon discusses how accelerants spark the spread of fires, causing them to blaze out of control.

In what ways have you observed this happening in situations of misperception and metaperception?

Were you aware during your observation that opinions may have been skewed and not exactly reality?

WE NEED TO HAVE A GODLY VISION OF OTHERS

Read Joshua 2:1-21.

Brandon reminds us how metaperceptions can be problematic as they "spark the spread of fires." The two Israelite spies were scared for their lives and were not certain whether Rahab would betray them.

How do Rahab's actions toward the spies help us shift our mindset from one of fear to one of compassion?

Brandon states that misperceptions and metaperceptions "often go hand in hand because misperceptions about people on the other side of whatever the divide might be perpetuate negative metaperceptions." The confusion and resulting misunderstandings only grow larger.

How have you observed this collaboration of misperception and metaperception in your own personal experiences?

Brandon attributes part of the dissolving of these accelerants of Toxic Polarity to open communication with others. **How does communicating with others reverse our misperceptions and metaperceptions?**

Once we have a better understanding of those around us, our vision shifts. We no longer view them in a backward light but can see them more in line with the way God sees them.

*Note: to consider the dynamic outcome of the halo effect within the church, see the **Go Deeper section** at the end of this study.*

COMPASSION OPENS THE DOOR TO UNITY

Read Jonah 1:1-3; 3:10; 4:1-2.

Jonah immediately judges the people of Ninevah as so sinful that they are past – or undeserving of – the saving of even our almighty Father. He uses misperception to judge them and has some metaperceptions of how they will treat him upon his arrival to their city.

In what ways do we as Christians avoid sharing the gospel with unbelievers in the same way Jonah did? Why do you think we struggle to tell others about Jesus?

Brandon talks about Jonah's journey to compassion and the lesson God is teaching this prophet and to us through his experience. Sometimes we might see others as sinful, and yet we are harboring the sin of misperception.

How can compassion lead us on our path to unity?

At some point we have all been shown compassion by someone who took the time to understand us in a different way and see us from a different perspective. **How can you take the time to show others compassion? In what ways can individual churches demonstrate compassion to others?**

THROUGH JESUS OUR PERCEPTIONS ARE TRANSFORMED

Read Acts 9:1-9.

The beauty is that this is all part of God's design and a perfect example of Christ and His gift of salvation. Did Jesus have to leave perfect, beautiful heaven to be made a man, experience the suffering of life on earth, subject Himself to humiliation, and sacrifice Himself, taking all our sin upon Himself during a painful death on the cross? Absolutely not. But in love and compassion for us, He did.

Have you ever experienced something life changing because of someone else's love and compassion for you?

Saul experienced something amazing on the road to Damascus. Brandon describes Saul as having a backward perception of Christians. He says he "perceives them as a threat and actively persecutes them." But then an amazing thing happens. Jesus appears to Saul on his journey, forever changing his perception. Saul experiences a significant transformation of mind, heart, and life.

For those who we deem "unsavable" how can we as the church work toward changing these perceptions? How can we move past our own misperceptions and metaperceptions to make this change?

*Note: After Saul's transformation, he experiences significant apprehension from the early Christians whose accurate perception of Saul prior to his conversion, becomes misperception of him afterward. To consider this in more detail, see the **Go Deeper section** at the end of this study.*

God is the ultimate judge. Brandon shrewdly notes, "Unless both sides openly communicate, there is much room for misinterpretation." It is not our place to judge others. We are to be a vessel of love and compassion, showing Christ through our actions.

How can showing love and compassion change perceptions?

LAST WORD

There will never be a day on this side of heaven where we will fully experience love and compassion without misperception and metaperception. However, we are called as the Church to be compassionate and loving toward others and Jesus exemplified here on earth.

The way to change hearts is to be that same example that Christ showed us. Rather than embody an attitude of judgment and condemnation, we need to use a godly vision of others to generate compassion and walk in the love of Jesus.

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting.

The Halo Effect

Brandon touches on the halo effect and notes, "It occurs when we allow our initial assumptions about who a person is or believers to be colored by our stereotype of the broader group."

- How can the halo effect be damaging within the church?
- In what ways can the halo effect hinder Christian unity?
- Can misperceptions created by the halo effect limit spiritual growth? If so, how?

Paul Encourages Christian Unity

Misperception and metaperception can be damaging in the church.

Read Philippians 4:2-3 and answer these questions:

- Although a short glimpse into the disturbance, Paul is addressing two women. What do we see happening in this passage?
- What does Paul encourage the women to do?
- In verse 3, Paul entreats others to do something for the women. What does he ask them to do?
- Paul recalls their time in ministry together. Have you found that it is always easy to serve God with those around you?
- Even as the church we find that do not always agree with one another. How can we work through challenges that arise?

Reading further in Acts 9:10-31, we find Paul on the opposite side of misperception. While he had actively tried to abolish Christianity for so long, Christians were very fearful of him. God sent Ananias to begin a relationship of trust between Saul and the early Christians.

- How does this show God's intention for unity between them?
- Sometimes it can be challenging to see difficult people with godly vision and a compassionate mind. God took something negative in Saul and transformed it for His glory. With this in mind, how does it help you see those around you?
- Imagine being one of the early Christians. Paul had spent most of his time persecuting them. They were beaten, thrown in prison, and even killed at the order of Paul. How would this have molded your perception of him after his conversion?